

## Caught In-Between -re-visiting religious syncretism

*The seed which is the word of God grows out of good soil watered by the divine dew, it absorbs moisture, transforms it, and makes it part of itself, so that eventually it bears much fruit.*

– Ad Gentes, n. 22.

Carl Starkloff, a renowned missiologist, argues in a recent book that it is time to "«retrieve» the ancient meaning of syncretism". Freed from long-standing prejudices, he observes that syncretism can be appreciated at its face value: it expresses the mixture of "human desire for unity and synthesis". Further, the rehabilitation of the syncretic process is helpful and necessary in order to appreciate and evaluate Christianity "as a faith to be shared by all cultures"<sup>1</sup>. Despite all the sympathy one may rightfully expect for this perspective, it cannot go unnoticed that Starkloff's position is completely at odds with the view of another missiologist who almost four decades ago wrote that syncretism must be confronted without delay. For "there is real danger that we may find ourselves before long exceedingly rich in religion and exceedingly poor in real Christianity"<sup>2</sup>. How can one reconcile these views? Or are they reconcilable at all? What do we mean by 'syncretism'? Does it make any sense to talk of syncretism in a multicultural and plurireligious society? Has not the concept of syncretism become antiquated especially since the introduction of inculturation, contextualisation, etc.?

This essay addresses some of these issues, and in doing so, attempts to shed light on the problematic involved in living Christianity with and among

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1. Carl STARKLOFF, *A Theology of the In-Between* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), outer cover page. For an account of Starkloff's main thesis, see my review in: *Mission XI* (2004) pp. 396-403.

2. William Adolph VISSERT HOOFT, *No Other Name. The Choice between Syncretism and Christian Universalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 9. For a timely reaction, see: Gustave THILS, *Synchrétisme ou catholicité?* (Louvain: Casterman, 1967).

the various religions and cultures. Do syncretic processes have the potential to make Christianity a religion shared differently by all cultures? If so, what is the logic by which the syncretic processes evolve and ripen? How can the genius of *'bricolage'* be expressed in theological terms? (III) In order to come up with some reliable orientation we may usefully review an instance from the history of mission, especially during the second upsurge in the sixteenth century. Although the world has since then changed, and Christianity has become more a reality of the 'colonized', the unsought African encounter with the 'West' offers clues to the workings of syncretism (II). But any talk of syncretism presupposes a clear understanding of the term and the concept behind it. Despite the risk of subscribing to a contested conceptual framework, we shall begin with a brief account of the meaning, usage and implications of syncretism in religious thought hitherto (I).

### **I. Syncretism: meaning, usage and implication**

One of the main difficulties in talking about syncretism consists in the lack of a precise description or definition. Recent research has attempted to solve the problem by concentrating on the etymological, historical and practical sense attributed to the term. Etymologically, syncretism derives from συγκρητίζειν<sup>3</sup> a term and concept employed by Plutarch de Chaeronea (c.50-c.125 AD) in connection with the sociability and compromise typical of the Cretans. Syncretism denotes two traits commonly attributed to the *kretoi*: the friendliness or enmity shown correspondingly towards the friends or enemies of one's friends, and the solidarity exercised against a common enemy despite internal frictions or rebellion<sup>4</sup>. It hence refers to a specific kind of action: opportunistic, mutually profitable, reasonable as well as enabling solidarity in the group. Despite this positive connotation the concept has not become current until the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) introduced it to promote political unity and intellectual concord disregarding the confessional differences. Syncretism meant for him a consensus amidst the contested issues (*"in dimicatione consen-*

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3. Sugkrétismos was probably based on sugkrétos (Ionian form of sugkratos, "mixed together").

4. See, Charles STEWART & Rosalind SHAW (eds.), *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism. The politics of religious syncretism* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994) p. 3 ff; "Synkretismus", *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 32, (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2001) pp. 527-559.

*sum*"), for it could very well be the case that the differences were caused by and consisted in divergent perspectives, whereas agreement possibly existed in "*re ipsa*"<sup>5</sup>. Precisely this understanding manifests the two notions, namely purity and ambiguity, on account of which syncretism has been denounced and consequently has become unacceptable both for the theologian and the anthropologist alike. For any consensus reached among differing opinions may amount to a false compromise, especially if it does not illumine the *re ipsa*. Further, syncretistic solutions being ambiguous lack certainty, hence are untenable. Both these concerns were evident not only in Philipp Melancthon's (1497-1560) view on syncretism<sup>6</sup>, but also in the general use of the term since the 'syncretistic controversies' began exploring the sufficient reason for Church unity. Syncretism has become by now a negative concept to signify "an entirely unprincipled jumbling together of religions"<sup>7</sup> and this pejorative sense continued to extend to all realms of learning since the 1640s.

Initially, thus, syncretism stood for a viable political and reasonable strategy of action which if pursued further would not only resolve conflicts but also eventually bring forth the truth invested in the *re ipsa*. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century however syncretism was seen as a conceptual framework to be avoided due to the libertarianism and incompatible fusion of religions it understood to foment. Besides referring to the admixture of religions, the concept was used in connection with philosophical-theological syncretism<sup>8</sup>, meaning the incompatible mixture of Cartesian-Aristotelian, Thomist-Scotist systems of thought, for example. With the inception of comparative historical studies on religion in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, syncretism was attributed to the pre-Christian Graeco-Roman religions. Scholars even regarded syncretism as "an assimilative weapon" employed by the rulers to appropriate foreign cults and thus conquer the peoples totally. Further, syncretism "became an 'othering' term applied to historically distant as well as geographically distant societies, in line with Tylorean evolutionist thinking"<sup>9</sup>.

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5. See, Percy Stafford ALLEN et al. (eds.), *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterdami*, 12 vol., Oxford, vol. III 1913, pp. 332 & 539. Quoted in: "Synkretismus", p. 544.

6. On the issue of consensus debated by Erasmus and Melancthon, see: Michael BECHT, *Pium consensus tueri: studien zum Begriff consensus im werk von Erasmus von Rotterdam, Philipp Melancthon und Johannes Calvin* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2000). The consensus ecclesiae advocated by Erasmus might have lacked the fundamento evangelii required by Melancthon, see esp. pp. 345-360.

7. Ch. STEWART & R. SHAW (eds.), *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*, p. 4.

8. See, "Synkretismus", pp. 545 ff.

9. Ch. STEWART & R. SHAW (eds.), *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*, pp. 4-5.

That the negative conception persisted also in the contemporary missiological literature can be exemplified by the infamous "Rites Controversy" in connection with Matteo Ricci's (1552-1610) and Roberto de Nobili's (1577-1656) missionary activities respectively in China and in India. In both cases the introduction of indigenous religious concepts and practices into Christianity has been viewed as perverting the faith, fomenting idolatry, betraying the spirit of the gospel, denouncing the unicity of God, etc.<sup>10</sup>. Similar arguments were advanced against Bartolomé de Las Casas' (1474-1566) defence of the religion of the 'indios.' Giving in to the pre-Colombian religiosity would amount to sanctioning child sacrifices, carnivorous rites and idolatry<sup>11</sup>. The Christian religion –*vera religione*– cannot afford to be contaminated by naturistic religious conceptions or practices<sup>12</sup>.

However, there were persistent voices defending syncretism as a common feature of religions. Worth mention is the position adopted by Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) with regard to Early Christianity, which Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950) applied to all religions. In his *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (1902), Harnack affirms that Early Christianity had two powers to compete against, namely paganism and syncretism. The latter is understood as the last phase of Hellenism which Christianity had to confront. During this syncretistic period,

all existing materials were fused together, elements that lay far apart were solidified into a unity, and all previous constructions were shattered, while the surface of the movement was covered by broken fragments thrown out in a broad moraine, in which the debris of all earlier strata were to be found. This is the meaning of "syncretism". Viewed from a distance, it looks like a unity, though the unity seems heterogeneous. The forces which have shaped it do

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10. See especially, George MINAMIKI, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985); Fidel VILLARROEL, "The Chinese Rites Controversy: Dominican Viewpoint," *Philippiniana Sacra* 18/82 (1993), 5-61, esp. 18ff; J. S. CUMMINS, *A Question of Rites* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 2003), pp. 69-90; Andrew ROSS, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 178-199; David E. MUNGELLO, (ed.). *The Chinese rites controversy: its history and meaning* (Nettetal: Steyler, 1994).

11. See Lewis HANKE, *All Mankind Is One: a study of the disputation between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the intellectual and religious capacity of the American Indians* (Dekalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press 1974), esp. pp. 86ff.

12. On syncretism and the African reception of Christianity, see: Fabien EBOUSSI BOULAGA, *Christianity without Fetishes [Christianisme sans fétiche]* (Maryknoll: N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), pp. 70-72.

not meet the eye. What one really sees is the ancient element in its composition; the new lies buried under all that catches the eye upon the surface<sup>13</sup>.

Christianity had to settle with this "syncretism" or final form of Hellenism. ... Further, as soon as Christianity itself began to be reflective, it took an interest in this "syncretism," borrowing ideas from it, and using them, in fact, to promote its own development. Christianity was not originally syncretistic itself, for Jesus Christ did not belong to this circle of ideas, and it was his disciples who were responsible for the primitive shaping of Christianity. But whenever Christianity came to formulate ideas of God, Jesus, sin, redemption, and life, it drew upon the materials acquired in the general process of religious evolution, availing itself of all the forms which these had taken.

Christian preaching thus found itself confronted with the old polytheism at its height in the imperial cultus, and with this syncretism which represented the final stage of Hellenism. ... From its opposition to polytheism it drew that power of antithesis and exclusiveness which is a force at once needed and intensified by any independent religion. In syncretism, again, i.e., in all that as a rule deserved the title of "religion" in contemporary life, it possessed unconsciously a secret ally. All it had to do with syncretism was to cleanse and simplify –and complicate– it<sup>14</sup>.

For Harnack, "Christianity ... showed itself to be syncretistic. But it revealed to the world a special kind of syncretism, namely, the syncretism of a universal religion. Every force, every relationship in its environment, was mastered by it and made to serve its own ends ...". Further: "After the middle of the third century A. D., Christianity falls [sic!] to be considered as syncretistic religion in the fullest sense; as such it faced the two other syncretistic products of the age, Manichaeism and the Neo-platonic religion which was bound up with the sun-cult. Henceforward, Christianity may be just as truly called a Hellenic religion ..."<sup>15</sup>. In line with this argument Harnack would speak of the 'Hellenization of Christianity', a concept contemporary scholarship finds problematic. For, if one understands syncretism in the way portrayed by Harnack, it is identical to what is conceived under accommodation, inculturation, indigenisation, contextualisation, etc. in all of which the main concern resides in adoption, insertion and integra-

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13. Adolf von HARNACK, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* [Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten], (New York: Harper, 1962), pp. 30-31.

14. A. von HARNACK, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, pp. 34-35.

15. A. von HARNACK, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, pp. 312. 313-14.

tion of elements from the milieu in which a new religion takes root<sup>16</sup>. Further one has to note that Early Christianity was interested in preserving its newness despite its admitted continuity with Jewish-Hellenic-Roman religiosity<sup>17</sup>. Rejection of syncretism and the preservation of Christian novelty become central issues in connection with Christological and soteriological motifs which underlie the earliest stages of Christian dogmatic formulation. It is hence crucial to define what one means by syncretism.

According to Vissert't Hooft, syncretistic endeavours, such as 'translation' and 'absorption' are common to all religious diffusion and hence should not be reckoned as *the* syncretism one is called to reject:

Some speak of syncretism whenever a particular religion makes any use of concepts which have their origin in the life of another religion. But in that case we would have to conclude that every religion which steps out of its original environment is syncretistic, because it is quite impossible to enter into communication with people who live in another environment without using expressions and concepts which are in some way related to and embedded in the religious world in which the people concerned are living. Translation is *not syncretism*, if it is done with the desire to pass on the original message as clearly as possible and without greater modification of its original content than is inevitable in any process of translation.

Others speak of syncretism when a particular religion goes further than translation and takes into its own life ideas or practices which have their origin in another religious world. But this is also a too general use of the word. For every world-religion has done so. The great question is whether the 'foreign' elements become a part of the original structure or whether that structure is essentially modified by them. Absorption ... is not syncretism when it is undertaken with a sense of clear discrimination ...

The word syncretism should be reserved for another type of religious attitude ... This is the view which holds that there is no unique revelation in history, that there are many different ways to reach the divine reality, that all formulations of religious truth or experience are by their very nature inadequate expressions of that truth and that it is necessary to harmonize as much as possible all religious ideas and experiences so as to create one universal religion for mankind<sup>18</sup>.

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16. See for example, Hans-Josef KLAUCK, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity [Die religiöse Umwelt des Urchristentums]* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 151-2.

17 See for example, Gerd THEISSEN, *The religion of the earliest churches: creating a symbolic world [Theorie der urchristlichen Religion]*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), passim.

18. W. A. VISSER'T HOOFT, *No other name*, pp. 10-11.

Hence, *the* syncretism is "essentially a revolt against the uniqueness of revelation in history. ... the syncretisms conceive of religion as a system of insights and concepts rather than as a dialogical relation between a personal God and his creature..."<sup>19</sup>. However useful this distinction is (to which we shall return below), it reduces syncretism to the concept of religion – "Unglaube" – employed by Karl Barth<sup>20</sup>, namely the down right negation of revelation and hence rebellion against God. And by sticking to the Barthian understanding of religion, Visser't Hooft runs the risk of presenting Christianity *exclusively* from God's perspective, eventually banning it from the array of world religions.

Is there a way of talking about syncretism as a concept applicable to all the religions and still useful as a scientific tool in analysing the world of religions? In order to do so, it is necessary to identify and avoid the drawbacks in the conception of syncretism hitherto used by scholars in anthropology, theology, religious sciences, etc. André Mary's observations clarify the point:

L'usage spécifique du terme de «synchrétismes» consacré par les typologies des mouvements religieux modernes des années soixante, s'est toujours heurté à des contradictions manifestes qui font douter de sa pertinence en tant que catégorie analytique. D'abord le poids de l'héritage diffusionniste qui conduit à analyser une culture particulière comme un simple agencement ou dosage d'éléments empruntés à des cultures-mères, tend à priver le concept de synchrétisme de toute limite logique. On l'a dit: quel est le culte qui pourrait ne pas être qualifié, du point de vue de l'hétérogénéité et même de l'incompatibilité de ses sources, surtout dans ses débuts, de synchrétique? Lorsque l'enjeu porte sur la question du degré d'hétérogénéité des éléments, au point qu'on s'autorise à parler de synchrétisme modéré ou de synchrétisme plus ou moins riche, comme on le fait souvent, on s'aperçoit que le plus ou le moins dans cette affaire se mesure toujours à l'aune d'une culture de référence, ce qui encourage des jugements radicalement opposés. Pour les missionnaires, un culte est d'autant plus synchrétique qu'il reprend des éléments des religions

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19. W. A. VISSER'T HOOFT, *No other name*, p. 48.

20. Karl BARTH, "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion", in: *Church Dogmatics [Kirchliche Dogmatik]*. Vol. I, 2 § 17 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963) pp. 280-361. For a critical appraisal see, Paul F. KNITTER, "Christomonism in Karl Barth's Evaluation of the Non-Christian Religions", *Neue Zeitschrift für Theologie* 13 (1971) 99-121. Certainly, Visser't Hooft's understanding of syncretism is nuanced, hence cannot be identified with Barth's total rejection of phenomenology. However, on various points they concord. For an elaborate criticism of Visser't Hooft's 'reduction' of Christian universality, revelation, salvation, etc., see: Gustave THILS, *Synchrétisme ou catholicité?*, pp. 19-20, 37-65 and passim.

africaines; pour les anthropologues soucieux de l'intégrité des cultures qu'ils étudient, le syncrétisme se mesure à l'importance des éléments empruntés au christianisme ou à l'islam. D'où l'idée que l'impression d'hybridité ou d'incongruité qui est associée aux syncrétismes n'est peut-être après tout que le produit d'un regard extérieur, un effet de posture semblable à celui qui conduit les missionnaires à percevoir les pratiques dites syncrétiques comme une contamination du christianisme par les paganismes. La catégorie de syncrétisme ne serait qu'un artefact issu d'un point de vue externe sur ces réalités<sup>21</sup>.

But how do we come up with a concept of syncretism intrinsic to the phenomenon itself? Two possible strategies can be mentioned: a system-theoretical approach and a methodology concentrating on the syncretic processes rather than on the resultant syncretisms.

According to the former, religion is a system which fulfils a function<sup>22</sup>. It is made up of individual functional elements (e.g. dogmas) each of which is made up of other elements (e.g. linguistic expressions of the dogmas). The function of religion as a whole consists in resolving the problems encountered by persons who believe in and live by the system. The successful realization of this function depends inevitably on the resolution of conflicts proceeding from the interior or from the exterior of the system. Exterior conflicts arise when a system collides with another resulting in mutual systemic debilitation. From this perspective, syncretism can be described as a reaction to situations which might produce insecurity in, and consequent weakening of, the system. Reactionary measures against such system-debilitating situations may involve elimination of conflictual elements and eventual annihilation of frontiers. In other words, discriminatory differentiation causing direct or collateral systemic collisions is terminated in order to safeguard the continuity of the systems in a given environment. Syncretism thus amounts to a key strategy in systemic conflict resolution.

The term 'syncretism' refers in this context to the dynamic process originating in and working on the systemic levels to safeguard the survival of the system against external intrusion. It is generally known as *systematization*, a term borrowed from the Weberian sociology. Systematization can be of various kinds: *progressive*, if a religion, for example, engages in success-

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21. André MARY, *Le défi du syncrétisme. Le travail symbolique de la religion d'eboga (Gabon)* (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1999), p. 10.

22. See, for example, Ulrich BERNER, "Heuristisches Modell der Synkretismus-Forschung", in: Gernot WIESSNER (ed.), *Synkretismusforschung. Theorie und Praxis* (Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1978), pp. 11-26. Berner's explanation of religion as system refers back to Niklas Luhmann.



ful proselytization exploiting the weak-points of the other; *stabilizing*, if intended to revitalize its own elements in the event of an external threat. However, there are conflicting situations arising within the system itself which equally can lead it to self-destruction. Measures taken against such situations also are reckoned as syncretism in as much as they involve harmonization of system-interior conflictive elements. Since these measures implicate more the individual components of the social system, namely the believers, the Weberian term *rationalization* is applied to this process. Unlike systematization, rationalization targets system-intrinsic conflicts and consequent alterations. Alike in the case of systematization, these can be of various kinds: tending towards *perfection or stabilization* of the system. The former is the case when a religion, for example, returns to its roots in order to effect a renaissance; re-definition of the goals with all possible consequent ripple effects may produce a welcome syncretism. Rationalization, in the latter case, hinders possible divisions, internal strife, for example, on dogmatic, ritual, and organizational levels. And this allows (and even forces) syncretistic solutions to emerge<sup>23</sup>.

Although the system-theoretical explanation of syncretism may be extended to further layers of meaning, the brief sketch given above suffices for our present purpose, for it already demonstrates the complexity of the phenomenon as well as the inevitability of its explanation from within. Placing emphasis on symbiosis, Carsten Colpe<sup>24</sup> has discussed the various levels of syncretism resulting from the interaction between primary and secondary religions. The analysis designates syncretism as a transitional phase causing transformation, disintegration or absorption of the religions involved. Supportive of Colpe's position is the definition offered by Michael Pye: "syncretism [is] the temporary ambiguous coexistence of elements from diverse religious and other contexts within a coherent religious pattern"<sup>25</sup>. However, the systemic interpretation of religious syncretism, argues Theo Sundermeier<sup>26</sup>, fails to comprehend the phenomenon from wit-

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23. See, U. BERNER, "Heuristisches Modell der Synkretismus-Forschung", pp. 14ff.

24. "Syncretism", in: Mircea ELIADE (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 14 (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, [1987] 1995), pp. 218-227.

25. "Syncretism and Ambiguity", *Numen* 18 (1971), p. 93.

26. *Was ist Religion? Religionswissenschaft im theologischen Kontext. Ein Studienbuch* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1999), pp. 162-179. Sundermeier argues that despite all attempts by religious sciences to employ 'syncretism' as a scientific and non-biased term, it has not become successful. For the term is attributed 'from outside' to a religion, and as such implies a normative content which makes it 'useful' for theology. Further, the theory has at least three major drawbacks: the system theory employed in religious sciences (a) falsely describes reli-

hin and hence a new approach becomes necessary. Syncretism needs to be explained in its two basic, namely *symbiotic* and *synthetic* forms.

Following G. Mensching, Sundermeier distinguishes two basic forms of syncretism, namely symbiotic and synthetic. Symbiotic syncretism denotes the process in which primary religions are overcome and subdued by secondary world religions thanks to socio-religious differentiation and superimposition<sup>27</sup>. Instead of a simple evolution from the primary to the secondary religion, in which the former is cancelled out, the encounter between religions sets off an integrative dynamic. The primary religion provides the connecting links and the background or context against which the secondary is interpreted and received. Integration of the indigenous or primary religiosity is essential to render the secondary religion popular. To the extent the secondary religion succeeds in integrating the primary, it becomes the 'local' religion. In other words, the transformation from 'world religion' to 'folk religion' necessarily implies syncretism. Irrespective of the way the encounter between religions has been initiated and the superimposition has started, the syncretism involved is characterized by ambiguity. Further, the integration of the primary in the secondary is often unconscious, occurs at varied intensity and produces ambivalent results, leading to a total destruction of the primary or to a radical transformation of the secondary religion<sup>28</sup>.

On the other hand, synthetic syncretism is typical of urban, well differentiated societies whether of antiquity or of modernity. Despite the fact that motifs may differ according to specific societies and periods of history, synthetic syncretism is often linked with political and commercial interests. Its characteristic is the conscious selection of religious traits; and the artificial creation of synthetic religion serves individual self-realization. Syncretisms of this kind may be justly classified as 'bricolage'. Although this may present a transitory nature, it is, like symbiotic syncretism, prone to last long. Both the Baha'i religion rooted in Islam and the Hindu Babaism attributed to Sathya Say Baba, along with the so-called new religious movements belong to this category. Unlike the transitory syncretistic phase typi-

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gion as a closed system; (b) it assigns to religion rigid identities whose criteria and authenticity require further verification; and (c) the differentiation between systemic and element levels disappears in eventual analysis. See, *ibid*, pp. 163-4.

27. "Er [Der symbiotische Synkretismus] beschreibt jenen Prozeß, in dem die primären Religionen durch die ausdifferenzierten, überlegenen Gesellschaften und Religionen, den sekundären Weltreligionen, überlagert und beherrscht werden". Th. SUNDERMEIER, *Was ist Religion?*, p. 165.

28. See, Th. SUNDERMEIER, *Was ist Religion?*, p. 166 ff.

cal of the formative period of any religious encounter which allows for the origin and development of a canon and hence facilitates the religious identity, synthetic syncretism foregoes the formative phase by already establishing a random selection of doctrines, rituals and norms from various religions. Perhaps herein fits the definition of syncretism provided by Visser't Hooft<sup>29</sup>.

However, both kinds of syncretisms refer to the praxis resulting from the encounter between religions. Both are subversive; both search for religious identity and self-expression. We shall hence discuss them in reference to a concrete milieu of encounter and consequent praxis. In the following discussion, our concern will be mainly with the symbiotic syncretism.

## **II. The Kongolese Antonian movement - a case-study in syncretism**

The Kongolese Antonian movement inspired by Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita (1684-1706) is one of the first religious-prophetic-political challenges which the nascent African Church had to face during the second missionary upsurge<sup>30</sup>. Although the Capuchin missionary efforts succeeded in quashing its 'menacing threat' over the evangelization of the Kongo, the death punishment meted out to Dona Beatriz did not at all address or solve the issue it brought to light, namely the identity of Kongolese Christianity. Revisiting the events leading to the burning of Dona Beatriz and the subsequent missionary practices, we shall discover the syncretistic trends inherent in all these, and how they later shaped (and still do) young Christian communities.

### *II. 1 the first Christian encounter with the Kongo*

Despite the scarcity of reliable documents pertaining especially to the proponents of the movement, we do have enough material to comprehend

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29. See above, p. 5.

30. Set in the so-called "age of discovery", the Antonian movement is a reaction against the complex missionary-commercial-political European endeavour. This study is limited to the religious aspect without however ignoring the colonial concerns. For an analysis of the movement as a cultural confrontation, see: Sigbert AXELSON, *Culture Confrontation in the Lower Congo: From the Old Congo Kingdom to the Congo Independent State, with special reference to the Swedish missionaries in the 1880's and 1890's* –Studia missionalia upsaliensia, 14– (Falköping: Gummessons, 1970), esp. pp. 37-153.

the origin, motifs, development and end of the so-called Antonian movement<sup>31</sup>. Indeed, the heyday of the movement was brief (1704-06), but its significance shall be understood only in the context of the Portuguese missionary endeavours in the kingdom of the Kongo since 1485 when Diogo Cão during his second voyage to the African continent in search of Prester John accidentally came in contact with the Kongolese<sup>32</sup>. The ensuing baptism of the king, Mani Kongo, Nzinga Nkuwu (baptized João I) together with his six principal nobles at the capital, Mbanza Kongo, on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1491 has according to the conception of the times (*cuius regio, eius religio*) established Christianity as the religion of the kingdom. All historical accounts known to us since then indicate that despite the warm initial reception, the new religion did not succeed in capturing the hearts and minds of the common folk, and the king himself apostatized after two or three years, "en raison surtout de l'incompatibilité radicale entre la polygamie africaine, fondement essentiel de l'économie agricole des Congolais, et la morale chrétienne"<sup>33</sup>. However, the king's elder son, Mbemba Nzinga –Afonso I–, baptized a month later<sup>34</sup> together with his mother remained faithful to Christianity.

Irrespective of the fact that the agricultural economy played an important role in the Kongolese political system and irrespective also of military might, the key to political power resided in the hands of the religious leader. This tradition goes back to the unification of Kongo under the legendary hero Lukeni<sup>35</sup>, the mythical ancestor of Nzinga Nkuwu. While con-

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31. There exists a vast documentation on early Christian mission in Kongo, but almost nothing is extant from among the writings (if there were any) of the adherents of the movement. Our actual sources of information are the missionaries themselves who fought against the movement, and hence have given not always an independent picture of the contested issues and situations. See: Teobaldo FILESI & Isidoro de VILLAPADIerna, *La "missio antiqua" dei cappuccini nel Congo (1645-1835). Studio preliminare e guida delle fonti*. (Roma: Istituto Storico Cappucini, 1978), p. 63. For a list of documents and bibliography, see: W.G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Congo: des origines à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris-La Haye: Mouton, 1968), pp. 239-264.

32. For a brief discussion of the Portuguese mission in Kongo, see: Adrian HASTINGS, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) pp. 46-129, esp. 76 ff.; John BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines, 1994), chapter 4.

33. W. G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, p. 96.

34. So A. HASTINGS, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, p. 76; but, J. Baur, p. 57, states that Afonso was baptized together with the king.

35. For the foundation myth as reported by the missionaries, see: Louis JADIN, "Le Congo et la secte des Antoniens. Restauration du royaume sous Pedro IV et la "saint Antoine" congolaise (1694-1718)", *Bulletin de l'institut historique belge de Rome* 33 (1961) pp. 468-69; also: W.G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Congo*, pp. 17 ff.

quering and subjugating the Ambundu<sup>36</sup> the indigenous population south of the Kongo River, the Bakongo succeeded in establishing a centralized state, unifying the various small kingdoms under Lukeni. Six regions, namely Mpemba (where the capital was), Soyo, Mbamba, Nsundi, Mpangu and Mbata constituted the nucleus of his kingdom. According to tradition Lukeni and his men married women of the local potentates among whom the "chef de terre", *faiseur de pluie et garant de la fécondité agricole* enjoyed the esteem as "le premier des ngangas (sorciers) célèbres<sup>37</sup>". This personage, Mani Kabunga, represented and safeguarded the religiosity of the 'conquered' Ambundu despite intermarriage with the Bakongo and the consequent formation of the Mwissikongo, the ruling class. Probably the role continued to exist and was eventually identified with that of Mani Vunda<sup>38</sup>, one of the three principal electors of the Kongolese king (- an issue we shall take up below).

If this understanding is correct, one has to admit the existence of some tension within the Kongolese society when Christianity was introduced. Would it not then be possible that the ruling class utilized the new religion to dominate over the indigenous? Although one may agree with Randles that we may never know the answer, it seems plausible from the action of the king who restricted baptism to the selected few, for "chose si sainte et si bonne ne pouvait être donnée à aucun vilain<sup>39</sup>". If baptism was turned to an 'object of desire', we may not know; but its significance was surely misunderstood<sup>40</sup>. Pertinent to our discussion is also yet another issue: if the arri-

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36. Beyond this mythical rendering, Augustin AWAK'AYOM (*Histoire de l'évolution de la société Mbuun de l'Entre-Kwilu-Lubwe du XVII<sup>e</sup> au XX<sup>e</sup> s.*, Paris, 1975) has reconstructed the history of Ambun (Ambundu) which shows their cultural affinity with neighbouring populations such as Bayansi, Badinga, Bamputu, etc. See, Baudouin Mubesala LANZA, *Les permanences et mutations de la religion traditionnelle africaine: Cas des Ambun de la république Démocratique du Congo* (Rome, 2002), pp. 11ff.

37. W. G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, p. 20.

38. According to a tradition referred to by J. BAUR, Mani Kabunga is another name of Ntinu Nzaku ne Vunda, the leader of the ruling local clan Vunda. Vunda in Mpemba region becomes the headquarters, Mbanza Kongo, of the founder of the kingdom, Ntinu Wenu whose descendant is Nzinga Nkuwu, the first historically known king of Kongo; see also: S. AXELSON, *Culture Confrontation in the Lower Congo*, p. 43.

39. Duarte Pacheco PEREIRA, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* (c. 1505-1508), Academia Portuguesa de História, Lisbonne, 1954, p. 170. Quoted in: W. G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, p. 95. For Randles' opinion on the issue mentioned, see: *ibid.*, p. 42.

40. Or its meaning was symbolically 'better' interpreted. That the people requested baptism in order to obtain the 'noble' Christian name, has been observed by missionaries: see, Giovanni Antonio CAVAZZI, *Istorica Descrizione de' tre Regni Congo, Matamba ed Angola* (Bologna 1687), VII 66, p. 665. Baptism was in 1720s turned into 'a costly commodity' by some

val of Christianity helped resuscitate the autochthonous religiosity. If so, how was it expressed? Some indications can be obtained from its propagation since the death of Nzinga Nkuwu in 1506.

The apostatized king's disillusion with Christianity was probably reflected in the election of Mpanzu Nzinga, a "bastard" son whose rights to succession (if at all applicable) were successfully challenged by the king's elder son Afonso exiled in Nsundi for his refusal to give up the new religion. The ensuing war of succession which the Christians won was traditionally likened to Constantine's victory over Licinus at *ponte milvio*, making thereby Afonso the apostle of the Kongo. Having pardoned the captain of the pagan army, Mani Vunda, Afonso commenced enforcing Christianity by prohibiting the worship of fetishes and ensuring the collaboration of the Portuguese, none of which succeeded. For the Portuguese –clergy, artisans, etc.– had other priorities than the Christianisation of the Kongo. Afonso's letters to the Portuguese king complained regularly about the bad example given by "those who came to teach it" [the faith] and the artisans who abandoned their jobs "in order to buy slaves"<sup>41</sup>. The situation was so abominable that in 1534 the nuncio in Lisbon asked the Pope to apply to these missionaries the Oriental Church Law permitting them to marry. And a Portuguese layman even wrote to João III in 1539 asking him to "evacuate from this kingdom all whites, clergy as well as laymen, and to replace them with new people of good conduct; for they are guided by envy, avarice and covetousness"<sup>42</sup>.

But why did not Afonso expel these trouble-makers? Despite the suggestion of King Manuel to send these people back, Afonso feared to do so probably for three reasons. First, he did not want to embarrass the Portuguese reign which he considered friendly, brotherly and of equal status; secondly, the *regimento* of 1512 decreed that the Portuguese living in the Kongo would be under the jurisdiction of the King of Portugal; and thirdly,

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secular clergy of the diocese of Luanda, see: Pavia MANSO, *Historia do Congo: Documentos* (Lisboa, 1877) CCXI, p. 358-369. See also below: p. 15 & note 49.

41. Letter dated: 5-10-1514; see: Antonio BRASIO (ed.), *Monumenta Missionaria Africana: Africa ocidental*. (Lisboa: Agência Geral do Ultramar, Divisão de publicações e biblioteca, 1952), vol. 1, pp. 306-316; see also: W.G.L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, pp. 100ff..

42. "e em verdad diguo a V. A. que coussa muy proveitosa será pera o diuino vmano despejarsse este Reyno de todollos homees bramcos, que nelle estam, asy eclesiasticos como seculares, e tornarllo a reformar de gente nova, e boa; por que se a emveja, avareza e cobiça no mudo reynam, ..." Carta de Gonçalo Nunes Coelho a D. João III (20-4-1539), in: A. BRASIO, *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, vol. 2, p. 78.

he did not want to displease the Portuguese in his kingdom nor those on the São Tomé island which was already a Portuguese possession since 1483. Although the islanders would eventually intrude in the Kongolese politics and humiliate Afonso, their military support was vital for Afonso's projected destruction of the "great house of idols." Failing their support he burned down the house by himself, was consequently branded as "a very bad man" and threatened with death<sup>43</sup>. This takes us to the uneasy relationship already existing in the political realm between the ruling class and the landed indigenous people at the time of the arrival of Christianity.

The kingdom of Kongo during the reign of Nzinga Nkuwu (João I) rested on two formidable supports: the authority of the king and that of the religious leader. Despite the lack of pre-Christian documents concerning the Kongolese royalty, comparison with other African kingdoms permits us to present an image<sup>44</sup> which seems to have influenced the events during the Antonian movement. Alike most of the South Saharan African kingdoms, the Kongolese monarchy was elective, not hereditary. Its principal electors were Mani Vunda, the governors of Mbata and of Soyo who saw to it that a harmonizing personage representing the aspirations of the people might be elected. The king constituted, as well as symbolized, the collective identity of his people so much so that everything beneficial to the kingdom namely, success, power, vitality, etc. depended on his person. As the case of the heroic founder of the kingdom he too would model the world anew to render it habitable by imposing his power against harmful forces. This meant, on the one hand, that the king was both 'divine' and 'human' at the same time; in him was assembled all the best human attributes in their perfection. On the other hand, at the death of the king, a crisis started, opening up a possible reign of chaos. For the king was Nzambi Mpungu, the incarnate spirit of God which every ruling king was bound to revive<sup>45</sup>. The ritual death of the king in order to ensure the natural forces was hence an extension of this pattern of thought. Despite jeopardizing political continuity, it acted as a constraint against despotism and a catalyst for 'democratic' power. However, ritual regicide was unknown in the Kongo. Instead 'democracy' was

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43. Letter dated 5th Oct. 1514. See, A. BRASIO, *Monumenta misionaria africana*, vol. I, pp. 296-98.

44. Based on: W. G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, pp. 27 ff.

45. "Nzambi Mpungu semble en effet désigner la "royauté" incarnée dans chaque roi, l'esprit éternel de Bumba [dieu créateur des Bakuba] que tout roi se doit de faire revivre." W. G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, p. 32.

guaranteed by the "chefs de terre" called *Kitomis* found in various provinces.

According to the accounts of this period, *Kitomi* was for the Africans "un dieu sur terre et plénipotentiaire du ciel, et c'est pour cela qu'ils lui offrent les prémices de chaque récolte<sup>46</sup>". Functionally equivalent to Mani Kabunga, people approached him "pour remédier aux disettes et pour bénéficier de la pluie pour les semailles et avec sa permission il semaient et récoltaient"<sup>47</sup>. People believed that *Kitomi* possessed the virtue to ensure and increase future harvests. He was hence attributed special (shamanic?) powers and consequently was thought not to die naturally<sup>48</sup>. If the equivalence mentioned above between Mani Kabunga and Mani Vunda is correct, it consists in their function as *Kitomi* whose representatives guaranteed the fertility of the earth all over the kingdom. This would also explain why Mani Vunda was one of the principal electors of the Kongoese king and later had the right to participate in the enthronisation ceremonies together with the superior of the European missionaries<sup>49</sup>. All indicates that Mani Vunda was perceived as the legitimate religious authority of the people before and

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46. Gio Antonio CAVAZZI (da Montecuccolo), *Istoria Descrizione de'tre Regni Congo, Matamba, et Angola sitvati nell'Ethiopia inferiore occidentale e delle Missioni Apostoliche Esercitateui da Religiosi Capuccini Accuratamente compilata dal P. Gio Antonio Cavazzi Da Montecvcculo Sacerdote Capvccino Il Qval Vi Fu' Prefetto E nel presente stile ridotta dal P. Fortunato Alamandini da Bologna predicatore dell'istesse Ordine. All'illustrissimo Signor Conte Giacomo Isolani* (Bologna, 1687, 2nd ed., 1690), lib I § 175; quoted in: W. G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, p. 39.

47. Alfredo de Albuquerque FELNER, *Angola. Apontamentos sobre a ocupação e inicio do estabelecimento dos Portugueses no Congo, Angola e Benguela* (Coimbre, 1933), p.376; quoted in: W. G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, p. 39.

48. Cavazzi's account (within «»), reported by W. G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, p. 39, reads as follows: "Or, le Kitomi et sa femme «font croire [...] que leur vertu communiquée [...] aux champs et aux semences, permettra d'en voir à la prochaine saison la récolte centuplée» ... Dans certains provinces du Congo, «les gens croient que le Kitomi ne peut mourir de mort naturelle, ils ajoutent que si cela arrivait, le monde périrait et la terre même serait anéantie. Aussi, pour éviter une si terrible catastrophe, lorsque le Kitomi tombe malade et que la maladie semble assez dangereuse [...] ils le tuent brutalement. Par sa mort violente, ils pensent conjurer cette calamité».

49. An account of the period given by P. Cherubino da Savona, in 1775 reads: "Le personnage le plus estimé et respecté dans tout le royaume, et qui tient le plus de pouvoirs en cette circonstance (the election and enthronization of the king), je ne sais depuis quelle antiquité et la provenance, s'appelle *Cameni Mongo et Mani Vunda*, ce qui veut dire: Seigneur de la terre et aïeul du roi. Le Mani Vunda dit avoir deux couronnes; lorsqu'il élit le roi, il s'approprie une couronne et la pose sur la tête de son neveu avec le consentement des électeurs ses collègues." Louis Jadin, "Aperçu de la situation du Congo et rite d'élection des rois en 1775, d'après le P. Cherubino da Savona, missionnaire au Congo de 1759 à 1774", *Extrait du Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome*, 35 (1963) p. 405.



after the introduction of Christianity in the Kongo. And it seems that his authority extended even to the political sphere, could challenge and even restrict the royal power<sup>50</sup>. Probably, herein lies the rationale for Afonso's desperate attempts to legitimate the royalty through the intervention of the Pope.

One of the constant features of Kongolesse royalty during and after the reign of Afonso I consists in its preoccupation with legitimacy. Various measures were undertaken to this end. In the case of Afonso I, these consisted in (besides destroying the idols of the traditional religion) the erection of a church dedicated to our saviour (thus turning Mbanza Kongo to São Salvador), the education of the Kongolesse youth in Christian religion both at home and abroad, the implementation of the Portuguese royal customs and administrative systems in the capital, the promise of obedience to the Pope as a Christian prince in 1513 and above all the search to make the Kongo a bishopric. Thanks to the Portuguese king Manuel I at whose request Pope Leo X agreed to waive the Lateran Council's minimum age requirement of 30 years for bishops, Afonso succeeded to have his 26 year old son Henry consecrated bishop in 1521. Although he was only an Auxiliary to the bishop of Funchal, Afonso had hoped that the diocese of Kongo would be erected for him, enabling the Kongolesse king a direct link with the Pope without the usual intermediaries<sup>51</sup>. But these aspirations were a source of friction on two fronts (political and religious) which would constitute the perfect environment for the emergence of prophetic movements such as the Antonian.

## II. 2 *the second phase of Christian-Kongolesse encounter*

In analyzing the European encounter with the New World, Urs Bitterli distinguishes four phases<sup>52</sup>, each of which is characterized by a particular

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50. For more supporting documents and the extent of the problematic, see: W. G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, pp. 40-47.

51. "Il [Dom Henrique] fut promu évêque d'Utique et auxiliaire de Funchal avec résidence au Congo en 1518. Il présidera aux destinées de la chrétienté congolaise de 1521 à sa mort survenue avant 1539. ... il [Afonso] n'obtiendra pas pour son pays l'érection d'un évêché indépendant: le Congo dépendra du nouvel évêché de São Tomé dès 1534." Louis Jadin, "Le clergé séculier et les capucins du Congo et d'Angola aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles: conflits de juridiction, 1700-1726" [Extrait du *Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome*, XXXVI (1964) 185-483] p. 187.

52. Urs BITTERLI, *Cultures in conflict: encounters between European and non-European cultures, 1492-1800*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), ch. 2.

understanding of the other. Whereas ignorance and glorification of the other are specific to the first phase, the second is marked by rivalry, the third by suspicion and the fourth by gradual understanding. *Mutatis mutandis* the schema applies also to the Christian-Kongolese encounter, in as much as the continuing presence of Christianity in the Kongo makes it simultaneously both alluring and repulsive. All missionary attempts to make it appealing and popular have in fact challenged the autochthonous religion and authority. It is in this context that the mounting tension between the Europeans and the Kongolese subsequent to the death of Afonso I in 1543 becomes understandable. The period up to the emergence of the Antonian movement seems to stand for the second and third phases in Bitterli's schema mentioned above.

Even before his death, Afonso was fully aware of the double challenges before him: Christianisation of the Kongo and the preservation of political unity. In 1526 he informed King João III that he had forcefully prevented Bishop Henry from carrying out evangelical work outside São Salvador lest he be "poisoned" by the local people. In 1540 he was even afraid for his own life, given the Portuguese attempt to assassinate him in the church during the Easter ceremony (probably for his opposition to the ever increasing and "indiscriminate" slave trade)<sup>53</sup>. Disillusioned with the royal "brothers" in Lisbon, Afonso came to believe that the (resident) Portuguese were only awaiting his death in order to install a king of their choice. This was precisely what happened in the two years (1543-1545) during which Pedro I and Francisco I were thrust on the throne. The political turmoil only worsened with the colonial expansion, given competing economic interests which enhanced European rivalries in Africa. From among the complex political scenarios stretching to the reign of Pedro IV (1703-1718), we shall consider only three which directly affect our understanding of the Antonian movement. These can be subsumed under the following headings: (i) survival of the Kongolese kingdom with the support of the colonial powers; (ii) missionary politics of the Jesuits and the Capuchins, (iii) intertribal feuds and indigenous religiosity.

(i) Although relative political stability was established with the election of Diego I, vested interests vied for power with his death in 1572. Such chaos typical of all Kongolese interregna known to us intensified owing especially to invasions supported or silently tolerated by the resident Portuguese interested in wielding power in the Kongo. The situation of

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53. See, S. AXELSON, *Culture Confrontation in the Lower Congo*, pp. 73ff.

Alvaro I (1568-1587) was untypical however because he remained in power against the invading Jaga (Yaka) thanks only to the powerful, all-white force of 600 men sent from Lisbon. After the battle, many of the invading soldiers settled down in São Salvador thereby increasing the number of resident Portuguese. The Portuguese meddling with the Kongolesse kingdom was largely directed from São Tomé and Luanda. There was however a respite thanks to Dutch concurrence after 1602 which both the Mani Soyo and King Garcia II (1641-1661) exploited to their own advantage. The province Soyo in retaining its right to elect the king, declared independence from the kingdom in 1636, when Garcia II sought to establish a delicate balance between the Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and the missionaries. From this time onwards the political integrity of Kongo was seriously threatened.

The destruction of the kingdom followed the Dutch-Portuguese peace treaty of 1649. Following the retreat of the Dutch from Angola, the Portuguese residents of Luanda resumed their influence on Kongo, refusing especially Garcia II's demand to transfer the entire ecclesiastical administration, including the bishop, from Luanda to São Salvador. The crux of the problem was control of the rights to exploit the Kongolesse mines, resources and slaves. The king's insistence on his sole control of these rights led to the infamous battle of Ambuila in 1665 during the reign of Antonio I on which Antonio together with 400 nobles and 5000 soldiers died in combat. Despite Lisbon's displeasure with the peace treaty signed between the warring parties in 1667, the kingdom of Kongo had already ceased to exist with the demise of the nobility in the war. The following years saw anarchy and interminable civil wars, which would constitute the immediate political background of the emergent Antonian movement during the reign of Pedro IV.

(ii) If the kingdom continued to exist as a unity until the battle of Ambuila and in some semblance thereafter was owed to a great extent to the missionaries who in spite of their own wars against the traditional religion had an interest in safeguarding this unity. Despite their expulsion from the kingdom in 1515 and their return to São Salvador in 1620, the Jesuits like the Capuchins were also king-makers in their own way. Two personages may serve as examples: Bras Correa and Matthew Cardoso. Whereas the former, initially a Spanish trader who became a priest and then later a Jesuit, helped bring Pedro II to power in 1622 and thus put an end to the return of 'paganism', the latter secured the centre's power thanks to introducing education and the establishment of educational institutions controlled from the capital. Although the Jesuit seminary (founded in 1625) at São Salvador could provide only a tiny fraction of the priests needed, it was

effectively addressing a dire need. Coupled with writing catechisms in the local language, the Jesuits raised the hope of 'implanting' Christianity and of enabling a new Kongolese identity - an ideal dating from the reign of Afonso I. Not only the ideal but also the means to realize it were closely pursued by his successors, thanks especially to the missionaries. The means consisted in obtaining the papal bull establishing a hereditary monarchy in the Kongo.

Continuing the policies of his predecessors, in 1583 Alvaro I sent Duarte Lopes as his ambassador to the Pope. Although the mission did not bring any benefit to the king (his request to be recognized as a vassal of Rome was ignored), it was Lopes' notes which Filippo Pigafetta made use of in publishing his *Relatione del reame di Congo* in 1591 which aroused a lively interest in Kongo among the Europeans. An immediate consequence of this interest was the erection of the diocese of São Salvador in 1596, adding Angola to its jurisdiction, but subject to the padroado archdiocese of Funchal. The first bishop was Homen-Miguel Rangel who arrived there in 1601 and died a year later. In order to ensure Papal interest in Kongo, in 1604 Alvaro II sent Antonio Nsaku ne Vunda as the new ambassador and later appointed Mgr. Vives as the resident lobbyist before the Pope. However, the Bishops of this new diocese preferred to reside in Luanda rather than in São Salvador. Their dissatisfaction with the reign of Kongo was expressed well in the ad limina report of 1619 presented by Manuel Baptista Soares<sup>54</sup>, the only bishop who spent some years in Kongo. It seemed to the rulers of Kongo that the regal legitimacy and protection they sought after from Rome was being denied by some connivance between the missionaries and the resident Portuguese in Luanda. This explains partly their anger with the Jesuits (who alike the other clergy even participated in the slave-trade). The arrival of the Capuchins altered the situation a little.

The Capuchin mission in São Salvador was the result of long and arduous diplomacy by the Kongolese kings, fomented especially by the establishment of the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* in 1622<sup>55</sup>. Consequently expectations were high when Fr Bonaventura d'Alessano, the Prefect

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54. J. Cuvelier & L. Jadin, *L'ancien Congo d'après les Archives romaines* (Bruxelles: Mémoire de l'Académie royale des Sciences coloniales, 1954), pp. 398-404; also: Louis Jadin, *Le clergé séculier et les capucins du Congo et d'Angola aux XVIe siècles: conflits de juridiction, 1700-1726* [Extrait du Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome, 36 (1964) 185-483], (Bruxelles, 1964), pp. 197-198.

55. For a detailed description, see: Teobaldo FILESI & Isidoro DE VILLAPADIARNA, *La "missio antiqua" dei cappuccini nel Congo (1645-1835)*; on the preparative phase, pp. 16-23.

Apostolic, arrived at the capital in 1645 after passing first through Soyo. Noticing that no bishop was present among the twelve man missionary group, Garcia II sent two missionaries to Rome asking for three bishops and more missionaries. He requested further that the Kongolese royalty be declared hereditary. None materialized specifically due to the *padroado* politics<sup>56</sup>. All the missionaries could do was to assure the king of their support in the form of a silver crown which they had brought with them from Rome. This poor gesture only increased the king's suspicion that the Capuchin's like the other Europeans were interested only in maintaining their power over Kongo. Power was wielded by the Capuchins specifically thanks to their mission against 'paganism' in the countryside.

(iii) Whereas the Jesuits concentrated their activity in the capital, the Capuchins were active all over the kingdom, attempting to reach out to provincial centres and villages. Both promoted a well-established missionary practice of employing the *maestri* besides the *repetitori* to propagate the Christian message. At the early stage the *maestri* acted as interpreter-catechists, and later both as the religious authority and voice of the people. Their main tools of instruction were the catechisms prepared by the Jesuits and the Capuchins, which employed the traditional question- answer format to teach the basics of Christian doctrine. However, in order to respond to concrete everyday needs, the *maestri* must have integrated the traditional religion into Christianity. For the missionary praxis of the period consisted mainly in dispensing the sacraments of which baptism was the most important as it enabled the people to belong to *Nzambi mpungu*, the great God. Their desire for and attitude towards it are well expressed in the following account:

"Welch seltsame Ansichten die Kongoneger von Christentum und Taufe hatten, zeigen die Erlebnisse der Patres Gabriele de Valencia und Antonio da Tervelli in der Provinz Batta 1648. Da kamen Hunderte von Schwarzen von allen Seiten her, manchmal 20-25 Stunden weit, und baten die Taufe und Beichte. Mit Hilfe von Katechisten (Repetitori) bemühten sich die Kapuziner, den Leuten die nötigste Glaubenswahrheiten beizubringen. Es handelt sich also in Hauptsache um Erwachsenentaufen in einer Umgebung, die grundsätzlich das Christentum angenommen hatte. Hundertmal mußte man ihnen die Katechismuswahrheiten wiederholen, bis es die einfältigen Menschen verstanden. Da wurden die Neger ungeduldig, daß die Patres soviel unnötige

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56. See, Teobaldo FILESI & Isidoro DE VILLAPADIARNA, *La "mission antiqua" dei capuccini nel Congo (1645-1835)*, pp. 56ff.

Umstände machen. Sie wollten doch ganz einfach Christen werden. Sie verlangten darnach, wieder in ihre Hütten zurückzukehren und klagten: «Warum braucht es soviel Mühe, so viel Vorsicht, so viel Fragen nach der Festigkeit unserer Vorsätze? ... Wir sind doch nur da, um wie die anderen Weißen, all das Salz zu essen, das ihr uns geben wollt. Warum haltet ihr uns hin?»<sup>57</sup>.

The fact that missionaries in general and the Capuchins in particular targeted the traditional beliefs and practices is well-known. The expulsion of the Jesuits by Alvaro II and the animosity towards the Capuchins shown by Garcia II and his successors are partly grounded on this missionary policy of radical opposition to traditional customs and beliefs. There were two principal targets of missionary attack: polygamy and veneration of the fetishes, which from a native perspective protected both regal power and tribal solidarity with society and nature. It remains uncertain if Afonso I practised or condoned the regal incest "toujours pratiqué au Congo au XVIIe siècle", but his successor Diogo I sought dispensation for marriage with a close relative<sup>58</sup>. In the case of fetishes or *nkisi* the missionary approach consisted in destroying or removing them from the spot, alleging that they were devil's tools. In their place were introduced the Christian symbols of cross, rosary and statues. Although one might agree with Hastings<sup>59</sup> that the fatal mistake in this approach consisted in creating a 'ritual void' which the missionaries could not fill, it also points to a fundamental dimension of encounter between religions/cultures: the necessity of intersubjective interpretation to ensure the new converts' pertinence to the Christian religion. The absence of an intersubjective-interpretative realm was exploited by the prophetic movements of which Dona Beatriz played an important part. Not only did the Capuchins fail to capture "la dimension sociale du mariage traditionnel", and suspected "la profondeur et la sincérité des conversions chez les Congolais", but also worked to "instaurer une foi, mais aussi une culture. Elle [l'oeuvre missionnaire des Capucins] a tenté de faire table rase de ce qui existait en imposant ... de nouveaux modèles, en instaurant de

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57. Laurenz KILGER, *Die Taufpraxis in der alten Kapuzinermission am Kongo und in Angola* (Schriftenreihe der Neuen Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft - 7), Schöneck, CH: Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft, 1949, pp. 6-7. The quotation within refers to: Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi, *Istorica Descrizione de' tre Regni Congo*, lib. IV, n. 5/6, p. 343. "Salz essen" = *dia mungwua* -to eat salt- was the expression used to describe baptism. See also: S. AXELSON, *Culture Confrontation*, pp. 50-51.

58. W. G. L. RANGLES, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, p. 101.

59. A. HASTINGS, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, pp. 98 ff.

nouvelle normes"<sup>60</sup>. Not to be marginalised in this tension was the tribal political dimension which was also threatened by the new religion.

As mentioned above, the immediate consequence of the war of Ambuilla was the virtual disintegration of the kingdom of Kongo, the simultaneous existence of three kings (one in São Salvador, another in Kibango and yet another in Bula, plus the regent of Soyo) all claiming to be the sovereign of Kongo. In addition to the reasons already mentioned, the deterioration of Kongolese sovereignty was caught up in a rivalry between two interrelated royal clans, namely the Ki-mpanzu and the Ki-mulaza. In 1678, Daniel I (a Ki-mpanzu), resident king at São Salvador attacked Garcia III, the resident king at Kibango, and was in turn attacked and murdered by Pedro III, the resident king at Bula. Consequently, the capital, including the churches and schools, was totally destroyed; the inhabitants moved to the banks of the Ambriz River, and the city was abandoned. The invading army took the royal insignia with them to Bula. Although Pedro's successor João II proved to be forceful against the Count of Soyo, the ally and protector of the Ki-mpanzu clan, and able to continue war against Garcia III, he did not succeed in being accepted by the Kongolese royalty, represented especially by "the eldest and most important member of the Kinlanza"<sup>61</sup>, Dona Anna di Leão (1710 †), the widow of Afonso II Afonso (1667-1669). It was during Afonso III Afonso's reign (1669-1670), in fact, that thanks to the Capuchin intervention Kibongo having obtained recognition from the new bishop of Luanda was attacked by the king of Bula. Despite Capuchin attempts to broker a peace between the two kings (of Bula and Kibongo), João II refused to accept the conditions, especially those demanding the return to São Salvador and recognition of Portuguese authorities. As the capital lay devastated and abandoned, a coup took place at Kibongo forcing Garcia III's successor Manuel I to flee to Soyo for protection. The leaders of the coup, Alvaro and Pedro Agua Rosada, became from 1690 onwards the new claimants of sovereignty in Kongo. And it was Pedro IV Agua Rosada –a ki-mpanzou on his mother's side and a ki-mulaza on his father's side– who from 1694 attempted to re-establish the

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60. Mbulamuanza MUDIMBE-BOYI, "La pratique missionnaire des capucins italiens dans l'ancien royaume du congo (XVII-XVIII<sup>e</sup> S.) d'après leurs relations" in: A. NGINDU MUSHE-TE (ed.), *Combats pour un christianisme africain* (Kinshasa: Faculté de théologie catholique, 1981), pp. 56, 57 & 59; see also: S. AXELSON, *Culture Confrontation in the Lower Congo*, pp. 105ff; T. FILESI, "*Missio antiqua dei cappuccini*", pp. 51ff.

61. J. K. THORNTON, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*, p. 39. Thornton speaks of three instead of two clans; however, the rivalry was always between the two mentioned, the third taking sides.

kingdom of Kongo with its capital at São Salvador<sup>62</sup>. The Antonian movement is intimately linked to this chaotic political situation replete with cultural-religious overtones and nationalist-populist aspirations.

### II. 3 *the rise and fall of the Antonian movement*

In discussing the Capuchin missionary activity we referred to two of its main features: a radical, constant opposition to the traditional religion together with a close collaboration with the political power. Both play an important part in the life of Dona Beatriz who as a young girl during the political revolts mentioned above must have had knowledge of the popular aspirations. It is only in the popular Kongolesé context that we shall understand the Antonian movement which was not the first to propose solutions to the religious, cultural and political problems of Kongo. There were at least two earlier 'prophetic movements' initiated by Kassola and Mafuta respectively.

The attempt to found a Kongolesé independent church in 1632 is attributed to Francisco Kassola, "un converti récent", "féticheur très renommé et grand médecin" well-known to the Jesuit missionary Pero Tavares who worked in the region of Bengo. Having encountered difficulty in conveying the Christian message to the indigenous peoples, Tavares concentrated his activity among the slaves who not only enthusiastically received it but also considered him an incarnation of the ancestral spirits, especially so for his vociferous protest against the brutal treatment of the workers by the governors and plantation owners. His defence of the oppressed won him sympathy and a good many converts one of whom was Francisco<sup>63</sup>. Although barely instructed in the new faith, the latter succeeded in mingling the Christian teaching with the traditional religiosity, and also presenting himself as a prophet. "Prophète noir s'adressant a des Noirs dans un langage simple et adapté, Francisco Kassola remporta un réel succès lorsqu'il déclara ... qu'il était fils de Dieu"<sup>64</sup>. Challenged by the missionaries for his tradi-

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62. See, Louis JADIN, "Le Congo et la secte des Antoniens. Restauration du royaume sous Pedro IV et la "saint Antoine" congolaise (1694-1718)", *Bulletin de l'institut historique belge de Rome* 33 (1961) pp. 411-601, here: pp. 423-427.

63. See, Louis JADIN, "Pero Tavares, missionnaire jésuite, se travaux apostoliques au Congo et en Angola (1629-1635)", [Extrait du Bulletin de l'institut historique belge de Rome 33 (1967) pp. 271-402], Bruxelles, 1967, pp. 282-89 & 370-73.

64. Martial SINDA, *Le messianisme congolais et ses incidences politiques* (Paris: Payot, 1972), p. 22.



tional religious practices, Francisco abandoned the Church, began preaching against the missionaries and promoted a Kongolese Christianity gathering many Bakongo under his fold. Acclaimed as a liberator of his race, this itinerant prophet worked miracles and conducted healings. Popular support moved Francisco to demand the expulsion of the missionaries which angered the colonial authority. All attempts to silence him were in vain as he always managed to flee from the inquisitors and to find refuge in the interior regions of the country thanks to his followers. Fetishes were henceforth prohibited, confiscated and the practitioners of sorcery imprisoned. The result was general anger against the Christian religion.

Although not of the same grandeur, a second protest movement emerged at the turn of the century in the middle of civil wars and inexplicable misery at the foothills of Kibangu, the stronghold of Pedro IV. In 1703 Mafuta Apollonia Fumaria (Old Simeon) claimed to have visions of the Virgin Mary and Christ which required the inhabitants to move to and re-occupy immediately the capital São Salvador lest they be subjected to divine punishment<sup>65</sup>. People who gathered around this old woman were miraculously cured of their illness for which she was considered a prophet and saint. Even the queen Marie M'Panzou (Maria Hippólita) was convinced of her message and supported Apollonia against possible inquisition. No wonder the Capuchin missionary Bernardo da Gallo did not succeed in convincing Pedro IV to arrest Mafuta. But the incident also reflects the indigenous need to interpret the Kongolese situation in its own religious-political-cultural terms. The Antonian movement continued this pattern of adding a local colouring to the Christian message.

The emergence of the prophetess Mafuta in the turn of the century confirms also the popular expectation of the fulfilment of "an oath of nonaggression and peace"<sup>66</sup> sworn between Queen Anna de Leão, Pedro Kibenga and King Pedro IV, unchallenged by the other claimants to the throne and orchestrated by the Capuchin Francesco da Pavia in June 1700. On Saint James' day of that year Pedro IV proclaimed he would soon re-occupy the capital. He was however reluctant on account of further skirmishes in 1702 owing to a breach of the agreement by vassals of Queen Anna and her rivals. The wars and the ensuing social chaos, especially slavery, created disillusion and doubt among the Kongolese if the promised transfer of the capi-

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65. See, John K. THORNTON, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 108-112.

66. J. THORNTON, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*, p. 77.

tal to São Salvador would ever take place. Mafuta's prophecy was already forcing the king to make good his promise. When she was threatened by the missionaries, it fell upon Beatriz to pursue the path of persuasion. She "fell ill with the supernatural sickness that would lead to her death and rebirth as Saint Anthony, in August 1704. ... She must [now] go to preach to the king in Kibangu"<sup>67</sup>. Seen thus, the Antonian movement is a political pressure group intent upon re-establishing the Kingdom of Kongo with its capital in São Salvador. The means were religious, Christian as well as traditional.

Cured of her illness, possessed by Saint Anthony and thus transformed into a *nganga*, Beatriz took up the mission of the restoration of the kingdom. It was evident to her that God would punish the Bakongo if they continued to refuse to re-occupy São Salvador. She asked the people to recite the rosary thrice –morning, noon and evening– and to pray the Salve which would distinguish her followers from those of the missionaries. The Antonians wore a unique head-band as a further mark of distinction. In order to convince Pedro IV to abandon the Mount Kibangu and instead to march towards the capital, Beatriz presented her demand as an order received from Saint Anthony himself. The king received the message favourably and Beatriz began propagating her message by sending 'Little Anthonians' throughout the kingdom. People began attributing miracles to her.

Alarmed by her growing following and its possible danger to Christian mission, the Capuchins interrogated her and found her teaching erroneous, typical of a possessed person<sup>68</sup>. They demanded that the king stop her. As usual Pedro IV was reluctant to act against the Antonians for in his eyes they did not threaten but rather increased his power and influence over the people. Sensing the disapproval of the missionaries Beatriz intensified her preaching, ordering now the people to burn all fetishes, including the cross. Fearing repercussion and arrest Beatriz fled Kibangu in the company of Mafuta to Bula, seat of the rival king João II. It was here to Bula that the royal insignia (known as *sanctissimo sacramento*) were brought after the devastating war of Ambuilla. Claiming that she had recuperated the royal insignia, Beatriz made a triumphal entry into the Kongolese capital São Salvador in Oct./Nov. 1704 accompanied by a great multitude, including her own guardian angel, João Barro referred to as Saint John. Once in the capi-

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67. J. THORNTON, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*, p. 110.

68. J. THORNTON, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*, p. 124 ff. For a historical reconstruction of the events leading up to Beatriz's execution by fire, Pedro's re-occupation of São Salvador and the role of the Capuchins therein, see esp. pp. 111 ff.

tal, Beatriz undertook the reconstruction of the city and allied herself with Pedro Constantinho da Silva Kibenga who in the meantime parted company with Pedro IV. In effect, Beatriz symbolically occupied the capital, what the dithering king had been urged to do; she also symbolically became a king-maker herself although of a different kind than the Capuchins and the old queen Anna de Leão. To the people she was a saint laying true foundations of a Kongolese church which the missionaries had refused to establish.

Convinced of her power to work miracles, to cure infertility, and to act in the person of Saint Anthony, crowds moved to the capital. Beatriz began sending out her Little Saint Anthonys to various regions of the kingdom to spread her message. Although driven away from most of the powerful principalities, they did create havoc for the Capuchin missionaries especially when they discouraged people from receiving baptism. "Within a few months of the start of her preaching, she had won the support of large masses of common people, living a great distance from São Salvador, whom she had never visited personally. Two Little Anthonys, unarmed and apparently unaccompanied, had managed to get a whole district to stop baptizing their children. No doubt they were responding to the call in the *Salve Antoniana* that baptism served no purpose as God would know the intention in their hearts"<sup>69</sup>. It was inevitable that eventually the political as well as religious authorities would react strongly against the movement.

Political reaction came in the form of a Kinlaza led attack against the movement, for it was identified with the Kimbanzu. However, the attack could not succeed without defeating or winning over Beatriz' strong ally Kibenga who, despite all attempts by the Capuchins and Pedro IV, was unwilling to compromise. Reconciliation efforts continued through 1705-1706 whereas Pedro IV began moving his army towards São Salvador ironically fulfilling what Beatriz initially demanded him to do. In the meantime the saint was intensifying her message with visits to Heaven in order to ensure the restoration of the kingdom. Finding herself pregnant however, and unwilling to reveal it to her followers, Beatriz left São Salvador in Feb./March 1706 in the company of Mafuta and Barro for her home village to deliver her child. It was near the village that the envoys of Queen Anna to Pedro IV accidentally found the mother, father and the child. The envoys were of Kinlaza clan; they arrested Dona Beatriz and her company, and took them to Evululu where the king had established his base.

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69. J. THORNTON, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*, p. 154.

Unsure of what to do with his prisoner Beatriz, Pedro IV decided to send her to the bishop in Luanda. But Father Bernardo advised him against such action lest she be rescued by the Antonians. He argued that it should be the Kongolese laws, not the Church laws, which should incriminate her. Following this reasoning the royal council deliberated the issue and condemned Dona Beatriz, Barro and Mafuta to death by burning. If Pedro IV regretted this decision it is impossible to verify<sup>70</sup>, however the Capuchins had to exert some pressure on him in order to be permitted to witness and assist the execution of the sentence which was carried out on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1706. The report given by Fr. Bernardo Gallo presents the Capuchin intervention in very positive terms describing it as a last sacramental assistance to persons condemned to death as well as a defence of the living, for he succeeded in convincing the king from sparing Dona Beatriz's child from the pyre<sup>71</sup>. His report leaves the impression that with the execution of Dona Beatriz, the movement would die once and for all: "La pauvre saint Antoine qui était habituée de mourir et de ressusciter, pour cette fois mourut, mais ne ressuscita plus"<sup>72</sup>. This proved to be a vain hope.

Although the death of Dona Beatriz was a severe blow to the spirit of the Antonians, they survived<sup>73</sup> and gained even more power on two grounds: the revival of local beliefs and an increase of power for the rival chief Kibenga. The continuous cry for help from Jesus and Mary (*tsiadi Jesus, tsiadi Mary*) contained in the *Salve Antoniana* and recited incessantly after the saint's execution transformed itself to the Bakongo belief that humans die only in their corporeal form, but continue to live on in spirit. All the bodily remains which survived the fire thus became spirit-possessed objects multiplying the presence of Dona Beatriz all over the kingdom.

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70. M. SINDA, (*Le messianisme congolais*, p. 52) seems to suggest this possibility.

71. There exist mainly two accounts on the execution of Dona Beatriz, one by Bernardo da GALLO (see, *Relation des dernières guerres civiles du Congo. Victoire du roi Pedro IV. Schisme de la femme qui se faisait passer pour Saint-Antoine. Comment le schisme fut heureusement terminé par sa mort. Rapport du Père Bernardo da Gallo*, in: Louis JADIN, "Le Congo et la secte des Antoniens", 491-533) and the other by Laurent de LUCQUES (see, J. CUVELIER, *Relation sur le Congo du Père Laurant de Lucques, 1700-1717*, Inst. Royal Col. Belge, Bruxelles, 1953) both of whom witnessed the event. For a concise and critical discussion, see: M. SINDA, *Le messianisme congolais*, pp. 41-58; see also: Teobaldo FILESI, *San Salvador: cronache dei re del Congo* (Bologna: E.M.I., 1974), pp. 213-266; Graziano SACCARDO, *Congo e angola con la storia dell'antica missione dei cappuccini*; vol. 2, a cura di Emilio da Cavaso (Venezia-Mestre: Curia provinciale dei Cappuccini, 1982), pp. 200-215.

72. Bernardo da GALLO, *Relation*, p. 526.

73. See, for example: L. JADIN, "Le Congo et la secte des Antoniens", pp. 533-538 & 550-556.

Reassured by her presence among them, the Antonians joined hands with Kibenga; after the murder of the count of Soyo, the region fell to the Antonians. Pedro IV's power was put in real danger when the queen Marie M'panzou left him to join Kibenga in San Salvador. The inevitable war had to take place and on 15<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1709 Pedro IV defeated Kibenga in a bloody battle which saw the massacre of almost all the Antonians. Pedro IV was proclaimed by the Church "the restorer and defender of the Holy Faith". The challenge to the faith continued however in the Antonian hymn sung by the Bakongo who were convinced of Dona Beatriz's continual presence among them. This group was now lead by two brothers of Kibenga.

What gave them such a conviction? Why was Dona Beatriz still so important after the restoration of the kingdom? The answer may be found in the so-called syncretism because Christianity had begun to become a folk religion. Various forces and aspirations were involved in shaping it.

### **III. Anthropological and theological considerations**

In discussing the Antonian movement we have indicated that despite positive elements it was seen both as a political menace and a religious aberration. While its political power was considerably diminished after the victory of Pedro IV, a religious sentiment of sympathy towards the movement lingered on. This explains the Capuchins' continued opposition to the movement and all associated with it. The question of what constituted the original dynamism of the Antonian movement can be better perceived by analysing the anthropological dimension which then leads us to theological considerations especially regarding the issue of syncretism.

#### *III. 1 an anthropological perspective*

We have already alluded to the fact that Dona Beatriz commenced her call for restoration of the Kongolese kingdom as a result of a vision in which St. Anthony appeared and commanded her to start the project. Such visions were common among the Bakongo, and were often attributed to the agency of the ancestors. This was precisely how the Kongolese attempted to explain the arrival of the Portuguese and the benevolent actions of Fr. Tavares among the slaves. The plausibility of such an explanation rests on the belief that death does not definitely put an end to human existence, that after and beyond death humans continue to exist as spirits and that ancestral spirits

are actively interested in safeguarding the terrestrial life of their peers. Further the spirits often act through mediums who are either prophets or persons initiated into divination. Already at the age of twelve Dona Beatriz has been initiated into the Kimpasi society, and as a *nganga marinda* she lived on the periphery of the village<sup>74</sup>. Following the belief and tradition of her society, she must have been convinced that it was society as a whole which suffers, and it was therefore the duty of the *kimpasi* members to eradicate such suffering by addressing its causes<sup>75</sup>. The *nganga marinda* thus acted effectively as a social critic, reformer and healer at the same time.

The *Kimpasi* society made use of Christian symbols and concepts both in its initiation ceremonies and in sending forth the *nganga*:

L'initiation à la société Kimpasi tient lieu dans un enclos inhabité, à la frontière du village près la forêt. Dans l'enclos on cultive plantes médicinales, protégés par les haies et aussi par plantes épineuses que fonctionnent comme une haie. Il y a aussi un autel au milieu; on l'approche par un escalier. Au milieu d'autel il y a une croix, symbole de la jonction entre le monde d'ici et au de là. Après l'arrivée du christianisme au Congo, la croix est vue aussi comme un symbole chrétien. On utilise aussi autres instruments chrétiens, comme le encensoir et le aspirateur; il y a aussi autres symboles traditionnels comme kitekes (statues humaines qui ont la capacité de voir et identifie le mal).

Les initiés sont choisis normalement parmi la communauté en général, et apportés au enclos. A la porte du enclos, ils sont liés avec une corde; et amenés dedans par les *nganga* et sons assistants. Pendant l'action les initiés tombent en extase (entrent en transe). Ils appartiennent morts. Une fois dans le enclos, on les amène à un endroit occulte; les *nganga* utilisent médicaments pour revivre les morts; ils sont après instruits dans le mystère de la guérison. Les apprennent et parlent aussi une langue propre des initiées. On dit que ils sont maintenant possédés par les *nkitas* (esprits/force) qui agit à travers eux. Les initiés sont obligés de garder l'instruction reçue comme un secret, et aussi défendre l'enclos contre toute intrusion. Après le période d'initiation, les *Kimpasi* peuvent réintégrer dans la communauté; mais ils restent au-dessus des tabous tribales (p.ex., le tabou d'inceste). La renaissance a donné les *Kimpasi* une nouvelle identité. On porte aussi signes (ceinture; couronne, etc.) que démonte cette identité<sup>76</sup>.

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74. Bernardo da GALLO (*Relation*) writes: "Elle [Béatrice] fut également *nganga marinda* ou prêtresse ou médicastre d'une certaine secte superstitieuse et féticheuse, appelée *Marinda*, ou démon que l'on appelle de ce nom". See, L. JADIN, "Le Congo et la secte des Antoniens", p. 515.

75. See, J. K. THORNTON, *The Kongolesse Saint Anthony*, pp. 56-58.

76. M. SINDA, *Le messianisme congolais*, p. 75.

That the *nganga marinda* was interested in social problems did make the trade more acceptable and respectable in the eyes of the common people. These healers not only identified the malicious *kindoki* and provided remedies to it, but also acted *thanks* to it. The Antonian movement becomes hence comprehensible as a religious revival and reform aimed at interpreting and integrating the *kindoki* within the Christian conceptual and practical spheres<sup>77</sup>. In order to spell out better this initial attempt of reinterpretation of local religious concepts, we need dwell a while on the phenomenon of *kindoki*.

### III. 1.1 *the phenomenon of kindoki*

Despite the various conceptions possibly present among the diverse Kongoleses peoples, one may affirm that *kindoki* represents an occult and invisible force<sup>78</sup>. One can only deduce its existence; its manifestations escape human control. In fact, one speaks of *kindoki* when confronted with inexplicable situations and insufficient explanations. From the time of the arrival of Christian missionaries in Kongo, all reference to *kindoki* was subsumed under sorcery and all healers were considered sorcerers (*fattucieri*). That is to say, there was only one type of *kindoki*, the bad, malicious, evil one. But the popular belief and traditional religion knew and considered the *kindoki* as an ambiguous religious power, both supernatural and invisible at the same time. "The power of *kindoki* was simply the gift of possessing the ability to operate with the assistance of the Other World, and if it was done for good aims, generously, it was a positive virtue indeed"<sup>79</sup>. This notion is evident thanks to the distinction made between *kindoki* and *nkisi*<sup>80</sup>. Whereas the former commonly refers to a malevolent force, the latter indicates things and practices which aid and protect against the evil, as well as assist in perpetrating harm. In both cases the force present is *kindoki*, hence ambivalent depending on the person (*ndoki*) who employs it.

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77. This may rightly be called a bricolage. "Si le bricolage a «un sens», s'il est producteur d'une signification située et orientée, c'est, c'est qu'il vise au renversement de rapports de sens a-symétriques, à l'exemple de la contre-culture nègre qui inverse les valeurs du Noir et du Blanc moins pour retrouver la négritude comme culture blanche inversé que pour introduire une subversion de la table des valeurs " André MARY, *Le bricolage africain des héros chrétiens* (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 2000), p. 88.

78. Simon BOCKIE, *Death and the Invisible Powers* (Bloomington, Ind., 1993). pp. 43-57.

79. J. K. THORNTON, *The Kongolesse Saint Anthony*, p. 42.

80. Cf. BUAKASA T., *L'impensé du discours*, pp. 18-19; also: 155-245 & 297-309.

The distinction is important in the context of Dona Beatriz's dispute with the Capuchins expressed eloquently in the *salve antoniana*:

Salve you say and you do not know why. Salve you recite and you do not know why. Salve you beat and you do not know why. God wants the intention, it is the intention that God takes. Marriage serves nothing, it is the intention that God takes. God takes. Baptism serves nothing, it is the intention that God takes. Confession serves nothing, it is the intention that God wants. Good works serve nothing, it is the intention that God wants. The Mother with her Son on her knees. If there had not been St. Anthony what would they have done? St. Anthony is the merciful one. St. Anthony is our remedy. St. Anthony is the restorer of the kingdom of Kongo. St. Anthony is the comforter of the kingdom of Heaven. St. Anthony is the door to Heaven. St. Anthony holds the keys to Heaven. St. Anthony is above the Angels and the Virgin Mary. St. Anthony is the second God...<sup>81</sup>.

One may easily misunderstand the gist of the argument lest for the repeated mention of the sacraments. Beatriz' point is not that the sacraments do not have any value in themselves, but that they correspond exactly to the actions performed by the *nganga marinda* or the *nganga* in general. As none of these actions cannot eradicate the evil *kindoki* unless performed with good intention, so do the sacraments effect nothing if they are administered (as it appeared to her) with vested interests. In fact, this criticism challenges the Capuchin mission on various fronts: first of all, it equates the missionary administration of the sacraments with the healing performed by the local *nganga* and thereby denies the missionary any special place. Secondly, it demands recognition for the local religiosity conducted in favour of the society as a whole especially by the Kimpesi. Thirdly, the cri-

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81. J. K. THORNTON, *The Kongolesse Saint Anthony*, p. 216; the original Italian text given by Bernardo GALLO (Archivio "De Propaganda Fide" (Rome), Scritture Originali nelli Congregazione Generali, vol. 576, fol. 304v, as published in Teobaldo FILESI, "Nazionalismo," p. 495) reads as follows:

Salve voi dite, e non sapete il perche. Salve recitate, e non sapete il perche. Salve bastonate, e non sapete il perche. Iddio vuole l'intenzione, l'intenzione Iddio piglia. Nulla serve il casamento, l'intenzione Iddio piglia. Nulla serve il battesimo, l'intenzione Iddio piglia. Nulla serve la confessione, l'intenzione Dio piglia. Nulla serve l'orazione, l'intenzione Dio vuole. Nulla servono l'opera buone, l'intenzione Iddio vuole. La Madre et il figlio nella punta di ginocchio. Se non era S. Antonio, come havevano da fare? S. Antonio è il pietoso, S. Antonio è il remedio nostro, S. Antonio è il restauradore del regno di Congo, S. Antonio è lui la porta del cielo. S. Antonio tiene le chiavi del cielo. S. Antonio è sopra gl'Angioli, e la vergine Maria. S. Antonio è lui il secondo Dio ...

Quoted in: J. K. THORNTON, *The Kongolesse Saint Anthony*, p. 215.



ticism makes a fine distinction between two types of *nganga*: the malevolent and benevolent, those who employ *kindoki* to do evil and those who employ it for good. In as much as Dona Beatriz makes use of the *kindoki* for the restoration of the kingdom, her actions should not be understood and interpreted as destructive to society. Further, if one were to understand the term *nganga* in its original sense as ‘creating from,’ her vocation would be nothing other than producing the harmony between the individual and the community by means of appropriate ritual. She does then become the incarnation of St. Anthony, the consoler and helper of the distressed. But this would not be the perspective of the missionaries who saw in the Antonian movement (besides various other errors) a misappropriation of the sacramental powers invested in the clergy. Contempt of the authority –whether of the Church, of the missionaries or of the king– would be the main charge levelled against the Antonian movement. Hence the accusers of Dona Beatriz did not make any distinction between the various types of *nganga* active in the Kongolese society; all were branded together as sorcerers. And this was a great mistake on the part of the missionaries. But that is not the entire story.

### III. 1.2 *Kindoki as symbolic discourse*

By analysing various narratives in the local context, Buakasa advances two hypotheses which would consider the *kindoki* and *nkisi* both as a mode of knowledge and as a symbolic discourse:

[1] ... il y a lieu de considérer la *kindoki* et les *nkisi* comme un mode de connaissance par lequel les sujets concernés s’expliquent leur monde et le monde. ... Mode de connaissance, la *kindoki* et les *nkisi* constituent et offrent le cadre social de la production, de la transmission et de la conservation des savoirs et des techniques relatifs à la médecine et à la pharmacopée kongo. ... [2] en réalité, *kindoki* et *nkisi* ne seraient qu’un discours, idéologique, pour une autre réalité. Cette autre réalité, ce sont les rapports sociaux. En d’autres termes, il s’agirait, dans la *kindoki* et les *nkisi*, d’un phénomène qui serait une plaidoirie des rapports sociaux au sein d’une formation sociale donnée. Donc, ce qui semble se passer dans la *kindoki* et les *nkisi* comme quelque chose de spécifique ne se passerait pas là en réalité, mais hors de là, dans les rapports sociaux<sup>82</sup>.

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82. BUAKASA, *L’impensé du discours*, p. 20.

Referring to *kindoki* as a mode of knowledge, Buakasa means practical knowledge despite the fact that it is more attune to an ideology rather than to either science or technology. What is meant, one might say, is an instrumental rationality based on efficacy which provides a certain sense of security to all the members of the society concerned. It is in reference to the society that *kindoki* obtains a central role.

We have already indicated that *kindoki* is an ambiguous force, engendering fear and capable of both protecting and harming a person. "Sur le plan de son action, cette puissance est perçu comme une "intelligence" (*ngangu*) et un "pouvoir" (*lendo*), d'une autre nature que l'intelligence et le pouvoir humains"<sup>83</sup>. Its effects depend entirely on the intentions of the one who wields the power. Symbolically the power has been described in correspondence with night (*ngangu za mpimpa* - "intelligence de nuit") and day (*ngangu za muini* - "intelligence de jour"). The former, being more fundamental is deemed superior. The concept of *kindoki* is hence the result of an attempt to describe or deal with whatever is evil, malicious, unwanted and harmful to or in the society. Anomaly is thus expressed in terms of *kindoki*. Certainly it is not what the society desires for itself, but the language of *kindoki* explains the society's success thanks to the power of *kindoki*. Here is a pattern of thought which refuses to acknowledge any simple notion of causality: misfortune, accident, death, etc. may be explained in reference to observable causes such as a snake bite, collision, disease, etc. At issue is what might have occasioned these "causes". The Kongolese believe that behind every occurrence there has to be a double causality, one physical and evident, the other efficient and latent. The concept of *kindoki* points to the latter in as much as the obvious evil (death, accident, etc.) functions only as a symbol. Accordingly the identification of a particular person (e.g., the dead person's uncle, mother, etc.) as cause of the evil amounts to symbolically naming the 'effective/latent' cause. It would be a momentous error to mistake the symbol for its referent<sup>84</sup>, the latter being social rapport. From this perspective, the Antonians attempted to promote the anti-*kindoki* acti-

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83. BUAKASA, *L'impensé du discours*, p. 138.

84. Unfortunately, this is the current situation in Kongo, as François Kibwenge points out in his doctoral thesis, *L'«église sacrament du salut» et les défis du monde rural africain. Le cas de la «kindoki» (sorcellerie) chez le peuple kwilois au diocèse de kidwit (Congo)*, presented to the Faculty of Theology, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, 2004. To redress this conceptual error one should have recourse to the original thought patterns which were distorted by colonial-missionary activities. A re-awakening of the African cultural patterns should be hence a priority for the contemporary mission lest the Christian message may dry out in materialistic interpretations.

vities which may have caused negative repercussions in the society. Such anti-*kindoki* activities facilitated their being misunderstood as rebels. Or, better: the ignorance of local symbolic patterns of thought resulted in the fact that the missionaries failed to appreciate the religious-cultural potential present in the Antonian movement. Contemporary attempts seem to take account of this fact.

### III. 1.3 *Kindoki and theological reflection*

In studying the import and function of *kindoki* in Zaïre, Åsa Dalmalm writes:

... le *kindoki* est non seulement ce savoir extraordinaire retenu comme explication de la maladie et de la mort, le *kindoki* qui dérange l'ordre de la communauté sociale, mais aussi le savoir et le pouvoir qui garantissent l'équilibre de la société et son unité.

Dans la rencontre entre la société traditionnelle du Congo et l'Occident (Christianisme), le *kindoki* dans le premier sens a été privilégiée, isolée, détachée de ses rapports avec la législation, la morale et la religion. La Mission et l'Église ont pris en considération le *kindoki* en tant qu'explication de la maladie, et à partir de cet aspect limité, ont rejeté le langage de *kindoki* en tant que tel –allant dans le même temps jusqu'à remplacer le *kindoki*– *cause du mal* par le concept de Satana<sup>85</sup>.

The power and knowledge attributed to *kindoki* are represented by both the king and the *nganga*. As such, it is an intuitiv knowledge (*connaissance immédiate*) to safeguard the individuals of a society from visible and invisible dangers. By fusing the royal and medical functions together *kindoki* would correspond to the Christian dualism between God and Satan, the Antonians argued that they waged a war against Satan (*kindoki*) and hence stood on the side of God (Nzambi). The Antonian movement becomes hence an *anti-kindoki* activity appropriating to itself the royal and therapeutic roles traditionally recognised by the society. The homology between God-Satan and *Nzambi-Kindoki* was ill-conceived, but it only indicates the difficulty in integrating the Christian concepts into local cultural-religious categories. The language of *kindoki* may be taken farther.

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85. Åsa DALMALM, *L'église à l'épreuve de la tradition. La communauté évangélique du Zaïre et le Kindoki* (Paris: Éditaf, 1985), pp. 199.

During the Antonian movement as well as now, *kindoki* has become a language of crisis situations. The crisis then was constituted of the endemic wars, abandonment of the capital São Salvador, absence of unity etc. Now it is constituted of the inaccessibility of fundamental needs, the lack of modern medical service, and an increasing inadequacy in social rapports, etc. According to the African conception healing is holistic. When the missionary church failed to address this key concept in healing, the Antonian movement took advantage of the vacuum. Where the *kindoki* 'ate the people', whittled away the soul of the society, the Antonians came forward to heal these wounds by introducing a syncretic form of Christianity in rudimentary Kongolese categories. Syncretism is an often sought remedy in crisis situations. What the notion of *kindoki* offers now to the church and what the Antonian movement tried to emphasize seems in today's understanding to be what we mean by ethics.

Kindoki est avant tout le langage de l'éthique de la société.

Si nous regardons ce qui dans la *kindoki* est considéré comme "normal" et ce qui est rejeté, ce qui est considéré comme pouvant servir à protéger, à réparer et à guerrier, nous verrons que bon est tout ce qui ajoute à la vie et à la puissance du *kanda* [tribu] et qui le prolonge. Bon est ce qui maintient l'unité, réconcilie, guérit et transmet la vie. Et *kindoki* est utilisé pour exprimer ces fonctions, aujourd'hui été attribué à Nzambi, origine et source du bien.

Mal, mauvais est selon ce langage de la *kindoki* ce qui rompt l'unité du *kanda*, tout ce qui porte préjudice à la vie et à la continuité du *kanda*: la maladie, la stérilité, les entreprises avortées ... Mais aussi le manque de solidarité, l'égoïsme, l'individualiste qui se distingue et cherche son propre intérêt. L'individu qui à l'intérieur de la communauté du *kanda* dépasse les autres, vit plus longtemps, devient plus riche ou réussit mieux que les autres, n'est donc pas seulement considéré en termes d'admiration ou comme un atout pour la communauté. Au contraire, quand il devient différent, quand il se singularise, quand il s'affirme aux dépens du *kanda*, il devient un danger. Il est *ndoki*, expression du mal extrême.

Ce qui est rompu ou brisé par le *ndoki* n'est pas uniquement une solidarité sociale, un sentiment de justice et d'équité sociales. Il nous semble que la portée en est autrement profonde. Il s'agit d'une solidarité et d'une appartenance à une même vie à partir du sang qui est menacée. Il y va de la vie et de la survie du *kanda*<sup>86</sup>.

This understanding integrates positively the traditional sense of *kindoki* in terms of Christian community. Would it be possible to continue this

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86. Å. DALMALM, *L'église à l'épreuve de la tradition*, 214-15.

dialogue with the traditional religion without being branded as syncretic in the negative sense? According to Dalmalm it would be possible as long as the Christian and African (Kongolese) cosmologies enter into dialogue. This would oblige the Church to address anew the issue of sin and evil including therein the material and personal aspects, emphasizing especially the holistic healing. Further:

*Au niveau de la pratique pastorale, ... le kindoki/langage ... parlerait à l'Église sur la situation des hommes, sur leurs espoirs et leurs déceptions. ... Selon le kindoki, la maladie, l'infortune en général n'est pas uniquement une affaire personnelle de nature technique mais aussi et surtout une affaire social et rituelle. Il offre aussi des débuts d'une thérapie basée sur la réconciliation adoptée déjà, par de nombreux chrétiens.*

*Collectiviste, le kindoki traditionnel sous-entendait une communauté unie et cohérente. Dans le cadre de cette communauté, la réconciliation est présumée solution aux conflits. ...*

*Le kindoki offre une expression et une réponse rituelles aux problèmes existentiels des hommes. Jusqu'ici, l'Église y a répondu uniquement au niveau intellectuel<sup>87</sup>.*

Hence the rituals in relation to *kindoki* may become an alternative pastoral praxis to heal persons in crisis situations. A therapy of reconciliation can, for example, be modelled after such rituals. They may be of enormous advantage even in the political and social realms especially because *kindoki* functions in the intersubjective spheres of interaction. From this perspective Antonian syncretism has addressed an issue which caught little attention during the transmission of the Christian message into an African cultural context.

### III. 2 *the Rehabilitation of Syncretism*

In discussing the Antonian movement, we have presented it not only as a political but also as a religious critique with significant syncretistic features related to the traditional conception of *kindoki*. Unlike later developments of Kongolese Messianism, the Antonian movement exemplifies a very weak syncretism, but for that reason easier to understand. And its emergence at the formative period of Kongolese Christianity poses the

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87. Å. DALMALM, *L'église a l'épreuve de la tradition*, pp. 217-18.

question: how need one approach syncretism? That we require a new perspective has been suggested above (I). The current issue is how to understand and interpret syncretism and what status one should assign to it<sup>88</sup>. In responding to that challenge we shall follow the perspective provided by C. Starkloff.

In order to understand and interpret religious syncretism, Starkloff makes use of the concept of *metaxy* employed by E. Voegelin in his *Order in history*. Voegelin detects various critical periods in human history, and argues that they correspond to a tension between the creative imagination and the desire to find meaning proper to the beginning and end of such periods. Augustine's interpretation of the Roman epoch can thus be seen as a period of conflict between *civitas dei* and *civitas terrena*, two societies functioning on two orders and two systems of values engendering a metaxy. Metaxy would be hence a symbol to express the existential experience between the this-worldly and the other-worldly realities. It is the realm of the "participatory existence" where humans share in the divine. Metaxy is, hence, "the symbol that validly expresses the experience of existence in the Between of thing-reality, including the bodily location of consciousness, and of Beyond-reality"<sup>89</sup>. Consequently syncretism would be the creative expression of the truth born out of the metaxic experience. In other words, historic tension is an indication of humanity's search for truth and unity. And the experience of historic truth is always marked by diversity. Syncretism would be an attempt to express the plurality of historic truths within a unified whole.

The expression metaxy has been used both by Plato and Aristotle. According to Aristotle, Plato employs the expression to indicate the intermediate position occupied by sense reality and eternal forms. By adopting the term, Voegelin wants to understand the whole of human history as a metaxy whereas the resurrection, according to the Christians, would give sense to human history. Metaxy is hence a symbol of the human condition: of the embodied human consciousness of transcendence. From this perspective, syncretism becomes part of the eschatological search for meaning: "the syncretic process is often the instrument by which historical meaning can be continued or retrieved by means of the arduous labour of obedience to the Word of God joined to respect for human and cultural tradi-

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88. Quite useful on this point is Leonardo BOFF's discussion in his book: *Church: Charism and Power. Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (N. Y.: Crossroad, 1985), pp. 89-107.

89. C. STARKLOFF, *A theology of the in-between*, p. 17. The description is Voegelin's.

tions"<sup>90</sup>. And Starkloff understands the church history as a syncretic process which at the end of the scholastic period arrives at a synthesis. The process has to be continued in order to make Christianity a global religion. Hence Starkloff advances two fundamental affirmations: first, syncretism is a constitutive part of the human search for meaning; and second, the syncretic expression of truth goes beyond the mere admixture of truths, it reaches a synthesis with a rationality beyond symbolism. This is evident in the liturgical adaptations and the dogmatic developments of the early Christian centuries, with the only difference being that in the latter case one has moved beyond the 'surface syncretism' to reach the core of Greco-Roman religiosity. That is to say, Christianity accepted the Greco-Roman cosmology in order to expound its own beliefs which are rooted in Judaism.

How does this conception rehabilitate syncretism? In as much as syncretism is seen as a process bringing about a superior synthesis of faith and culture, obeying the word of God, it is capable of discovering or continuing the historic truth within a socio-cultural tradition. Being an ambiguous phenomenon at the frontiers, it as with prophetism requires discernment. Starkloff proposes that syncretic processes can be interpreted as the liminal phase within the structure of passage rites suggested by A. van Gennep<sup>91</sup>. The liminal performance enables the receptors of Christianity to retain or re-discover their own cultural identity. Herein lies its positive value. One may hence describe syncretism also as anti-structural, for syncretism reverses symbolically the accepted social order in order to re-appropriate it. Syncretism thus provides society with the necessary adaptation to face the challenges posed by different cultures or religions. The value of syncretism consists in the liminality it engenders: it obliges the society to pass through the liminal phase so that the values of different cultures or religions can be integrated smoothly to produce a new religious/cultural identity<sup>92</sup>.

Bypassing Starkloff's methodology based on Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology* and the concrete applications referring to North American contexts<sup>93</sup>, we shall in conclusion pose the question: has syncretism the capacity to make Christianity a religion shared by its adherents irrespective of their cultural differences? Or can syncretism be an effective means in

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90. C. STARKLOFF, *A theology of the in-between*, p. 55.

91. C. STARKLOFF, *A theology of the in-between*, pp. 57ff.

92. See also: Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity. Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), pp. 62-83.

93. C. STARKLOFF, *A theology of the in-between*, chapters 2 and 3.

promoting true Christian pluralism? Our response takes us back to the Antonian movement.

### **Conclusion: Syncretism as hermeneutics**

In discussing the Antonian movement, we have seen that despite being a vocal political protest with inherent messianic elements, its leading figure, Dona Beatriz, was in the eyes of the missionaries "une femme funeste, féticheuse, en proie au démon, qui allait de cette manière tromper les pauvres gens frustes et ignorantes"<sup>94</sup>. What were "ses actions ... diaboliques"<sup>95</sup>. One may categorize or enumerate them<sup>96</sup>, but in the last analysis they amount to interpretations of the Christian religion in terms of Congolese culture and religion. According to all accounts known to us<sup>97</sup>, Beatriz claimed to personify St. Anthony, live the life of a human-divine, interpreted Christian origins in African terms, equated Christian symbols with *nkisi*, attributed to the sacraments and their administrators the power of *kindoki*. In terms of the analysis given by Starkloff, we shall understand this interpretation as a temporary phenomenon introducing a surface syncretism which enables the newly baptised to relate themselves with the Christian religion without totally negating the traditional beliefs and practises. Precisely this was the reason why the Capuchins vehemently fought against the movement: it indicated that both polygyny and 'idol worship' would be sanctioned on the ground of traditional beliefs. But how else should the Bakongo have reacted to the new religion? Balandier seems to be right as he writes:

Les Ba-Kongo ne conçoivent pas qu'une relation directe avec Dieu soit possible; elle est non seulement impossible, mais impensables. Leur théologie ne leur concède que deux modes d'action sacrée: sur les ancêtres et sur les forces dont les nkisi sont les supports. Le rituel chrétien et les instruments de la litur-

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94. L. JADIN, "Le Congo et la secte des antoniens", p. 502.

95. L. JADIN, "Le Congo et la secte des antoniens", p. 499.

96. See, for example, S. Axelson, *Culture Confrontation*, pp. 81f., 96f. & 142-45; Emilio da Cavaso, "Culto antoniano negli antichi regni del Congo", *Il Santo* 1961 (1) 101-136, esp. pp. 130-32, who sticks to the missionary account and consider Beatriz's actions as "errori"; Carl Sundberg, on the other hand, writes: "Dona Beatriz is rather to be seen as a "pietistic revolutionary", "Christianity in Dialogue with African History and Culture", *Swedish Missiological Themes* 92 (2004) 346.

97. See, for example: L. JADIN, "Le Congo et la secte des antoniens", pp. 499ff; 515ff; 541ff, etc.



gie sont plutôt classés dans la seconde de ces deux catégories. Ils relèvent selon la logique kongo de l'ordre des nkisi<sup>98</sup>.

What is remarkable is that the Antonian movement was an attempt to integrate a religious dimension with a political project demanding the restoration of the Kongolesse kingdom. The Kongolesse re-interpretation of Christianity may not have been consistent with the Christian message of (spiritual) liberation as understood in those days. But undoubtedly the Antonian movement served to restore to the people the identity which they rightly or wrongly felt had been removed in the new religion. "Le christianisme leur a donné les moyens d'une libération et d'une restauration du royaume; il devient l'instrument d'un salut que n'est pas celui que son enseignement annonce"<sup>99</sup>. From this perspective, syncretism is an adequate way to render Christianity meaningful to its local adherents. But would not the local interpretations isolate the Christian praxis? A very brief answer would be: The rehabilitation of syncretism facilitates and promotes plurality within Christianity. If such a plurality does not destroy the unity intrinsic to Christianity, but instead serves to foment unity, syncretism must undergo a new critique. Only then shall it be a means of deepening the faith. One may hence agree with Roger Bastide: "le syncrétisme ne peut être que «réinterprétation» à travers l'intelligence et la sensibilité ... du message chrétien"<sup>100</sup>.

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98. Georges BALANDIER, *La vie quotidienne au royaume de kongo du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1965), p. 259.

99. Georges BALANDIER, *La vie quotidienne au royaume de Kongo*, p. 261.

100. M. SINDA, *Le messianisme congolais*, p. 11. Hence André Mary ("En finir avec le bricolage...?", *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 2001, n. 116, p. 28) writes: ... les syncrétismes religieux ne sont pas syncrétiques et encore moins syncrétistes, si l'on entend par là un mélange ou même une identification plus ou moins consciente de traditions hétérogènes, mais qu'il s'agit d'une logique de simple cumul sans confusion ou d'un processus de réinterprétation ...", p. 259.