

# **Witchcraft, Culture, and Theology in African Development**

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## **Abstract**

A comparison between a forest and a vegetable plot illustrates problems arising from ignoring cultural differences in contemporary mission. Attempt by Westerners to wish away difference between them and Africans can and does lead to inauthentic existence among the latter. Ignoring the reality of witchcraft (often called Satanism) rather than acknowledging it among Africans perpetuates poverty, resulting in the emergence of many booming but apparently shallow African churches. The adoption of European languages for everyday use in Africa can be harmful to indigenously-rooted development. Applying little known western theological principles to the issue of witchcraft can be a tasking enterprise. For the achievement of any connection between their theology and their lives, African churches must resort to the use of African languages. This article explores the phenomena of witchcraft, indigenous culture and theology in African development and concludes that failure to acknowledge the interwoven relationships among the above-mentioned themes has been the root cause of Africa's persistent crisis of underdevelopment.

## **Glossary**

References to 'Africa' in this essay should be taken as being to Sub-Saharan Africa.

## **Introduction**

This article considers macro as well as micro issues of human society, especially in the African context. Its conclusion is radically theological and challenges the wisdom of our age. The author has been closely integrated into the rural African community of the Luo people of Western Kenya since 1993. The reader is asked to bear in mind from the beginning a much neglected aspect of human communication, namely that language is context-specific. This means that language is mutually comprehensible only in so far as culture is common. It follows that clear communication across cultural divides is difficult (Harries 2008). Failure to acknowledge this has been the cause of numerous blunders in intercultural communication, threatening the foundations of many communities, especially in Africa.

## **Use of Western languages in Africa**

We might well begin with an allegory: A European planted a vegetable plot in an African forest. It included cabbages, bananas, potatoes and tomatoes. Hearing of his success, people back in the West gave him gifts and loaned him money. Adjoining forest residents were impressed by his income. The European told them they must do things in *his* way if they were to benefit from his monetary largesse. They found this impractical and undesirable. But the forest contained plants related to those in the vegetable plot including wild bananas, tomato-like fruit and sweet potatoes that looked like 'real' potatoes. Instead of talking about the forest having vines, exotic trees, dense undergrowth, snakes and numerous birds and monkeys, they described it as containing potatoes, bananas and cabbages, and were given access to the same gifts and money as the

Europe. Is one kind of cabbage superior to another? Is a local variety inferior to the foreign one? Why, indeed, should a cabbage be called a tomato?

Mission scholars erode differences. Translation practices “purify ... situations of their social and historical variables...” (Venuti 1998:25). Examples abound: an African palaver can be called a ‘discussion’ (Armstrong 1979:14). A large polygamous homestead can be called a ‘home’ (An illustration of a house is given the label ‘*dala*’ in Capen (1998:28) whereas a *dala* is a homestead, not just a house.) A scrawny and ferocious guard animal can be called a ‘dog’, as is a European poodle! The terms superstition, primitive, magic and so on can be omitted from discussion. Then “... one generation’s conscious omissions [can] become the next generation’s genuine amnesia” (Tambiah 1990:28).

“Scholars have scratched their heads for a satisfactory definition of magical beliefs and puzzled over the mentality of people who can subscribe to them” then concluded that “... the savage was a credulous fool” (Douglas 1966:22-23). Condemnation and sweeping generalizations rather than appreciation and understanding have become normal in the West’s approach to African beliefs and practices. Applying ‘witchcraft’, a European word, to African practices (see Ellis (2007:31-33)) results in the assumption that the African belief is the same as the European understanding of the word.

African people have attempted to align themselves linguistically with dominant economic powers to avoid ridicule (Haar 2007:110). They echo ideas from the West in order to avoid being ridiculed..Historical and spiritual/religious circumstances that propelled wealth creation in the West are downplayed among Africans. I take this as being because secularists who are somewhat dominant in Western society today undermine their position if they concede a necessary ‘religious’ component to their own history (See Weber 1930 and Trouillot 2003:107-108.) Few contemporary scholars acknowledge the role of the Gospel in the history of the West. This is so as to perpetuate the ‘myth’ that anybody around the world, regardless of religious persuasion, should be able to devise and operate a ‘modern’ economy – preferably before the millennium project deadline of 2015 AD (Millennium 2008). The use of terms as ‘economy’, ‘efficiency’, ‘strategy’, ‘sustainable’, etc in relation to poor nations seems to erase differences between them and their wealthy counterparts.

There is little motivation to do otherwise where a European language is the official *lingua franca* as is the case in many African countries. Thus Africans are compelled to use European words or equivalents to describe peculiar African experiences. It is in this sense that a *KiSwahili* speaker uses ‘love’ as the equivalent of *upendo*; ‘house’ for *nyumba*; ‘God’ for *Mungu*; ‘work’ for *kazi* and witchcraft for *uchawi*. This is invariably the translation approach taken even where the *KiSwahili* word is very different from the European word. ‘House’ in English does not fully describe what the Kiswahili call *nyumba*. Such cultural difference is the reason why a native English speakers will laugh at the idea of witchcraft where the same idea will inspire awe in a *KiSwahili* speaker (See Haar 2007:110).

The Christian worldview influences much of the thinking and attitude of Western European scholars who tend to view matters from a historically Christian perspective. This manifests, for

example, in their definition of what constitutes religion or superstition. A refusal to recognize such distinction is ultimately futile.

Projects designed in the West to benefit the poor in Africa can be fatally flawed if they fail to account for cultural differences. Unless the reality of witchcraft is faced “many projects and investments, especially in the rural areas, are bound to fail” (Hinfelaar 2007:229). Projects wholly managed by Westerners tend to encourage a culture of dependency which in turn encourages corruption (Odongo 2007).

The subjective takes precedence over the objective as the example of the Alur, a group ethnically related to the Luo of Kenya, who put “great verbal stress” on that which does “not obtain in practice” (Southall 1970:238) illustrate. Contrary to Western ideals of objectivity, the use of language among Africans (Luo) is heavily oriented to *generating* reality (Harries 2007:21). Overwhelming reliance on foreign support and funding blunts the Kenyan’s ability for objectivity, leading them to proffer spiritual explanations to physical experiences. (Blunt 2004:318). What can such an attitude portend for a modernizing / developing Africa?

The idea of witchcraft is central to the day to day experience of an Africa and permeates every aspect of life in Sub-Saharan Africa. There is the constant awareness of the reality of evil induced by witchcraft. Thus warm greetings and handshakes can serve to counter evil thoughts and intentions from others. Expressed agreement can be more a way of avoiding heart-to-heart offence, than an expression of objective truth. Laughter can be a means of arresting bad forces before they enter and invade the body following threatening interpersonal encounters. Church services could be an exercise in the exorcising of witchcraft in the manner of ritual sacrifices. Sexual encounters can be employed as a weapon for neutralising evil powers in a woman. Beliefs such as these are outside the immediate experience of Westerners (see also Harries 2007).

### **The Degree of Charitable Dependence in Africa**

In this section the level of dependence on foreign aid in Africa will be considered. While the experience upon which my claims are made came largely from my stay in Western Kenya, and to a lesser extent Tanzania and Zambia, I believe that the points I make have wider applicability. Foreign aid donors may in their dealings want to replicate what happens ‘at home’, unfortunately many feedback, accountability and control mechanisms are not functional inter-culturally: “Precision and rigor in keeping accounts ... is foreign, threatening, and indicates a lack of understanding of the needs of ordinary [African] people” (Maranz 2001:38). The need for accountability can be counterproductive as time and effort expended on correcting ineffective procedures can be better utilised in the interest of a community. If subalterns cannot speak (Spivak 1988) then they cannot give feedback on projects (Harries 2008c). It is hereby proposed that a proportion of international interactions should be on the basis of ‘vulnerable mission’ – in which Westerners use indigenous languages and local sources of funds (Harries 2008c). This will help in the re-education of westerners uninformed in the logic and cultural practices of non-Westerners..

My home area in Western Kenya now falls directly under the massive all-encompassing United Nations donor-based Millennium Development Project (MDP) (Mutua 2007). While other projects target specific objectives, (Odongo 2007) the MDP attempts to do everything required to eradicate poverty in a given community, while bringing other initiatives under its umbrella

(General Assembly 2008:10). The MDP is oriented to: hunger and poverty, primary education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability, global partnership & development (Mutua 2007).

This community had been heavily dependent on foreign aid prior to the advent of the MDP. Numerous foreign church-based orphan projects have recently mushroomed in the area. A local water supply has been funded, I understand, by the European Union. The educational system (increasingly offered for free) is heavily subsidised by foreign donors. There is a bank offering finance and loan services in the village. Churches are finding it harder to survive without financial incentives from foreign donors to encourage church attendance among the people. Many buy low-priced, second-hand clothes, donated from the West, at local markets. Roads are being built with funds from China and elsewhere. Food aid comes to supplement local shortages. The most widely read newspapers are in English and their style shows their indebtedness to Western journalism. Medical services are available for free, or almost free, thanks to foreign donors. To cap it all – foreigners are credited with bringing Kenya back from the brink of a civil war following electoral disputes. Dependence on foreign support is not limited to the aforementioned areas. My local seminary (Kima International School of Theology) was built and is being run with foreign funds. Over 90% of the students survive on foreign scholarships. This is based on personal estimate as I teach part-time at this school.). While these foreign aids are detrimental to the future growth of Africans, the people not ready to concede to this fact as they fear it might lead to a cut in funding. The consequence is that Africans approach the physical through the spiritual (Senghor 1964:72). It is gods / spirits / ancestors and not physical cause / effect reasoning that are thought to bring life-success (Maranz 2001:135).

Historically, Africa's lack of physical productivity *is* clear. What we nowadays call 'poverty' has been the 'normal' way of life for generations of Africans (Melland (1923:53 and Wilson 1952:89). Prior to the arrival of Westerners, Africa has little to show of her civilization. Hunter gathering, nomadic pastoralism and minimal hand-cultivation on a rotating basis were widespread economic norms. How can such be transformed into profit-maximizing surplus producing economies? Studies done to explore this question tend to be sidetracked (Harries 2008). Western approaches to Africa tend to assume a prior 'blank slate' rather than a pre-existing culture (personal observation). Observant Kenyan people note how almost everything they have and use these days is of foreign origin, and that African people themselves produce relatively little in exchange for goods – except poverty to win sympathy. I explore the reasons for this below.

### **What Limits the Productive Capacity of Africans**

The subsidy attached to 'solutions' to poverty from the West itself makes them attractive to cash-strapped African communities. But they do not work. The educational solutions that Africans suggest are frustrating for many Westerners. Africans tend to blame the Devil or Satan -often used as a synonym for witchcraft- for their ills. The defeat of the Devil ushers in 'progress' (Harries 2006:153). Secular Westerners shake their heads incredulously at this apparent ignorance. The existence of evil as a personalized experience is to many Westerners the figment of a wild imagination. Western churches practice "disbelief in the reality of witchcraft" (Murray 1970:28). Witchcraft is for Westerners a concocted invention. The reality however is that hard work can be counter-productive in witch-bound societies because it results in somebody being

bewitched by the jealous. The readiness of Westerners to scoff at the reality of witchcraft and deny the existence of witches has been damaging to development.

The irony of the matter is that '*Satan*' is of Arabic origin (Johnson 1939:419). Used interchangeably with witchcraft or 'evil spirits, Satan is blamed for the ills of Africa (Douglas 1987, Murray 1970 and Imperato 1966). Biblical teaching, in its assumed dualism between God and the Devil / Satan, appropriates diverse and older African categories. The term for ancestral spirit in many African languages is taken as a synonym of '*Satan*', a troubling and misleading practice (Maluleke 2005). A number of options have been advocated to counter the machinations of Satan (i.e. troublesome ancestral spirits) by the Luo of Kenya:

- 1/ Animal sacrifice (Evans-Pritchard 1950:86).
- 2/ Stabbing the remains of the corpse of the person who is the source of a troublesome spirit (Mboya 1997:206).
- 3/ Burning a corpse in its grave (I have periodically heard of this practice.)
- 4/ Killing suspected witches.
- 5/ Breaking the virginity of a girl's corpse should she die unmarried (Mboya 1997).
- 6/ Ensuring that widows are inherited, even after their death (if necessary through ritual sex with the corpse), and so on. (Rituals such as breaking the virginity of a dead girl or ensuring that widows are penetrated even after their death if they were not inherited when alive are carried out to prevent the living from being haunted by ancestral spirits.

The Luo term *jachien*, (considered a synonym to Satan) is related to others such as *sepe*, *mumbo*, *mirieri* (Ocholla-Ayayo 1976:174), *olele* (Mboya 1997:107) and especially *juok* (the "supreme natural power") (Ocholla-Ayayo 1976:174). *Juok* (*jok*) can be translated back into English as vital force, mystical power or God (Ogot 1961). Kenyan Luo speakers often translate the term into English as witchcraft (Capen 1998:61). Witches (*nyakalondo*, *jajuok*, *jajuog wang*, *janawi* and perhaps *jabilo*) are all considered to use *juok*, or *juok* power in their evil arts. *Juok* is also the power arising from *jochiende* (plural of *jachien*, i.e. Satan). In a complex way the power lying behind *juok* (witchcraft) is none other than that of malevolent ancestral spirits.

Older women are most likely to be accused of being witches (Dovlo 2007:71), especially close family members— co-wives, mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law etc. Older women in African society are often poor, troubled, rejected by their husbands in favour of younger women, or bereaved. They are relatively powerless, often emotionally vulnerable, and least likely to fight back if accused of practicing witchcraft. They are widely imagined to be jealous, bitter and envious. African people are known for their jealousy and old women are the archetypal suspect. Maranz points out, for example, that many African people hide their wealth from the knowledge of others (Maranz 2001:138). This is not surprising when the belief persists that unused wealth can be considered available to any interested person (Maranz 2001:150; see also Ntloedibe-Kuswani 2007:215). Barren women are assumed to wish for the death of their co-wife's children than to sit in lonely misery as another woman enjoys the company of devoted offspring. Jealousy, it is believed, surely troubles old widows who observe other women enjoying their husband's company and wealth. More likely to be neglected and ignored than men when sickly or aged, old women are prone to bitterness and jealousy.

I have elsewhere traced beliefs in Satan, spirits and witchcraft to what I see as their common denominator – bitterness and a jealous heart (Harries 2007:219-223). When good is considered to be of limited supply, then someone else's possession of it (husband, children, food, quality housing etc.), means loss for another (Foster 1973). The reluctance to accumulate visible wealth is extremely important to economics (see also Harries, 2008). It results in people not wanting to be held accountable (Maranz 2001:102), not wanting to hold others accountable (Maranz 2001:41), fear of wealth, and a love of the appearance of poverty.

Belief in witchcraft-induced jealousy is very strong among Africans. Some people are said to be pre-occupied with trying to bring down those who seem to be doing better than them while such potential victims avoid the appearance of doing well in order not to stir the jealousy of witches. The following examples illustrate the impact of witchcraft on life, including the economy: a prosperous farmer who lost his child to what he believed were witches in Zambia left his place abode and business unexpectedly at night so he would not be attacked again by witches. A prosperous villager in Zambia stood in line at a funeral as a coffin was passed by. Suddenly and unexpectedly those carrying the coffin stumbled and the coffin tilted sideways pointing at him. It was for the bystanders an indication of his guilt in the deceased's death. The apparently innocent man took to his heels. He was never seen again. A Tanzanian farmer living in a semi-desert area was told that water had been found under his land. A post was erected to mark the place. But the farmer, fearing the jealousy of his neighbours should he become wealthy through having the borehole for the whole community on his land, secretly moved the post. When the bore-hole diggers came, they did not find any water. People in Western Kenya spend much money and time on funerals attended by numerous family members, at least in part to prove that they do not rejoice at the departure of the dead. "Most Luos of Western Kenya spend less on preserving life than caring for the dead" (Kodia 2005:33). An Anglican bishop insisted that his funeral be cheap and simple, but "more than half a million [over \$8,300, was raised] to cover the funeral expenses" (Kodia, 35).

The people most likely to be accused of being selfish by the jealous are those who have accumulated wealth through their own efforts. Means of investment that are indivisible are much desired, to avoid the social obligation to share one's wealth (Maranz 2001:20). People may be quick to put their wealth into bricks and mortar. Education is much preferred to money, as once acquired it cannot be taken away. Receiving wealth from a foreigner does not make someone guilty of the same degree of selfishness (that would be used to justify jealousy), because the beneficiary has not worked for it. This is another reason why donors are much loved. Across the continent witchcraft has enslaved many, trapping them to a life of poverty. Witchcraft thus hinders economic progress. Witchcraft fears result in people directing resources not towards the maximization of profit or output but a minimization of witchcraft (jealousy). While people live in constant fear and trepidation – those churches which are still guided if not controlled by the West, tell the people plagued by disease, poverty, calamity, house-fires, barrenness and AIDS that witchcraft does not exist! The church is failing in its duty. Witchcraft, surely, is exactly what the church ought to be tackling? Many African Indigenous Churches are doing so (Murray 1970). But others are slow to learn from them. African Christians have learned, often the hard way, that there is no point in telling most Western Christians / missionaries that their problems are caused by witchcraft. The response – that witchcraft does not exist – amounts to saying that there is no jealousy in so far as "... it is difficult to define ... [witchcraft] in isolation from the

idea of jealousy” (Ntloedibe-Kuswani 2007:225). This can be so contrary to the evidence as to be ridiculous, and certainly of little or no help in day-to-day life. At best perhaps – it can drive witchcraft underground. And this is what happens. Witchcraft beliefs are not a vestigial organ that can be excised, leaving the body intact and functioning ‘normally’. They are the DNA of life, or its central ideology. Even if ‘removed’ from certain community members, the effect on behaviour lingers. ‘Witch-bound’ communities attempt to force aberrant members into line.

The 2008 Kenyan post-election violence has its roots in ‘jealousy’. The Nilotes and other ethnic groups in the West of Kenya were jealous of their wealthy neighbours the Kikuyu for having the corner on prosperity, so led a revolt to drive the Kikuyu people from their land. This was a very traditional way of dealing with witches – albeit on a larger scale than usual, demonstrating that Akrong was right to say that witchcraft beliefs affect the political sphere (2007:61). Africa continues to groan under the heavy burden of witchcraft beliefs (Haar 2007:1).

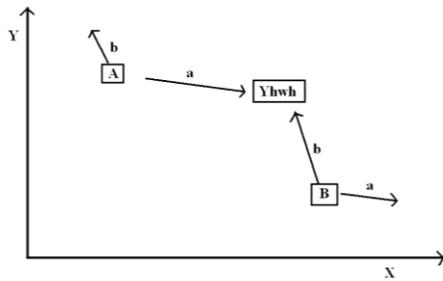
The church in Africa is in many ways under the control of the West as it depends on donor-funding for its survival. How can the West rectify this?

### **The Transfer of knowledge of God from the West to the non-West**

The missionary project on the African continent has in many ways been a success (Jenkins 2002). Critics such as the anthropologist Beidelmann (1982) have come to an acceptance of this fact. The African church is there, its members numerous, and its influence widespread (Jenkins 2002). Yet it is said that the church is ‘a mile wide but only an inch deep’ (Obed 2008) and that it is plagued by the prosperity Gospel; a “cynical manipulation” (Cotterell 1993:2). It may not be too far from the truth to say that the failure of the African church to develop an indigenous theology is the consequence of a fundamental error on the part of the Western Church’s in applying Western ways and culture, including Western languages, to African problems. This would not be such a serious problem if the African church already had its own foundations in place. That is – it would be different if the churches were meeting and interacting as equals. Then the African church could learn from ‘the other’ selectively. As it is, however, many African churches have been denied the value of indigenous solutions to the challenges facing them. Secularism, with its associated doctrines and belief systems, has been on the rise. Secularists’ disdain for spiritual mystery has rubbed off on Western Christians. What Christians do not always perceive, is that the resultant desire for straightforward Scriptural comprehensibility is contextually dependent. That is the desire to demystify and simplify the Bible is a product of a secular age, and not necessarily integral to eternal truth.

If African theology is to develop using African English, because the meanings (or impacts) of the English terms African people use are profoundly different to those of Western English, then Westerners will not (or even ‘cannot possibly’) understand (or agree with) the theology being produced in Africa – unless they first master the English language as used and understood in Africa in all its complexity. Advocating that African theology develops distinctly from Western theology may appear to some as splitting the church. But should it be one? The church needs to be more than one in order for her to be one. If the destination is the same, let’s say, but the starting points differ, then those at different starting points need to move in different directions in order to arrive at the same destination (See illustration in Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Different Starting Points Aiming to Find a Knowledge of God.



In Figure 1 the X and Y axes represent any two characteristics or attributes of God. If *Yhwh* is the true God, then people B must be directed along path b and people A along path a in order to reach the truth. Directing people B along path a does not take them closer to but further from truth, as also illustrated for people A by path b. For example, people A may understand the power of God but not the love of God, so need to be taught his love, whereas people B may understand the love of God, but not the power of God, so need to be taught about God's power. Some scholars have questioned whether belief in a high-God is native to the Luo people: (Nyarwath 1994:141 and P'Bitek 1970:58-69). Do the Luo take the term *Nyasaye*, commonly translated 'God', as some kind of 'mystical power'? Western theology does not address the need to educate people into the understanding that there is one powerful God, it takes this as a given, to be accepted or not by faith. That which African people need to understand, that seems to be irrelevant to modern Western theology, is how God would have them overcome witchcraft. Because to be helpful in Africa, theology often will not be acceptable to Westerners, hence I draw another conclusion: in order for African theology to advance and progress, it must be done in a language other than English, i.e. in an African language; "You are right" was Bediako's response, repeated six times, to my suggestion that English may be enemy number one to theology in Africa (Bediako 2006).

### Barriers to Accurate Reporting

Why do efforts at writing African theology in English continue when barriers to the success of such a project are almost endless? Why are such barriers to the development of a theology that can effectively counter witchcraft so widely ignored? I suggest reasons for this in the following.

Numerous strategies evolved to ease race tensions between Blacks and Whites (and others) have contributed. Internationally these strategies in emphasising inter-ethnic equality, in effect equal capability in contexts guided by the West between Westerners and non-Westerners, can curtail or pre-empt efforts at compensating for difference. I appeal to such not to allow the privilege of a few to be the demise of whole communities. African people are *not* inherently inferior to others (Trouillot 2003:106). African communities *can* develop, through thinking about themselves and their societies in familiar categories as does the rest of the globe, and not by simply imitating others: "There is a need, therefore, for policy change in the whole of Africa towards using African languages as a media of education in order to bring about development" (Qorro 2003:194), "... development in Africa will not be forthcoming until we start using our languages as LOI [Language of Instruction] from the beginning to the end of the education process" (Prah

2003:24), Short-term advantages gained by winning foreign charity should not be allowed to derail Africa's self-development project.

### **Overcoming Witchcraft in Africa**

Limitations in communication as discussed above mean that attempts by the West at 'helping' Africa to develop often create dependency. An important part of the African worldview often ignored/overlooked by Westerners is the matter of witchcraft. Knowledge of these cannot be transported intact across cultural divides, and is frequently concealed from view even to scholars. Witchcraft and associated beliefs in magic are widespread, ancient and incredibly resilient (Haar 2007:1). Her co-authors make various suggestions on how to do away with witchcraft. Some of these are contradictory – so some authors find education to be the key (Dovlo 2007:89), whereas others find education to be ineffective (Haar (2007:9) and Kgatla (2007:287)). Some advocate Christianity and the church (Kgatla 2007:283-285), whereas another warns us that the church can enhance witchcraft beliefs (Bongmba 2007:130-137). Prosperity may not help, as Dovlo reminds us that “the incidence of witchcraft accusation increases both in cases of economic well-being and disaster” (Dovlo 2007:69). Some emphasise the spiritual side of the solution to witchcraft, causing Haar to talk of “the need for new theologies” (Haar 2007b:26). “Changing witchcraft beliefs in Africa, then, can only be the result of a long-term process. What is needed ... is to cultivate alternative modes of interpretation of life-events in order eventually to undermine the witchcraft mentality. But any type of education in this regard ... must be culturally based in order to be effective” Haar (2007b:24-25) concludes.

A prerequisite for the effective and lasting overcoming of witchcraft, I suggest, in line with the discussion above, is that people use a language that they understand. That is, either their mother-tongue, or a language closely related to it. Expecting the overcoming of mankind's great enemy using a language which does not resonate with or articulate people's deep beliefs is, I believe, asking too much. Witchcraft beliefs can remain intact, but hidden. Education in Africa cannot be expected to overcome witchcraft if it occurs in foreign languages that ignore it.

For Africa to be free, the bondage of witchcraft has to be broken. (Hinfelaar 2007:229). The key for this to happen, I suggest – is faith in God, i.e. Yahweh – the creator and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is primarily because God is God. It may be important to state at this stage that these thoughts on how to overcome witchcraft, and the assumptions regarding the nature and preeminence of witchcraft underlying them, may not be shared by African people themselves. My advocacy of belief in God as solution to witchcraft belief is both positive and negative. Positive, because I believe in God and I believe that He has left us his Word, that he came to die for mankind, and that the greatest thing a person can do is to become a follower of Jesus Christ. Related to this – I have seen God transform people's lives and found Christian teachings to have brought positive transformations to people in diverse contexts and circumstances. On the other hand I subscribe to the promotion of Christianity because I have seen that alternative strategies of intervention by the West 'do not work'. In some cases their immediate impact is negative, and in other cases the dynamics they engender create unhealthy dependency or outright corruption (Odongo 2007). This is because such interventionary strategies provide incomplete knowledge. True knowledge of and faith in the one God the creator of the universe *must* reduce fear of witchcraft. There can be no question about this at all. The Bible can be taken as an 'anti-

witchcraft' manual, on the nature of which I can mention only a few specifics: The 10<sup>th</sup> commandment (Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21) contains direct commands condemning jealousy (see above for the link between jealousy and witchcraft) – “do not covet”. The first four commandments point to God's singular supremacy. The Bible condemns witches and witchcraft (Exodus 22:17-18) outright. Ostracising witches / witchdoctors was somewhat widespread and customary in Israel (I Samuel 28:3). The command is clear: “fear God [not witches] and keep his commandments” (NIV Ecclesiastes 12:13). New Testament activity is overtly anti-witchcraft. In condemning Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:20-21) and Elumano (Acts 13:9-10), burning books associated with witchcraft (Acts 19:19), warning the Galatians (Galatians 3:1), listing witchcraft amongst other sins (Galatians 5:20) and so on. Jesus never identified a witch as responsible for people's ills; his healing (unlike that of many traditional healers) was never ‘against a witch’. The impression is that he did not want to credit witches with the privilege of such recognition.

Identifying ‘the defilement of corpses’ to the kinds of taboos held by neighbouring Near-Eastern states was surely aimed at curtailing the power of the dead (Douglas 1993:152-153)? “The [unique] Biblical codification of impurity does not generate ... interpersonal accusations” emphasises Douglas (1993:154). Judeo-Christian opposition to witchcraft is ancient.

Instead of blaming and exorcising witches and spirits, the recognition of one supreme God is a way to seek a unified purpose even in that which *seems to be* an act of bewitchment. Jesus taught love of enemies and that revenge is God's (Romans 12:19). It can be said in summary that the whole of Christian teaching is aimed at countering beliefs in malevolent powers such as of witchcraft. The way this anti-witchcraft message is delivered is important. I have already mentioned the necessity of the use of indigenous languages. Christian leaders need to demonstrate genuine faith by personal example. The propagation of this message cannot be left to foreign donors. People must be sufficiently convinced to follow the example of Jesus and his disciples – to give their lives voluntarily in God's service to make all nations followers of the liberating teachings of Jesus (Matthew 28:19).

## **Conclusion**

This article begins by comparing a forest to a vegetable garden, the former representing Africa and the latter Europe. The features of the forest are hidden to vegetable gardeners, who could tend their plots without realising they are doing away with a forest. Forest dwellers, while pleased with such transformation, are disadvantaged in never having learned how to clear a forest or plant vegetables for themselves. Instead they are rendered dependent on foreigners. That dependency is hidden by strictures in communication under the cover of countering racism and other theoretical oversights that conceal difference.

One aspect of African life often concealed from Western view is its solid belief in witchcraft. The profound effect this has on interpersonal relationships has adverse effects on diverse aspects of socio-economic development. Bitterness and especially jealousy are at the root of witchcraft, which is little understood by Westerners, who often deny its existence. This denial means that inter-church relations can be based on misguided assumptions. As meaning is context-based, such ignorance of ‘the other’ can throw theological and ecclesial teaching off course, leaving much of Africa dependent on the West primarily because of the subsidization of its education by the latter. This article suggests that a better alternative could be the use of regional African

languages, especially in theological education on the continent. In this way Biblical scholarship could be applied in the light of African experience including witchcraft and magic. The Biblical message of God and his son, Jesus Christ, working through the church, can be powerful tool to combat witchcraft and superstition in Africa.

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