



Satanism in Zambia: a pastoral challenge

by Bernhard Udelhoven & the Fingers of Thomas

March 2009

Background

The first cases of Satanism in Zambia seemingly were reported in the early 1990s. In 1997 some youths in the Copperbelt gave testimonies to the press about recruitment into Satanism before they were delivered by Pentecostal churches. Later similar testimonies were given in Lusaka. By 1997 talks about Satanism had entered the public forum, discussions were going on, the press referred to it, and different churches, institutions, the Zambian Police and different political parties were forced to make statements or answer questions about Satanism.¹ Zambia's fears concerning Satanism had been preceded by panics in other African countries, like Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa. In the 2000s several publications appeared in Zambia of ex-Satanists describing their involvement in Satanism, with details about the Satanist underground. One could call such testimonies of delivered Satanists a "grass-root multimedia venture", because within a short period time such testimonies flooded Pentecostal and charismatic circles throughout Zambia in form of photocopies of books, audio tapes and videos of recorded testimonies. By now in the urban centres Satanism has become the

"currency" for talking about the occult. A number of supernatural qualities of Satanists have been reported and are widely talked about: ability of flying, walking through walls and closed doors, splitting of souls, or causing harm and death at distance; such attributes had previously been located within the discourses on witchcraft.

Rumours

Rumours of Satanism spread especially through the urban centres, but reached also the rural areas. (Note however that in many rural areas the old paradigm of witchcraft seems still more pervasive to people's own experiences than Satanism.)² Satanists are supposed to drive in black cars, to be rich, and to own many consumer goods and fashionable clothes which are fabricated in the underground world. Some are said to have sold their years to Satan: for riches of this world one gives to Satan a number of years of this life. "Satan gives nothing for free. If he gives you riches, he wants your life", a delivered Satanist testified. Satanists are said to be hierarchically organised, following a strict line of command, though they are themselves unaware how the chain holds together. Satanists are said to use the cover of churches to look for members and to keep the public

¹ See for example Zambia News Online (06.06.1997) with comments on Satanism by representatives of the Christian Unity Ministries, the Zambian Episcopal Conference, the Zambian Church of God, the Lusaka Baptist Church, the Zambian Police, and the National Democratic Party on <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Newsletters/zno20.htm> (accessed 24.02.2009).

² In many rural areas (at least in our experiences so far) people have heard about Satanism, but considered it an issue mainly in the towns. "Satanism exists not so much here but in town. But witchcraft is very present here in the villages."



unaware of their activities. In 1997 the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Lusaka was banned because of allegations of Satanist involvement, abductions and human sacrifices that were said to have taken place in that church. In spite of public outcry (which included the stoning of church-windows and some vehicles), this judgement was later revoked for lack of evidence. Many believe in a conspiracy theory that Satanists are protected by higher authorities. According to a popular (born-again Pentecostal) understanding of things, the devil is very angry especially since Zambia has been declared a Christian nation; he tries much harder to fight Christianity in Zambia. Some religious leaders have warned against a Satanist plot to infiltrate all key-institutions of Zambia: business, parliament, the judicial system and even the churches.

Certain events shed some sinister light on the rumours. In the Kafue river a body was found with an apparent suicide note: "I cannot do what they ask me this time; I have to kill myself". Other people were reported missing by their families, just to come back after many days or even weeks with a confused mind or even mad, speaking about having been abducted by Satanists. (Note that many children get - at least temporarily - lost in the urban compounds, and such experiences of parents looking for lost children adds greatly to the fears.) The notion of Satanism also has absorbed certain criminal activities previously associated with witchcraft: some people trying to become rich (or to be cured from HIV/AIDS) through occult means that include child defilement, sex with close relatives, and there are also suspicions of some cases of ritual murder or the digging up of graves. The press also reported some strange stories that are widely spoken about. A woman in Mongu was implicated into a case of theft, when stolen goods were found in her house. When questioned by the police she testified that she was a Satanist. When she made a confession in the police station about other people

involved in the cult, she was whipped (according to the report) by some invisible person before the eyes of the police.

Recruitment into Satanism is said to happen through forms of initiation of which the targets themselves are rarely aware: through consuming Satanic foods, or receiving gifts, money or fashion articles from the "underground world", Satan is said to gain an "entry-point" by means of which he can make in due time a proper "covenant". As such Satanism in Zambia is of a quite different kind to the different forms of Western Satanism, from whom the word has been borrowed.

Panics in schools and hospitals

A number of schools (more especially boarding schools) experienced real panics about Satanism that caused much concern also for the parents. Groups of students started to behave strangely and some were thought to have special powers. In one girl school the students stopped eating any meat coming from the school kitchen since they heard from fellow students that the food was contaminated by Satanists. Subsequently some girls fainted for lack of food, and some had to be hospitalised. In a number of schools some students behaved like being possessed when they were being prayed over by charismatic groups, and some made confessions of involvement into Satanism during such prayer meetings. In at least one school also a teacher was implicated, who subsequently showed signs of possession when being prayed over by a charismatic group, after which he made some forms of confession about his involvement in Satanism. Some suspected or confessing Satanists were dismissed from a number of schools. Hospital staff around Zambia experienced apprehensions in patients when taking blood. "The blood may be used by Satanists." Some delivered Satanists stated in testimonies that "most clinics are run by Satanists to gain supplies of blood".



Testimonies

Satanism (like witchcraft) in Zambia is known for its secrecy, and there is little chance to investigate Satanism openly. Thus the main source of information about Satanism in Zambia comes from testimonies of delivered Satanists. Such testimonies present themselves as inside stories and first-hand experiences of the Satanic world: its workings, initiations, schools and purposes. "To know the Satanists you have to be one of them," some say. "Delivered Satanists" (meaning repentant and delivered in one of the many Christian churches) give concrete pictures about the extend of Satanism, the dangers, the practices, initiation, but also how to come out of it, and how to protect oneself from the advances of the Satanists.

An example of such a testimony is the book *Transformed from Satanism to Christianity* of Evangelist Gideon Kabila, who was delivered by the Apostolic Church in Zambia in 2005. Within a short time of publication, photocopied versions of the book circulated throughout Zambia,³ though the author explicitly forbid to photocopy his copy-written book. He describes that he had been a Satanist since birth, since his mother came from a Satanist family. He made his first journey to the underground world at the age of seven:

It was at this hour [midnight] when I started hearing strange voices of people, whispering outside, and I switched off the light. The room became darker than I expected it to be. Then I saw a very dark person, huge and tall coming near my bed. He opened up his voice and said, "Time had come to go to another world." He said that I needed no

³ The author of this article was shown photocopied versions in Chilenje, the Copperbelt, and in a small village in the Luapula Province.

transport because it was a spiritual world. Then he commanded me to hold his hands so that we might go, and immediately I gave him my hands I disappeared and found myself into another world with electricity and well designed but with tough principles. It was the world of death. They welcomed me as the prince of the coast. I did not know what it meant till I saw my mother dressed in a red and black coloured garment, with a sword in her hands and then she surrendered me to one of the fat giants who were called the grandmasters. Then they took me to a certain room where I was told to go and make a covenant.

Evangelist Gideon Kabila continues on over 50 pages to describe the underground world, the different covenants with the devil, the Satanist commandments, the Satanist schools and universities, the different types of demons that are in league with Satan, and the different missions that Satanists have to perform in the world in order to advance in the Satanist hierarchy (sacrificing family members and loved ones, causing road accidents, disturbing Christian prayer meetings, practicing lesbianism and prostitution, causing confusion, breaking marriages, initiating other people into Satanism, etc.) He gives descriptions of underground factories in which Satanic foods and consumer goods are produced out of human blood and body parts and spread throughout Zambia so as to initiate more people. In the end he gives an account of his dramatic deliverance through the Apostolic Church in Zambia and the power of prayer that is stronger than the powers of the underworld.

Such types of testimonies stressing the power of prayer over the Satanist world became a regular feature in crusades, prayer services and overnight prayers of a number of Pentecostal churches and charismatic prayer-



groups. Some testimonies are very dramatic. One young woman from Chirundu confessed:

My grandmother initiated me into Satanism when I was still a child. She gave me the blood of a chicken to drink and I felt very strong. There was a power in me that God had not created me with. I started longing for blood and I was killing four relatives a year. I became a queen when I had killed my father. I was allowed in the underground world to see the Devil himself, but I could only see him from far and his head was covered. I was given a mirror to kill. I killed many people, more than 100, maybe 200. I could also change my body into a rat, or a hyena, and into a donor fish. Like that I caused the bridge on the Great East Road to collapse. I caused many accidents. I wanted to drink blood every day, and I became more and more thirsty for blood. Blood is like water for the Satanists. At home my family wondered why I was not eating. They did not know that I had other food to eat. I had snakes around my waist, and when I slept with a man they sucked his blood and he would die the next day. ...

She also spoke about sacrificed babies that were sold as frozen chicken: "They look and taste like chicken and you think they are chicken. Satanists have a lot of magic." She warned about private clinics run by Satanists to get a daily supply of fresh blood, and during one testimony that was recorded on video she collapsed into a trance, which gave the impression to many people that she was not yet totally delivered.

Other confessions are less dramatic and also less bloody; people speak of experiences of flying, travelling to distant places, meetings with fellow Satanists in a spiritual world, and attempts to confuse prayer services. Such

testimonies have established a common jargon, a new vocabulary, through which the Satanic world, its locations and its hierarchies are being described. We hear of "entry-points", specific covenants, mysterious positions within the hierarchy ("queen", "queen of darkness", "queen of the coast", a mysterious "Olieva", "sons of Satan", etc.), categorised missions ("missions of prostitution", "lesbianism", "killing", "causing confusion", "recruitment"), satanic clothing with its own colour code ("pink for prostitution, red for danger, black for Satanic gatherings"), and specific locations, schools and "chambers" in the underground world. Through such testimonies of insiders we gain a certain intimacy with the hidden satanic world.

Moreover, the testimonies of delivered Satanists reaffirm Christians in their Christian commitment and prayer life (hence their place in sermons and prayer services): Ex-Satanists confessed that non-committed Christians were easy targets of their sinister activities, while prayerful people were difficult to attack: "We failed our destructive missions when we came in contact with a prayerful person, since prayer is more powerful than the devil." The testimonies confirm the privileged position of Christianity, more especially of the "spirit-filled" Pentecostal churches (often the testimonies are wrapped up in a Pentecostal language of deliverance); they offer Christians secure methods of countering Satanic attacks and help people thereby to manage the uncertainties of their lives.

Some pastoral challenges

Stories about Satanism have become an own literary genre. Not all stories are believed, and quite a few stories are listened to with a sense of humour or cynicism. The stories circulate at grass-root through face to face contacts, where people add their own experiences. Many families can report stories about involvements in strange car accidents; others lost a number



of family members in a short period of time through a series of events they could not explain but with reference to Satanism.

Maybe the most pressing pastoral issue in Satanism is the fear of parents for their children. Parents are afraid that their children (especially at school) get involved or get initiated into Satanism, maybe even without knowing what is happening, through friends, food or clothing. Schools are regarded as recruitment places for Satanism.

Then there are the direct experiences of a number of people with what they call an evil force. Some had paralysing visions at night, some felt overcome by it, and even children heard strange voices and had strange dreams featuring symbols of Satanism.⁴

People share with their pastors these deep and frightful experiences with something they cannot explain. Some people who are otherwise of a sober character, not easily swayed away by moods and feelings, have passed through experiences in which they felt overpowered by an outside force: in dreams, in visions, voices, or in waking life. It is because of these overpowering experiences that they sought help from their churches. These experiences may not necessarily be brought in direct connection with Satanism, yet there is no doubt that the concept or language of Satanism in Zambia provides a vehicle through which such experiences are being communicated and understood. Satanism is seen as a spiritual issue, not an issue that the police or the courts can deal with. It is an issue where people expect help from their church:

both in regards to individual & family care, but also in regards to guidance and to addressing the wider worldview in which the experiences of Satanism (or perceived Satanism) attain their twist, spreading intolerance, suspicions, and in some cases even panic.

The issue of Satanism in Zambia (a new word that has however deep roots in cultural cognitive traditions) has come to shape fears, expectations, relationships, concepts, beliefs and the worldview of many Christians, and poses a pastoral challenge that has many facets. Taking up this challenge is surely not easy. But beyond immediate pastoral care of afflicted people it may also provide an opportunity for pastoral agents to look again at very old issues that have provided the fertile ground for fears of Satanism to flourish (like the complex issue of spirits or witchcraft), which continue to shape relationships of people below the Christian surface.

⁴ Radio Yatsani broadcasts every day calls for missing persons (especially children) that have been reported to the police. According to one staff member, most of the children are found after a few days, and many children get missing in the compounds because of losing their way when scouting for food, friends, or other things.