

Prophetic Movements, Theory, and Mission in Postcolonial Congo

Toward a Confession Missiology

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Though first introduced to the academy in the late nineteenth century, missiology—the scholarly study of mission—did not gain much attention until much later and remains somewhat of a fledgling discipline, especially outside of overtly Christian organizations.¹ Most twentieth-century missiologists refused any kind of secular mission theory, with their major organizations institutionally devaluing non-religious theories as unfit for mission studies.² Protestant and Catholic mission organizations alike more often endeavored to systematize a coherent mission *theology* rather than to explore mission *theories* in the classical sense, producing texts proclaiming missiology to be concerned only with the propagation of “God’s word” and the expansion of Christianity primarily using biblical interpretations and statements from early church fathers.³

With such various theological underpinnings for those involved in denominational Christian studies, it is no wonder that rather than form any general coherence, the discipline today actually consists of several distinct and disparate missiologies.⁴ Between the first major rise in mission studies in the 1960s and the present, missiologists have consistently sounded the refrain that the discipline is in some kind of crisis, despite significant gains in missionary personnel and world evangelization during those years.⁵ For instance, extensive statistical research initiatives have found a rise in total evangelized

persons as a percent of world population in 1970 from 55.6 percent to 71.7 percent in 2000, almost twice the gains from the previous seventy years.⁶ In many ways, the crises that missiologists have spoken of have not been crises of low numbers of conversion. Rather, what has worried missiologists involves the recognition that their field of study continually diverged where their models were designed to further the cause and unite the faith. Ironically, where mission proclaims a unity of faith, the fruits of mission theory have only served to divide both its parent discipline and its adherents in very mortal, and sometimes, inhumane ways.⁷

In this paper I will explore this crisis and how practitioners of missiology continually base their models, systems, and methods in Western epistemologies. I will attempt to deconstruct such models through a postcolonial reading of mission work in the Congo region of Africa. Beginning with the influence of Simon Kimbangu in the early twentieth century, African mission work took a major turn with the new converts subverting mission and as anti-colonial movements arose in the latter half of the century, complete reversals and displacements occurred, revealing how destabilized mission there has become. Before doing this, however, some points about postcolonialism and the current state of missiology ought to be addressed. If, as I propose, missiology is trapped in a colonizing epistemology, then involving more secular protocols of theory may be necessary to disrupt the discipline enough for a sufficiently thorough reassessment to occur. Missiology must concede some theological ground as it negotiates the realities of oppression and violence inherent in current mission endeavors and the contemporary outcomes from missions of the past. I believe mission theory may yet escape some of the pitfalls of colonization though extreme discursive modifications are necessary if missiology is to have a fruitful dialogue with postcolonialism.

Traditional missiology and Western epistemologies

A basic format of the general discipline of missiology involves three major areas of study or dimensions, namely history, anthropology, and theology. In other words, a cross-section of the history of missions, mission anthropology, and mission theology represents a distinct mission theory in a traditional sense.⁸ Inherent problems afflict each of these dimensions when applied to

mission theory. Mission history, in many cases, paints an incredibly bleak picture with accounts of colonization demolishing whole indigenous cultures; mission anthropology suffers from relying heavily on native informants, a feature of classical anthropology under fire from postcolonial critique; and mission theology is rooted in problems of biblical criticism highlighted by liberation theologians and is fraught with divisive denominational interpretations and subcultures. To combine inherent problems in each of these dimensions into a mission theory further complicates the theory itself and perpetuates a colonizing worldview. To divorce a mission theory of any one of its dimensions reduces the theory considerably. Remove the theology, and why evangelize or for what purpose? Or, remove the historical understandings of the theory, and by what basis does one proselytize? Why engage in foreign missions when no consideration of human culture is entertained? In the moment of forming a particular mission theory, one constitutes a history, theology, and anthropology embedded in Western subject modes of discourse. To date, the various traditional missiological models all rely on at least one of these dimensions, sometimes all three, when the dimension continues to colonize either ideologically or manifestly in the proselytizing practices of its missionaries. In many cases, these problematic missiologies have yet to be seriously contested.⁹

Recognizing these difficulties of crafting models based on other classical disciplines, missiologists have proposed various other ways of theorizing mission. Arthur Glasser and D. A. McGavaran describe missiology as having four streams rather than dimensions: ecumenical, evangelical, Roman Catholic, and liberationist.¹⁰ Another missiologist classifies theory as “from above” and “from below” (an interesting hierarchy given the placement of liberation theology as one such theory “from below”).¹¹ Perhaps the most recent advancement for the study of non-Christian religious contact with mission is termed “dialogue” and includes theories addressing the place of God’s work in the activities of world cultures. Still other classifications of missiology have been suggested with such various terms as “exclusivism,” “discontinuity,” “fulfillment,” “cooperative,” “anonymous Christian,” “trinitarian,” “soteriological,” and so forth¹². As one scholar noted, these models “work theologically with a modern epistemological paradigm.”¹³ Missiology clearly perpetuates Western protocols of knowledge in its

systematic approach to expansionism and global efforts to proclaim religious truth. Insofar as this discipline combines observations of evangelization among non-Western peoples, discursive themes about globalization, and/or notions of pluralism, it risks establishing colonizing epistemologies and advocating colonizing behaviors. To profess that mission in general is concerned with improving the spiritual welfare of the global human family behooves missiologists to consider, explore, and assess the issues raised by postcolonialism.

While some voices argue for accepting secular modes of analysis or theory, it is fair to say that mission studies continue to be dominated by theological work driven by church planting and expansionism and centered on promulgating the gospel of Christ.¹⁴ Some missiologists pride themselves in acknowledging God in their work, thereby freeing the discipline from an overly secularized approach.¹⁵ One notable historian of Christianity is convinced missiology has great potential to “save history” as globalization increases on the grounds that it will not fall prey to “intellectual confusion or anti-Christian conclusions.”¹⁶ In many cases, Western ethics of capitalism, democracy, industry, responsibility, gender, and education pervade the discourse as well, to the point that many mission organizations equate successes in these areas as measures of church growth.¹⁷ Despite some recent work to involve postcolonialism more closely with mission theory, traditional practitioners, including the notable missiologist J. A. B. Jongeneel, apparently are not convinced “that the focus of their study needs to move from modernity to postmodernity” to maintain its relevance.¹⁸ The reticence to answering the postcolonial critique against missions is likely due to the personal investment of many missiologists. Given the number of them that engage in mission work or serve as ecclesiastical authorities in their churches, little short of the gamut of missiologists would need to renounce much of their practice in order to accept a more inclusive theory or theology.¹⁹ Lesslie Newbigin described how many missiologists feel about their work: “As a human race we are on a journey and we need to know the road. It is not true that all roads lead to the top of the same mountain. There are roads which lead over the precipice. In Christ we have been shown the road. We cannot treat that knowledge as a private matter for ourselves.”²⁰

Missiologists like Jongeneel and Newbigin suggest that postcolonial critique concerns itself only with the historical categorization of the colonization period or is too secular in theory to be embraced by a discipline which unabashedly and necessarily invokes the role of God in the work of propagating its gospel. However, strategic mission initiatives which have been complicit with Western colonization deserve inspection if missiology is to maintain its integrity.²¹ Missiologists certainly decry physically violent practices of colonizing the indigenous and are generally cognizant of past atrocities committed by missionaries and church institutions in their work among indigenous peoples.²² But in tucking away postcolonial critique as a postmodern take on the colonization period or as a secular invasion of theology shows their misunderstanding of the many dimensions of postcolonial studies and how manifestly and unavoidably linked mission theory is to epistemic violence. A careful reader of postcolonialism will recognize how incessantly the field turns on itself, always-already critiquing its own conclusions and paths to knowledge; he or she will not mistake postcolonial critique as simply a refined anti-colonial Marxism, but rather several theories aiming to decolonize and displace colonial apparatuses wherever they may appear.

One of the most powerful tools in the West's colonial arsenal has been mission work. Many of the first Europeans or Americans to enter indigenous lands were missionaries. Through proselytizing, these missionaries often introduced a neocolonial vicious cycle: they would not leave until indigenous peoples converted to Western religion (and in most cases, ways of living as well), but once converts abounded, missionaries remained to administer the now established churches. In the twentieth century, missions took on a less direct proselytizing approach by first working among foreign towns and villages to bring modern conveniences which again perpetuated neocolonial practices: the missionaries would remain until the society embraced electricity and running water, for instance—a clearly Western economic ideal that disrupted former indigenous practices to a high degree. As I will later demonstrate with the case of Kimbanguism, sometimes the proselytization of a people was so powerful that their adoption of Christianity and their mixing in of former indigenous elements of worship and science could produce effects so distant from the religion brought by the missionaries that it could be seen

as representative of indigenous religious expressions. Kimbanguism, in particular, now battles its own factions—those on the one hand that insist on a theology of Papa Simon Kimbangu and his sons as the temporal manifestation of the Holy Trinity and those on the other that assert the Nicene Creed and appeal to world Protestant organizations for official recognition.²³ These dynamics distort what may be seen as authentic either in the proselytizing of the Western missionaries, the outcome of their endeavors, or the most ardent anti-colonial movements that could disestablish colonial regimes in the region.

Because missiology is still rooted in modern epistemology and continues to be influenced by the West, concerns about liberation, creativity, decolonization, and oppression still linger among critics pressing the discipline to reformat itself. The editors of an important project to compile contemporary currents in missiology remarked how “many of the presuppositions of Western missions are no longer valid,” and as a result missiology “is searching for a new working self-definition.”²⁴ Now may be as good a time as any for such a re-defined missiology. The discipline not only seeks a new self-definition, but also is coming to terms with the crises of mission history and is taking stock of a world that, by many calculations, is moving in a post-Christian and post-religious direction. By no coincidence, dialogue missiologies have become increasingly popular as a viable study of global mission contexts given the interconnection of twenty-first century societies.²⁵ Though dialogue emphasizes a concerted effort by all parties to understand one another without apologizing for anyone’s beliefs, and for those involved usually means celebrating the differences between their traditions, it still installs a discursive dualism of sender and receiver. Whether embraced or not, these dynamics will yet come into contact with mission theory, ever proposing the questions about how mission can rid itself of colonizing epistemologies and behaviors. One author’s suggestion appears apropos in light of such re-workings of the discipline and the problems raised by postcolonialists: missiology ought to move from an established and instrumental help-discipline of mission to “a disestablished critical discipline, which focuses on critical deconstruction and creative reconstruction of mission theory.”²⁶

The first step in deconstructing mission theory includes noting and displacing several binary systems embedded in missiology's discourse. As missionaries see themselves as emissaries of a truth deserving acceptance or as ministers to an unevangelized population, they form a self-concept rooted in a binary of self and other, and other dualisms in their conversation soon (immediately) follow: parent/child, sender/receiver, male/female, Western/non-Western, and colonizer/colonized. Automatically one term gains privilege over the other in the discourse, and before long those involved lose sight of how they have objectified other peoples and relegated these to an inferior status. Or worse, some will even intentionally relegate the objects of their study to justify their proselytization practices. Furthermore, forcing binaries into the discourse neglects the dynamic, diverse, and often unknowable features of the world's various peoples.

Mission studies have perpetuated the parent/child binary by assuming the gospel and lifestyle of the missionary would improve the lifestyle of the proselyte. The proselytized need the message and teachings of the more advanced missionaries, either to spare them an afterlife outside of heaven or mortal poverty, sickness, or irresponsibility. Even when the missionary has virtuous intentions of helping others, so long as he or she has no intention of receiving the life of the proselytes to whom they minister, they privilege the self above the other. Working in a pattern of sender and receiver or teacher and student, the missionary establishes a one-way traffic model, which renders the same effect as the parent/child binary; seeing the proselytes as humans and not children or in need of the missionary's benevolence, or the benevolence of the missionary's God might remove the binary, but to the missionary's chagrin would likely dissolve the mission as well.

Feminist missiologists raise an important concern as well with regards to how mission studies constitute a predominantly male ontology. In the struggle for proclaiming life and working for justice for all people, mission must affirm life over death and involve women, wrote Kwok Pui-Lan—which comprise the majority of the poor and victimized of globalized market economies.²⁷ All too often, however, missionaries bend all their efforts toward converting individuals to the religion, which sustains a phallogocentric epistemology: what is a self-aggrandizing, invasive, and patronizing endeavor is considered best for the subaltern proselytes, to say nothing of the male-dominating and

sometimes misogynistic customs among many church organizations. Realigning mission work in terms of proclaiming life, involving women, addressing immediate needs of local individuals instead of focusing on conversions, and taking responsibility to communicate a non-sexist vision of the church moves mission toward a feminist missiology, one that preaches the “good news of liberation from sexism.”²⁸ To take feminist missiology a step further, the theory must also address the informant aspect of feminists’ role in “proclaiming life.” Can the Western feminist truly speak for Kwok Pui-Lan’s “majority of the poor and victimized”? How inherently phallogocentric is it to speak in behalf of subaltern women? “Life”—but in terms of Western birth, or indigenous terms? As I will discuss later, I submit that a truly feminist missiology must neither embrace nor ignore the subaltern woman, and proclaim life nonetheless. This proclamation of life, however, must be one of self-emptying, to borrow a phrase from Michael Nazir-Ali, where the totality of the missionary is emptied, confessed, vulnerable, neither masculinized nor feminized, neither sent nor received, but spilled to the ground, purged out of the missionary as it were, to a newness of life possibly completely other.²⁹

Kimbanguism and prophetic movements

One missionary accused Simon Kimbangu of unforgivable sins against white Christianity: “Kimbangu wants to found a religion which is in accord with the mentality of the African.”³⁰ Indeed, as Kimbangu’s movement gained momentum, more Belgian colonialists feared an African uprising than the success of the many Protestant and Catholic missionaries in the region. Though their founder was mostly apolitical and orthodox in his Protestant preaching, Kimbanguists prized how much God had finally made himself manifest in their black society.³¹ On April 6, 1921, Kimbangu pronounced a blessing of health on a sick woman near N’Kamba, Zaire, and she was healed.³² More healings ensued, Kimbangu’s fame spread rapidly, and within a matter of months, a massive new denomination had taken root. Catholic missionaries, unnerved by Kimbangu’s meteoric rise as a healer, sought his arrest. Colonial officials forbade the nascent Kimbanguists from holding meetings, deported as many as 100,000 to distant areas of Africa, and killed as many as 150,000. Under this colonial pressure, Kimbangu voluntarily gave himself up in September of 1921—less than six months after his first healing.³³

He was sentenced to lashings and to be executed. Protestants in the area fought for his release to no avail, though his sentence was commuted by Belgium's King Albert I to life imprisonment. He died while in prison in 1951 thirty years later.³⁴

The anti-colonial backlash from many of Kimbangu's followers attracted support and became the most significant folk movement of the region.³⁵ A core doctrine developed that declared that Kimbangu was a prophet, a preacher sent by God to heal those oppressed by the "white" colonizers. For many Kimbanguists, their founder was literally Jesus Christ in the flesh, sent as a black man. Papa Simon Kimbangu, as they began to refer to him, had suffered in prison just like the Christ of the Bible. Though folk doctrines took root in the movement, Kimbangu's successors held to the Baptist heritage of their father and sought to find a place among denominational Christianity. Simon himself had been a Baptist catechist and had been trained by Baptist missionaries in how evangelization and church planting. His three sons guided what by now had become a church body to adopt the Nicene Creed and other mainstream doctrines, however, a less orthodox emphasis on dreams, visions, exorcisms, and healings remained an integral part of the community.³⁶ Kimbanguists towed a line between an increasingly folk African religious lifestyle and a mainline Christian piety but could not keep out long-lasting customs.³⁷ Not long after Kimbanguism became officially recognized as "Église de Jésus Christ sur la Terre par son Prophète Simon Kimbangu," some began to teach that polygamy and pagan practices were still compatible with Christianity. At the center of Kimbanguism, Christian and African indigenous influences dynamically mixed with significant disagreements among the leaders of the church over the inclusion or exclusion of folk doctrines from their canon still going on.³⁸

The Kimbanguist church continued clandestinely from 1951–59 when Congo gained political independence. The new government officially recognized the church alongside Protestantism and Catholicism. Other prophetic independent movements sprang up throughout the Congo in the wake of Kimbanguism's establishment. In these communities, a similar emphasis on exorcism, dreams, visions, and speaking in tongues continued. N'Kamba, Papa Simon's birthplace, was known synonymously as "New Jerusalem," and the capital city of the Congo, Kinshasa, became the urban

capital of independent churches as well. By the late twentieth century, the greater Kinshasa region had become a highly Christianized yet highly African religious zone. Congo today represents an interesting point of contact for Christian mission because of its social hybrids between African and Western influences, Christian and quasi-Christian churches, and orthodox and heterodox belief systems.³⁹

Kimbanguism and the prophetic movements have much that mission theory would seek to study. For one, they represent a Christian movement that outlasted colonial rule and several anti-colonial upheavals, showing intense resilience to social change. Kimbanguism experienced extraordinary growth within months with very little personnel. Christian miracles were confirmed not only by a few but were announced throughout the region, bringing in many curious outsiders. With the rise in local converts, mission personnel remained steady over decades. The emphasis on healing and stamping out evil and sin evinced a solidarity within the communities in favor of Christian ethic and teachings. Later, Kimbanguism was admitted into the World Council of Churches and formally recognized by other Christian organizations, and Christianity at large made institutional gains as Kimbanguists built more dedicated buildings, churches, hospitals and mission stations.⁴⁰ While such characteristics of Kimbanguism and expansionism might appear ripe for missiological study, these actually disrupt missiology. A closer look into the religious practice of Kimbanguists and the independent churches of Kinshasa reveals how they actually subvert missions and colonization.

For many living in Kinshasa, Papa Simon Kimbangu is the “black Jesus.” He remains a central reference in the belief system and traditions. Kimbangu’s expressed goal during his ministry was to heal all the people, not to convert or transmit the gospel. Today’s Kimbanguists observe baptism by immersion in the Baptist model as the main mode of initiation into the community. Before communal celebrations, persons stamp the soil with their feet and sweep the floor in a gesture to chase away evil spirits. Women join the assembly during the celebration, dressed in white. Bible readings recall God’s concern with the suffering of the Kinois (citizens of Kinshasa) people. Like the ancient Hebrews, the Kinois are lost in a dark world, awaiting light. Their Bible is like the sword of the soldier with which the doors of hell are unmasked and torn open. Exorcism and healing go hand in hand. They observe a diagnostic

moment, which usually involves speaking in tongues, but which always involves rhetorical questioning that indirectly helps to ascertain what the person suffers. The moment of exorcism comes when common brothers and sisters of the afflicted use various means to expel the sin from the confessor. Spoken phrases, perfume, water, candles, flapping handkerchiefs around the possessed, or sometimes having the possessed lie down on the floor while others press the soles of their feet into the joints help to exorcise the heaviness and suffering from the afflicted.⁴¹

The moment of “animating” ensues once community members have a chance to rid themselves of their personal evils. Here, the community seeks to reaffirm the life of freedom and idiosyncrasy of the individual by turning Satan against himself. This re-invention of the world as a community reverts the situation of failure, self-deception, indecision, and suffering into an opportunity for grace, peace, and self-control. The Kimbanguist concept of healing is at this moment most pronounced: the reversion itself *is* the healing, the returning to the stasis before the flux, before the colonizing and supremacy of the white man over their community. Through confession, or oral purgation, the weaknesses of the individual are corrected by the Holy Spirit and the community. “Confession is a form of exfoliation of oneself, through which the adept is integrated into the collective fusional body of the assembly of the Holy Spirit.” The flow for healing opens up and a reverse of evil and suffering begins through communal participation.⁴²

The worldview of the indigenous Koongo (natives of the western Congo region) that continued in Kimbanguism depicts life as the alternating between positions—day/night, light/dark, movement/rest, Holy Spirit/Satan. Healing, then, is the purgation, rotation, opening up, and reversion of these positions. Through healing, “the Holy Spirit and Satan reach a point of equality. Rather than naming evil, which makes it present, one should chase it away, break with it.” Through their mimicry and frenzy, these independent churchgoers maintain both elements of the local Koongo cultural tradition and of modernity, but are displaced. The celebrations develop a space between contradictory places through the dramatization of Christian liturgy and their mockery of the versatile figure of Satan. As the reverse side of the Holy Spirit, Satan is omnipresent in their discourse, but to them is a farce. The celebration becomes one of domesticating colonial intrusion and gaining an ascendancy

over the oppressive world outside. Koongo independent churches thus infiltrate the very core of the colonial enterprise by transforming the colonial *dispossession* to which they were subjected into an empowering *possession* using the religion of the whites. Human perfectibility becomes a measurable and attainable component of communal religious experience apart from the whites and a privilege to all.⁴³

Interestingly, Kimbanguism and the independent churches have survived precisely because of their marginalization. As colonial forces displaced many from their homes, imprisoned church leaders, and demanded orthodox belief and practice, the local independents grew in number and force. Christianity was Africanized in a high degree, the chief figure being now an African not a Nazarene. The trend has continued to the present in such a degree that the Holy Trinity for many Kimbanguists has been reformulated theologically as a dual trinity, the one being spiritual and the other being temporal. Simon Kimbangu and his sons occupy the place of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the earthly or mortal trinity.⁴⁴

Since the same year Columbus landed in the Americas, a colonial presence has remained in the Congo region. Missionaries accompanied the first explorers who traveled up the Congo river and established outposts along the way, many of which continue. Kimbanguism developed directly out of the resulting mission movements in the area. In a direct sense, Kimbangu was personally trained by Baptist missionaries in the skills of church planting. The doctrines, teachings, ethics, and ecclesiastical systems Kimbangu had learned from his upbringing he was able to duplicate in his own grassroots religion. The first missionaries, the Catholics, indirectly influenced the rise of Kimbanguism in their early antipathy and campaign against Kimbangu. Precisely because of the persecutions against Kimbangu could his followers revere him as a Christ figure, or as Christ himself; without that narrative borne out of Catholic and colonial injustices, empowering aspects of Kimbanguist worship would be lacking comparisons of Papa Simon to Jesus. In a way, the almost instantaneous hostility toward Kimbangu fueled the movement's fame and spread the word. The converts these missionaries were supposed to bring into the fold actually mobilized directly because of them. They probably could not have known the Jesus they eventually regarded as the black Jesus without these missionaries.⁴⁵

In studying these cases, missiology itself is subverted. On a fundamental level, missiology asks who does the mission work. It seeks to identify first the missionary and the proselyte. In the case of Kimbanguism and independent churches in Kinshasa, missionaries in a sense taught the indigenous in order to bring a convert and instead brought a prophet. Within the discourse of the Christian missionaries, a prophet is greater than the missionary. The prophet/ess speaks for God, speaks of things to come; in short, the prophet *speaks*. The prophet/ess speaks freely, speaks his or her own doctrine, and speaks against sin and Satan. The missionary proclaims the words of prophets and the word of God. He or she has no voice and can only proclaim what has been uttered before. Rather than *speak*, the missionary is sent. Should the missionary *speak* for himself or herself, he or she would be converting proselytes to the self. In the moment of converting to the self, another distinct religion constitutes itself, separate from the religion represented by the missionary in the first place.

The ultimate unsettling of missiology comes when the missionary proclaims Christ and gets Christ in return. In the linear concept of missiology, one of sender and receiver, Christ then represents the one who sends. The missionary is the one sent to draw souls not to the self, but to Christ. With Kimbangu, the soul to draw to Christ *is* Christ; the proselytes the missionaries sought after worshipped now another Christ in direct response to the very messages and effects the missionaries sought to produce in them. In the moment of seeking to represent Christ to Christ, the missionary becomes other, loses his or her representativeness, and no longer is sent but received. As missiology closes in on step one of its analysis of Kimbanguism, it cannot proceed without forcing dualisms; the Kimbanguist has taken the mission from the missionary, has represented the mission more completely in living precisely what the former missionaries instilled through their proselytizing, and all in what mission essentialisms would categorize as a perfect intention of Christian charity, endurance, faith, and community.

When missiology cannot identify the missionary and the proselyte in unequivocal terms, its current self is undermined. What good is analysis when “missionary” cannot be known? Or, more challenging, when “proselyte,” “unevangelized,” or “heathen” cannot be known either? If seeking the expansion of Christianity in the Congo, all roads point to a slippage. By

missiology's own constructs, the more "effective" mission is there, the more power the Africans have over mission. Power, a heavenly power or inner strength is precisely the goal of missions, to build a heavenly kingdom. However, the kingdoms there are all run by the converts, not the missionaries. The very faith the missionaries bring in an effort to mobilize converts motivates the converts to invent new Christianities—a further *division* of kingdoms and denominations.

Although a deconstruction of missiology through a reading of Kimbanguism highlights the problematic observations the theory will inevitably make, Kimbanguism introduces several problematic issues of its own. I have intentionally read Kimbanguism in the fashion of the missiologist to demonstrate how missiology cannot study the prophetic movements of Kinshasa without forcing dualisms. I have also described the mimicry of Kimbanguist worship and its destabilizing of Christian liturgy. This reading employed classical anthropology to make its case, derived from native informants and Western scholarship designed to describe the Kinois' religious culture, which, though deconstructive of missiology, still operates within a Western epistemology.

Time, space, history, and science for native Africans conceptually occupy a wholly other space than how Westerners might describe them. To observe their communal behaviors and place them within a time and space that is past risks superimposing the Western assumption of past-present-future that some have argued cannot describe native African paradigms that do not divide time.⁴⁶ Throughout this reading, concepts of healing were written as religious rites; but to what extent is oral purgation literally what the West would call a medical science in the epistemology of the Kinois? To deconstruct missiology in terms of the Kimbangu, though indicative of theoretical problems in the discipline, is problematic in terms of postcolonial criticism. Taking Kimbanguism a step further, one must recognize how powerfully the mission work there colonized the Kinois, and how these prophetic movements cannot explain indigenous or African religion whatsoever.⁴⁷ Not only has Kimbanguism entreated Protestant ecumenical organizations for inclusion and recognition, it has restructured itself to accommodate them. Factions within the church have fought over the adoption of strict trinitarianism and whether the folk adoration of Papa Simon as God the Father, and Protestant

pressures to downplay the heterodox belief of modern-day prophets has led them to changing the official name of the church, replacing the word “prophet” in the title with “envoy.” No doubt Kimbanguists desire to be categorized as Christians in the Protestant and Western style.⁴⁸

Furthermore, Kimbanguism remains gendered hierarchically and socially. Women adhere to a strict dress code and usually separate themselves from the worship group. The leadership of the church has always been governed by men, direct descendants of Simon Kimbangu no less. While Kimbangu’s wife holds a place of reverence in Kimbanguist discourse, her role in the continuation of Kimbanguism does not receive much attention.⁴⁹ I do not, therefore, hold up Kimbanguism as an example of the postcolony, though the movement certainly incorporates features of anti-colonialism, but I have used Kimbanguism to show instabilities within fundamental missiology—which use certainly ought to be questioned as a masculine, Western, and colonizing method.

Gift giving and (ir)responsibility

Avoiding the problems in studying Christianized peoples like the prophetic movements among the Kinois, a reading of other mission projects in the same Congo region reveals another potential deconstruction of missiology, one which highlights the fundamental epistemological troubles in a missiological study of African mission. Viewing themselves as altruistic benefactors, the first missionaries to the indigenous Bira attempted to gain converts by giving gifts. The Bira, already practicing cannibalism, were inferior and grossly in need of not just the gospel message (the missionaries believed), but also work ethic and higher morals. To the Bira, however, the incoming whites were cannibals themselves, “eating the blacks” when they had the chance and shipping off black bodies to Europe to be canned as food. With time and gifts, the Bira slackened their animosity toward the missionaries, seeing them instead as wealthy and fortunate competition in an unfair system.⁵⁰

Missionaries, in their gift giving, practiced a kind of cannibalism. In giving to the Bira, they believed they were making the Bira irresponsible; the Bira needed to work and earn the gifts, demonstrating their responsibility through thrift and ethic. To give a gift to a beggar without any toil only

encouraged them to rely on the missionaries and not on themselves any longer. But the mere intrusion and the former terrible animosity between the two groups necessitated peace offerings and gifts for their to be an exchange. While frustrated at their proselytes for remaining irresponsible beggars, these missionaries ate their own doctrine. The very gospel message they believed to be sent to proclaim to the Bira was to beg at the hand of Christ for mercy and for forgiveness of sins, to teach the Bira to actually beg, spiritually, for salvation. In the moment of constituting the Bira as beggars, they repudiate the Bira and disavow the loss of souls and the rejections. The Bira's deliberate use of begging to resist the missionaries bred the very ethic the missionaries attempted to instill through their service; they asked with the expectation to receive while their "benefactors" withheld on the grounds that they were not responsible enough.⁵¹

The Bira blamed their constant empty-handedness on the missionaries. For all the gift giving, nothing was ever given, nothing was free. Strings were attached to each gift. Ironically, the missionaries sought to alleviate poverty, but their gifts only reinforced their disappointment in the Bira. After a vicious cycle developed and missionaries there noticed how ineffective their attempts were at winning converts, they contemplated abandoning the mission station and concluded that the Bira were too childish and irresponsible to ever get out of poverty. In the first place, the missionaries arrived *because* of their perception that the Bira were irresponsible and needed some righteous benefactor to pull them out of the mire of poverty. By their own constituting the Bira as childish, the missionaries constitute themselves as the missionary, not the proselyte, sent to save them. The Bira, however, have the power; by simply doing more of what makes the missionary the missionary—by the missionary's own constitutive effect—the mission nearly abandons its efforts.⁵²

Missiology is subverted by the Bira in its attempt to constitute missionary and proselyte. The whole work of the missionary in this case is to build up a capitalist and thriving society in a poverty-stricken village. A good capitalist rewards the responsible and withholds from the irresponsible. In the very moment of gift giving, in the very act of philanthropy for which the missionary is sent, the beggar renders the missionary incapable of responsibility. In the free exchange, the missionary creates an incentive, a market incentive, to never listen to the missionary. In a double-bind, the

missionary cannot practice philanthropy and achieve responsibility in either him- or herself, or the proselyte. The more the missionary proselytizes, the more the Bira provide incentives for the missionary to continue their work, never becoming “responsible,” always rendering the missionary incapable of progress. Their begging exemplifies the Christian life the missionaries preach, the responsibility to recognize one’s own fallen, inept condition before God. The missionary, however, can do nothing while the Bira beg; to satisfy the beggar only reinforces the opposite of the mission’s goals and to refuse the beggar justifies the Bira from never listening to the gospel message. To avoid gift giving altogether places a wedge between the expectations of the proselytes and the missionaries, with the proselytes likely slamming the door on any interaction with foreigners. The Bira’s ethic of gift giving and begging remains in force, no budging to the gospel ethic of the missionaries or to their capitalism. The missionary lives in a state of indeterminacy, with little control—the missionary is irresponsible, caught in the ethic of the proselyte they came to deliver. The Bira remain unconverted, unchanged from their interactions with the missionaries while the missionaries have become irresponsible outsiders.

Alternative missiologies

Missiology with its current methods cannot study the Congo region of Africa. Not only because of the problem in locating the missionary/proselyte but also because of the faith-centered and not people-centered overall approach. Still, missiology must study Kinois, Bira, Kimbanguists to be missiology; a harvest of souls continues there, and in full force. Missiology desires Africa, until and after the whole continent’s unevangelized are reached.⁵³ In pausing to study its work, namely the advancing of the word and kingdom of God, mission necessarily betrays all of Africa; in this moment, it has turned inward to search for which muscle to flex, ignoring the lived effects of the people it so unambiguously, forcefully and confidently claims to save. In light of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa, Musa W. Dube has argued for a new missiology capable of addressing the crises of global realities and sufferings. The only way out of this double-bind, for her, is through reversing missiology from focusing on the self (mission) to focusing on people. In this “people-centered” missiological paradigm, the immediate needs of suffering

people come to the front and receive full attention. Rather than purport *the* solution to these ills, people-centered theory recognizes the power inherent in the locals more than the organizations and allows for their total autonomy in determining doctrine and orthodoxy.⁵⁴

People-centered missiology practices more than preaches, but only with compassion. Compassion itself subverts competition, domination, and indifference, common characteristics of a Western mode of study. One cannot seek a profit and still have compassion, a direct shifting of the main aims of mission work. Dube calls on missiologists to be the first ones that can overhaul social structures that lead to poverty and slavery because of their pronounced antagonism for structural sin. But to have any effect toward fighting poverty and slavery, a gospel of life must replace an otherwise death-inducing truth claim or teaching. A gospel of life requires relativism; the mission theologian must see the inherent problems in assuming the efficacy of a scripture or a theology in every instance across global settings and peoples. At every instance that life is not proclaimed through scriptural interpretation or religious practice, the inverse must be advocated.⁵⁵

All too often, missionaries overlook in their biblical call to serve how implicitly local the preaching of New Testament disciples had been. A certain value was found in preaching to the converted, in limiting the scope of one's "great commission" to the few rather than the world.⁵⁶ In a sense, the converted are more in need of "preaching" than the unconverted. They have been given a higher mode of conduct, a stricter or more refined set of morals from which to govern one's behavior and lifestyle. The converted leave themselves without as many excuses, their conversion to be conversion has been a change of life, an alteration from a mode of living to a stricter, more limited mode. Certainly, the converted feel a sense of liberation, a sense of expansion within themselves otherwise, why convert at all? Nevertheless, their conversion to another moral code places them in the space of continually coming up—and increasingly so—short. Precisely why the morals are higher is because they are further beyond the reach of the individual, though in many cases the individual feels that they are within reach of the community. A greater gap between the ideal and the lived results where conversion occurs; coupled with any level of lack within the morality, and the converted then have less morality than before their conversion.⁵⁷

The ideal for missiologists is no mere philosophy or moral code, but the ideal person, God come down in flesh. Dube points out that for this to hold true, for God to assume flesh, there must necessarily be (what was discussed earlier as) a self-emptying: Christ left glory to be Christ. She likens self-emptying to the commission for the church to serve and not to be served. Only in letting expansionism go, at least as the driving force behind the missiology, can the discipline empty itself, for by bringing in converts and aiming to do so serves the self. Some contend that self-emptying and preaching to the converted only weakens Christianity and cripples its numbers, that there is strength in numbers, and so forth. Seeking converts among the unevangelized without seeking the welfare of the already converted risks a self-emptying, but of a different kind, where the renewal of life for the converted stops short, the gap between ideal and lived becomes too wide.⁵⁸

Observing a people-centered missiology may be close to what Katja Heidemanns advocates as a missiology of risk, or a feminist missiology. The problematic of the one-way traffic model, sender and receiver, breeds noise in missiology, static. “Christianity becomes a noisy religion when it proclaims, instead of listening,” wrote Kwok Pui-Lan.⁵⁹ Heidemanns describes the West’s out-of-control ethic of control, the belief that unilateral and decisive action can control events enough to receive a quick predictable response. Rather than exercise an ethic of control in a one-way traffic, the missiologist ought to recognize the global interdependence and responsibility for our common past and present. One missiologist described this as not being and doing *for* but being and doing *with*. In other words, missiologists must recognize the share they have in the colonial legacy and commit themselves to a different kind of listening. In a word, they must risk.⁶⁰

To truly listen to the proselyte, one must be every bit as vulnerable as the proselyte (the missionary hopes) is when hearing the proclamation. The missionary desires that the proselyte live his or her teachings, be open and uninhibited by current beliefs, and to listen to the full message the missionary brings. Yet, in this desire, and within a one-way traffic model, the missionary inhibits the self, demanding that he or she teach without being taught, and by so doing inherently excludes everything that could be learned from the proselyte. The missionary knows the risk in listening to the proselyte, that the imperative change he or she requires in the proselyte could be inverted on the

missionary. But this vulnerability must coexist if the missionary is to avoid colonizing the proselyte. To do away with the sender/receiver, the missionary/proselyte dualism must also disappear, and only then can the missionary practice the ethic he or she proclaims. Indeed, in this moment of listening, the missionary risks the very things he or she does and desires of the proselyte. But in such a setting, the proselyte is privileged as a human, as one with a voice and a life—and life is thus proclaimed over the stifling of another person's sense of self and being.⁶¹

Radical shifts in Christianity occurred when Simon Kimbangu affirmed life through a ministry of healing. He placed healing at the center of his work above conversion and expansionism and maintained what missiologists are quick to praise—stability, endurance, growth, community, hope, healing. Interestingly, the “celebrations” of the Kimbanguists and the independent churches revolve around the process of reverting oneself and one's community to their ideal of the Holy Spirit through confession. Self purification, confessing one's innermost demons without naming the demons or revealing them directly acts as a homeopathic reverting from evil to holiness. How might missiology use a mode of confession to heal itself, to escape the crises that have afflicted it since the beginning?

A confession missiology would place healing at the center of discourse, not as a feature, and would take the inner evils and expose them to the community for a reversion. It would encourage an interdependent community, where the missionary acknowledges the need for the proselyte, where both confess, both are received. This missiology would of itself be exposed, self-emptied, and vulnerable while refraining from systematizing itself. Consideration of self as preacher would give way to the reduction of mission, the seeking of deconstructing itself in creative ways. By affirming life, but not a particular life, global catastrophes could be addressed without the double-bind of sender/receiver, missionary/proselyte, and parent/child but rather with sibling/sibling, human/human, listener/listener.

¹ Jongeneel and van Engelen, "Contemporary Currents in Missiology," in *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 438.

² Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: the Evolution of Contemporary Missiology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), 34–35.

³ Jongeneel and van Engelen, 439; J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1960), xix.

⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk, "The Role of Theory in Mission Studies," *Missiology* 24, no. 1 (1996), 2.

⁵ Jan A B Jongeneel, "Missiological Mutilations—Prospective Paralogies: Language and Power in Contemporary Mission Theory," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32, no. 2 (2008), 108; Susan Smith, "The Interface between the Biblical Text, Missiology, Postcolonialism and Diasporism" (Malaysia, 2004); David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991); Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, xv.

⁶ David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, "Missiometrics 2007: Creating Your Own Analysis of Global Data," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 31:1 (2007), 32.

⁷ C. Didier Gondola, "The Emergence of a Congo Prophet," *Journal of African History* 47, no. 3 (2006), 506–07.

⁸ Alan R Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1987), xxiv.

⁹ Shenk, 31; Smith, 1.

¹⁰ Jongeneel and van Engelen, 446.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 447.

¹² Tancred I. King, "Missiology and Mormon Missions," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 4 (1983), 42–50; Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: the Evolution of Contemporary Missiology*, 25.

¹³ Jørgen Skov Sørensen, *Missiological Mutilations—Prospective Paralogies: Language and Power in Contemporary Mission Theory* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2007), 203.

¹⁴ Denton Lotz, "Paradigm Shifts in Missiology," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 32, no. 1 (2008), 6.

¹⁵ Jongeneel and van Engelen, 3.

¹⁶ Mark A. Noll, "The Potential of Missiology for the Crises of History," in *History and the Christian Historian* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 122.

¹⁷ Lotz, 14–15; Chielozona Eze, "The Pitfalls of Cultural Consciousness," *Philosophia Africana* 10, no. 1 (2007), 44; Stephen Brown and Paul Kaiser, "Democratisations in Africa: Attempts, Hindrances and Prospects," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 6 (2007), 1143–44.

¹⁸ Jongeneel, 108.

¹⁹ See Timothy E. Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) for an overview of missiology's major practitioners and their range of personal missionary service and activity.

²⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 183.

²¹ Smith, 1.

²² Lotz, 11.

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- ²³ Léon Nguapitshi Kayongo, "Kimbanguism: Its Present Christian Doctrine and the Problems Raised by It," *Exchange* 34, no. 3 (2005), 135-55.
- ²⁴ Camps and others, "Introduction: What Do We Mean by "Missiology"?", in *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 2.
- ²⁵ Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*, 192.
- ²⁶ Sørensen, *Missiological Mutilations*, 27.
- ²⁷ Kwok Pui-lan, "Mission," in Russell, Letty, Clarkson, and Shannon, eds., *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1996), 185–86.
- ²⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1983), 213.
- ²⁹ Michael Nazir-Ali, *Mission and Dialogue: Proclaiming the Gospel Afresh in Every Age* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1995), 26.
- ³⁰ Steve Rabey, "The People's Prophet," *Christian History* 22, no. 3 (2003), 32.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 33.
- ³² World Council of Churches, "Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by His Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu", <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/africa/democratic-republic-of-congo/church-of-jesus-christ-on-earth-by-his-special-envoy-simon-kimbangu.html> (accessed November 1, 2008); Rabey, 33; Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*, 132.
- ³³ Rabey, 33.
- ³⁴ World Council of Churches; John McManners and others, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 597.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 597–99.
- ³⁶ Nguapitshi Kayongo, 138–145.
- ³⁷ Cf. Gondola.
- ³⁸ Cf. Nguapitshi Kayongo.
- ³⁹ Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*, 132.
- ⁴⁰ Howard Clark Kee, *Christianity: A Social and Cultural History* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 763.
- ⁴¹ René Devisch, "Healing Hybridity in the Prophetic Churches in Kinshasa," *Social Compass* 43, no. 2 (1996), 226–27.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 228–29.
- ⁴³ René Devisch, "Frenzy, Violence, and Ethical Renewal in Kinsasha," *Public Culture* 7, no. 3 (1995), 593–629; Devisch, 230.
- ⁴⁴ Nguapitshi Kayongo, 135, 138–40.

⁴⁵ Cf. Gondola.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Chukuwudi Eze, "Language and Time in Postcolonial Experience," *Research in African Literatures* 39, no. 1 (2008), 25–26.

⁴⁷ Simon Gikandi, "Cultural Translation and the African Self: A (Post)Colonial Case Study," *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 3, no. 3 (2001), 365.

⁴⁸ Nguapitshi Kayongo, 135.

⁴⁹ Kee, *Christianity: A Social and Cultural History*, 763; McManners and others, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, 599.

⁵⁰ Raija Warkentin, "Begging As Resistance: Wealth and Christian Missionaries in Postcolonial Zaire," *Missiology* 29, no. 2 (2001), 145–47.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 148–49.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 152.

⁵³ Sue Kossew, "Traditions in Transit," *Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics, Economy* 10, no. 3 (2007), 339.

⁵⁴ Musa W. Dube, "Theological Challenges: Proclaiming the Fulness of Life in the HIV/AIDS & Global Economic Era," *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 363 (2002), 535–36.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 537.

⁵⁶ David R. Catchpole, "The Mission Charge in Q" , no. 55 (1991), 155–56.

⁵⁷ Dube, 538, 541, 543.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 541.

⁵⁹ Kwok Pui-Lan, "Postcolonialism, feminism, and biblical interpretation," in Philip L. Wickeri, ed., *Scripture, Community, and Mission: Essays in Honour of D. Preman Niles* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference in Asia, 2001), 261.

⁶⁰ Katja Heidemanns, "Missiology of Risk?: Explorations in Mission Theology From a German Feminist Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 93, no. 368 (2004), 111–14.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 114, 118.