

CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEST AND AFRICA: A BRIEF COMPARISON

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***Abstract:** A cognitive shift has occurred in recent centuries, a shift from understanding and experiencing reality in terms of spiritual forces to a rationality of functional instrumentality. In the West, this shift has largely peripheralised consciousness of spiritual forces. In Africa, by contrast, this is much less the case. Yet this shift seems an essential element of modernity. If Africa is to take its rightful place in the modern world and play its part in addressing the huge problems of modernity, Africa too will have to embrace this shift.*

Key Words: Cognitive shift; Enchantment; Modernity; Pentecostalism; Secularisation.

Introduction

This article addresses religion in the West and Africa, but the brief comparison will broach the topic obliquely, in terms of what can be labelled a cognitive shift. Historically, for people everywhere, the ordinary, natural, and immediate way of experiencing and understanding reality has been in terms of otherworldly forces. But in the last few centuries, a new cognitive culture arose among Western elites, leading to a new way of experiencing and understanding reality generally. Calling it the scientific revolution is often disputed, and that term itself did not take hold until the 1930s.¹

Nevertheless, one can say that between 1572 (the appearance of Brahe's nova) and 1704 (the publication of Newton's *Opticks*), a recognizably new consciousness emerged. Reasoning ceased to be about drawing conclusions from principles, premises and authorities; it was built on observation, experiment, and measurement. Collingwood summed up this cognitive revolution:

¹ Steven Shapin's treatment memorably begins: "There is no such thing as the Scientific Revolution, and this is a book about it." Cf. Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1.

Soon after the beginning of (the seventeenth) century, a number of intelligent people in western Europe began to see in a settled and steady manner what a few here and there had seen by fits and starts for the last hundred years or more: namely that the problems which ever since the time of early Greek philosophy had gone by the collective name of ‘physics’ were capable of being restated in a shape in which, with the double weapon of experiment and mathematics, one could now solve them.²

The shift drew considerable opposition since it involved the down-playing of previous authorities like Galen, Plutarch, Ptolemy and above all Aristotle and the Bible, long considered virtually unchallengeable repositories of truth. The shift was not concerned only with observation, experiment, and measurement: obviously, one of the triggers of this shift was the discovery of the new world, which at a stroke destroyed one of the planks of prior cosmology, the ‘two-spheres theory,’ which foreclosed the possibility of any antipodes. Wootton calls the publication of the Latin translation of these voyages ‘the discovery of discovery;’ it legitimated, across the board, the quest for novelty because it revealed once and for all that previous authorities had not known everything. Facts were facts – and theoretical considerations had to give way in the face of facts. In 1507 the relationship between theory and evidence changed and changed forever.³

This shift occurred everywhere across Europe, though Britain was undoubtedly the leader in the industrial revolution strictly so called, the application of this new consciousness to technological developments that came somewhat later (conventionally AD 1760-1820/40). Clearly, this was more than a mere cognitive shift; this new style of knowing depended on and in turn promoted an entire social and cultural revolution – and technological too, for obviously, printing was crucial in this market of ideas. Over time, knowledge enhancing conditions of human life came to overshadow any other kind of knowledge. Moral considerations could not stand in the light of established facts. Moreover, the knowledge so gained was by definition provisional or incomplete – it was always open to be corrected

² R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: OUP, 1978), 78.

³ David Wootton, *The Invention of Science: a New History of the Scientific Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), 137f.

in the light of new and better techniques. Progress became obvious – not in any moral sense, but in the sense that newer approaches and methods could be more powerful and productive.

There is little agreement as to why the intellectual, moral and socio-political shift occurred where and when it did. There seems a considerable element of the fortuitous in it. Gellner refers to fifteen different suggested explanations, which in some combination may provide the answer. He concludes:

It is unlikely that we shall ever know with precision the precise path by which we have escaped from the idiocy of rural life (Karl Marx's phrase). An enormously complex, multi-faceted historical process took place: the record is fragmentary and at the same time overburdened with data. Many factors are inherently inaccessible, and the practical and conceptual problems involved in disentangling the threads will in all probability remain insoluble.⁴

'Useful knowledge' became so fruitful, continually delivering obvious benefits, that in the minds of many it came to displace any other kind of enquiry altogether. It may not be a matter *of necessity*, but *in fact*, more and more people in the West seem to have grown so used to understanding causality on the plane of functional rationality that they see no need to go further. For example, when malaria is identified as the cause of death, science has established that this is caused by the plasmodium parasite transmitted by the bite of an infected anopheles mosquito, and most see no need to enquire further about the malign spirit force that led *that* particular mosquito to bite *this* particular individual; bad luck, or carelessness, or statistical probability are sufficient explanations.

This change in consciousness from explanation in terms of spiritual forces to a rationality of functional instrumentality, it is my argument, has driven the awareness of explanatory spiritual causes to the periphery. It is almost impossible in the West today to experience reality in the taken-for-granted manner of the past. Those affected by this change experience and understand reality in a way different from that of previous ages, because tending to bypass (if not

⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book: the Structure of Human History* (London: Collins Harvill, 1988), 170.

necessarily deny) the superhuman forces hitherto taken for granted as ultimate explanatory factors. Writing of *The Supernatural in Tudor and Stuart England*, Oldridge writes:

The intellectual, social and physical environment overwhelmingly encouraged the acceptance of otherworldly powers. It is one measure of this fact that the contemplation of the natural world led routinely to the confirmation of supernatural beliefs, just as today it provides evidence of scientific naturalism.⁵

Exactly. As late as the Tudors and Stuarts, the 16th and 17th centuries, people in Britain experienced reality in terms of otherworldly forces, and their everyday experience reinforced that perception. Today most don't, and their everyday experience reinforces a markedly different worldview. "Above all," writes Weinberg, "we must not imagine that our predecessors thought the way we think, only with less information."⁶

The shift traced here, the rise of a new cognitive style, constitutes a watershed; many would say *the* watershed in the history of humankind. This shift has changed the conditions of human life. Up till about 1800, the standard of living on all continents was roughly the same; very low indeed by today's measure. Before then, economic growth based on technological change barely existed. But the intellectual shift that gave rise to natural science, the application of science and technology to production and its accompanying refinements, have produced continuous innovation and increase. This shift has been so powerful that it has swept all before it and explains the recent configuration of the world's dominant powers.

To make this point is not to imply some moral superiority of the modern. Nor is it some glorification of a particular sector of humanity over others. However, this shift and the changes it has wrought are the defining facts of our times.

You cannot understand the human condition if you ignore or deny its total transformation by the success of the scientific revolution... (This) has totally transformed the terms of reference in

⁵ Darren Oldridge, *The Supernatural in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Routledge, 2016), 42.

⁶ Steven Weinberg, "Eye on the Present – the Whig History of Science," *NYRB* 17 (December 2015): 82.

which human societies operate. To pretend that the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, and its eventual application in the later stage of the industrial revolution have not transformed the world but are merely changes from one culture to another, is simply an irresponsible affectation.⁷

This is not some racist argument. The significant thing about this new mindset is that it is *not* restricted to particular peoples, but is transcultural; this ‘cognitive strategy (would be) the correct strategy in *any* world.’ This cognitive shift originated in Europe, but it was a revolution which happened in Europe, not a European revolution. It is not ‘Western’ in any hard sense, like ‘in Western genes,’ for it came to the West only recently, haltingly and fortuitously. Countries where this shift could never have originated – like China – have perhaps now done much more with it than those where it originated.⁸

Religion, of course, whatever else it is, is ultimately an explanation of reality, an explanation historically and virtually universally in terms of otherworldly forces. Religion has not remained untouched by this cognitive shift. The secularization thesis argues that with modernity, religion loses its salience because of differentiation, socialisation (the move from rural to urban), and rationalization. It is widely presumed that the secularization thesis is discredited. This presumption is incorrect. For my purposes here, I am stressing the element of rationalization. A brief illustration makes the point simply: contrast the church’s response to the Black Death of 1348-50 with its response to the current Covid pandemic. In the first the solution was special prayers, fasting, penance, novenas, and masses; in the second, it was to throw billions of dollars into vaccines.

The second part of this article relates this shift to the contemporary religious scene in both the West and (by contrast) Africa. The Western Christian past was marked by this virtually universal reference to the otherworldly. Most forms of Christianity throughout history have surely been enchanted in this sense. Peter Brown has even claimed that the greatest single reason for the triumph of early Christianity was that it was superior to its rivals precisely in its claim to

⁷ Ernest Gellner, “A Case of the Liberal’s New Clothes,” *Guardian*, November 1, 1995, 8.

⁸ Joel Mokyr, *A Culture of Growth: the Origins of the Modern Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 338.

have conquered the spirits so threatening to inhabitants of the late Roman Empire.⁹ For the early Christian apologists, “the redemptive operation of Christ lay in deliverance from demons rather than in deliverance from sin.”¹⁰

In an article covering Christian history up to about AD 600, Brown states: “Men joined the new community to be delivered from the demons; From the NT onwards, the Christian mission was a mission of ‘driving out’ demons.”¹¹ Such enchanted thinking was prominent in the West until relatively recent times. Cameron in his *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion 1250-1750* has shown that elements of an enchanted worldview were common in Europe’s Middle Ages: the changeling, or human child replaced by a demonic one; ingesting a demon through food; sexual intercourse between spirits and humans; the ‘evil eye;’ charms and spells; hybrid practices in which rituals were combined with particular herbs; rituals to counter hostile sorcery; spirit possession and exorcisms; physical objects or fetishes considered specially empowered; divination through apparitions and dreams and through casting lots (like bones); omens; out-of-body flight with demonic forces; the demonic insertion of foreign matter into humans; pacts with demonic agents.

But Western Christianity greatly changed in line with the cognitive shift outlined above. I have argued that this is the biggest single reason for secularization: not that this new cognitive style has disproved the otherworldly realm, but it has so peripheralised it that adverting to it is something now quite countercultural. One can believe in otherworldly forces, but that requires a shift onto another plane which has become increasingly less natural. Hence the empty churches in Europe, a phenomenon admittedly much less obvious in America, but the prominence of religion in America has often been misinterpreted. Christianity is in America invoked incessantly, far more than in Europe, and why this should be so is a fascinating question, but this is no argument for ‘American exceptionalism’ or the claim that America has resisted secularisation, and as the most modern country

⁹ Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 55.

¹⁰ A. D. Nock, *Conversion: the Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 222.

¹¹ Peter Brown, “Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity from late Antiquity into the Middle Ages,” in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, ed. Mary Douglas (London: Tavistock, 1970), 40.

of all thereby refutes the secularisation thesis. This is because, as Bryan Wilson noted years ago, in America no less than in other technologically advanced countries,

For every social problem, whether of economy, polity, law, education, family relations or recreation, the solutions proposed are not only non-religious, but solutions that depend on technical expertise and bureaucratic organization. Planning, not revelation; rational order, not inspiration; systematic routine, not charismatic or traditional action, are the imperatives in ever widening arenas of public life.¹²

Even for those insisting on creationism, Wilson remarks: “This pious biblicism appears to have no impact whatsoever on the assumptions on which the social system operates.”¹³ Wilson calls this ‘internal secularization’ or a hollowing out in accord with this cognitive shift. This is what Peter Berger was referring to in his lament that so many forms of American Christianity

proposed an understanding of Christianity divested of its transcendent (or, if you will, cosmic or supernatural) core. Conversely, they reinterpreted Christianity as a moral code, a therapeutic instrument, or a political agenda. All these... were accommodations to a secularism dominant in elite culture.¹⁴

The West, USA preeminently, has become undoubtedly productive, affluent and powerful. However, the rationality of functional instrumentality that has brought this affluence, freedom and dominance has major limitations that perhaps many do not see: it is no help in either the very small or the very large issues; it doesn’t help to choose a life-partner or sustain a marriage, nor does it provide easy answers to how the nation-state might handle inequality or coexist with rivals, competitors or allies. And there are several dangers ahead, some of which are rapidly becoming inescapable.

First, and now most obvious, the link with heavy extractive industries so obvious in modernity’s early phase has so affected our

¹² Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (London: OUP, 1982), 176f.

¹³ Wilson, *Religion*, 38.

¹⁴ Peter Berger, *Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist; how to Explain the World without Becoming a Bore* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2011), 132f.

climate that life as we know it is itself endangered; no bigger problem is imaginable. Second, and closely related, government by growth cannot go on forever. Increasing prosperity has enabled some countries to be relatively free without the coercive social restraints hitherto necessary; in Gellner's words, "saturation point must be reached eventually, when the washing machine will no longer deputise for the executioner as the foundation of social order."¹⁵ Third, advanced modernity has inevitably led to gross international inequalities engendering massive labour migrations and giving rise to unsustainable tensions. Fourth, the same inequalities are becoming evident within individual countries, leading to polarization which threatens the uneasy if functional political stability of even the quite recent past. Fifth, some societies may prove incapable of reaching even the messy social coexistence characterising advanced consumer societies and may decline into populism, criminality and authoritarianism. Sixth, a free market in incommensurate values, none of them socially or doctrinally underwritten, may produce an intolerable moral void.

A recent article by Andrew Walker entitled 'What we Lose in the Decline of Cultural Christianity' responds directly to those calling for the 'death of the Bible Belt' on the grounds that it is a construct "that misappropriated Christianity to consolidate cultural power."¹⁶ He admits there are elements of truth in that perception, and all Christians want Christianity to be as pure as possible; Christianity *has* fused with American culture. Yet Walker warns against too quickly celebrating the decline of that fusion:

From concepts like dignity, justice, and rights to the centrality of the family to the idea of life having an ultimate purpose [he later adds the university, the hospital, even basic charity]—all of these have found unique expression in Western civilization as the result of Christianity... When you define well-being in *material terms only*, it's easy to miss that alongside growing secularism is a shrinking marriage rate, surges in addiction and suicide, and a whole new category we call the "loneliness epidemic." As society

¹⁵ Gellner, "A Case," 29.

¹⁶ Presumably he is referring here to the use of Christianity to underpin racial oppression.

sheds its Christian foundations, there will be a serious detriment to human flourishing. We should mourn this as Christians.¹⁷

He is posing the question: if a society becomes underpinned by little more in the way of values than power, profit and productivity, can it survive?

The problems are undeniable. However, this cognitive shift and its consequences are surely irreversible. Calls to return to an earlier age – opting out of modernity – are of little use, and (much the same thing) talk of ‘rejecting the Enlightenment’ is equally unhelpful.

Turning to Africa, the situation is clearly different. Africa is less marked by this cognitive shift than has become the norm in the West. Appiah states it bluntly:

Most Africans, now, whether converted to Islam or Christianity or not, still share the beliefs of their ancestors in an ontology of invisible beings. (This is of course, true of many Europeans and Americans as well.)... These beliefs in invisible agents mean that most Africans cannot fully accept those scientific theories in the West that are inconsistent with it.¹⁸

Thus in Africa, the natural, ordinary and immediate way of experiencing reality is often enough through spiritual forces. Accordingly, religion can remain surprisingly unaffected by the cognitive shift mentioned above and remain concerned primarily with the explanation, prediction and control of these spiritual forces. In the West, these functions have been largely relegated to science, leaving religion concerned with communion with the divine. Thus the scientific worldview “has driven a great wedge between the religion of the industrial world and the religion of traditional cultures.”¹⁹ This can lead to considerable incomprehension and misunderstanding. Appiah insists: “For the modern Westerner... to call something ‘religious’ is to connote a great deal that is lacking in traditional religion

¹⁷ Andrew T. Walker, “What we lose in the Decline of Cultural Christianity,” *EPPC Newsletter*, May 5, 2021, 3.

¹⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In my Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: OUP, 1992), 134.

¹⁹ Appiah, *In my Father's House*, 115.

and not to connote much that is present.”²⁰ These are the issues that need addressing. It is because some are prepared to avoid them that discussion of African Christianity is sometimes disingenuous.

Of course, ‘Africa’ is every bit as much an ideal construct as is ‘The West’; Mali is not Malawi, Chad is not Botswana. Yet despite the variety, there is a recognisable uniformity in spirit worldview, well illustrated in a study like Westerlund’s of disease causation. Westerlund considers the hunter-gatherer San, the pastoralist Maasai, the settled and mainly agricultural Sukuma, Kongo and Yoruba. The San have a high god and one other lesser deity; the Maasai are very theocentric, with a high god but few other spiritual beings; the Sukuma focus on *ancestral* spirits, virtually neglecting other spiritual beings. The Kongo add fetishes or enspirited objects to other forces; the Yoruba have an entire pantheon of divinities, their *orisha*, gods of iron, thunder, even a god of smallpox. Nor are any of these slightly diverse worldviews static; in all these cases, there has been in recent years a significant shift from spiritual forces as causative of misfortune to supranormal living humans or witches – the term is not perfect, but for our purposes here let it stand; and it is the term used throughout Africa itself.²¹

There is not the space here to go into this in any detail; however, in my experience the enchanted worldview is pervasive. For example, albinism, a melanin deficiency that leaves sufferers vulnerable to cancer, is reckoned to be 500% higher in East Africa than among Caucasians, about one in 4,000. Tanzania is estimated to have about 200,000 albinos. In late 2008 reports emerged that about 35 albinos had been killed in Tanzania that year (unreported cases were probably much higher). The reason was the belief that albino body parts through their spiritual potency can help politicians win elections, make businessmen fantastically rich overnight, cure infertility and ward off evil spirits. The Tanzanian government appointed an albino woman to parliament to protect albinos’ rights. In central Africa, in Gabon, the Association for the prevention of Ritual Crimes denounced the twenty ritual murders in the early months of 2013. So too in the West of the continent, in Senegal, in the run-up to the 2012

²⁰ Appiah, *In my Father’s House*, 121.

²¹ David Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation: from Spiritual Beings to Living Humans* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

general elections, mysterious deaths were widely seen as a ritual human sacrifice for success in the elections. Children were warned not to go home from school unaccompanied, and albinos were considered to be in particular danger. In the legislative assembly, just after the elections, a deputy shouted across to the benches of the previous government: “Since you have lost power, albinos sleep in peace and we no longer find human remains in the streets.”²² Nobody asked: What did that mean? What was he saying? Everyone knows full well. In April 2022 a Catholic priest in Malawi was among a dozen convicted of murdering a 22-year-old albino in 2018, to extract the bones for financial benefit; the priest was the victim’s brother. At that time Malawi witnessed a veritable spree in which more than 40 albino murders and 145 assaults were reported. There is no need to pile up further examples, but to bring home the prevalence of this inspired religious imagination: a 2010 United Nations report claims that in the Central African Republic, 25% of all cases brought to court in the capital Bangui, and 80-90% in CAR’s rural courts, concerned witchcraft. As a result, 70% of prisoners in Bangui’s central prison were there on the basis of witchcraft accusations.²³

Consider an example from Uganda, where in the late 1980s, the Acholi were being targeted by Museveni’s NRA. Alice Lakwena, an Acholi healer, led her Holy Spirit Movement, which she saw as Christian, concerned with the purification of society from sin, set to purge the land of witchcraft and evil (considered rife in that time of crisis). She was possessed by several spirits, the most prominent an Italian,²⁴ but several others too, all foreign (American, Chinese, Zairean, Korean, and even Arab),²⁵ and they would all speak through her, at different times, in distinctive personae. The spirits would sometimes contradict themselves, and even her, which allowed portions of the message to be correct.²⁶ Besides her followers of perhaps 10,000, she claimed to be accompanied by 140,000 spirits, many Christians, and others of bees, snakes, rivers, rocks and mountains

²² *Observateur*, December 18, 2012, 8.

²³ UNICEF, *Children Accused of Witchcraft: an Anthropological Study of Contemporary Practices in Africa* (Dakar: UNICEF, 2010), 39f.

²⁴ Heike Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda 1985-97* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), 134.

²⁵ Behrend, *Alice Lakwena*, 134f.

²⁶ Behrend, *Alice Lakwena*, 142.

and of soldiers who died, their spirits rejoining and fighting alongside her after a short stay in purgatory.²⁷ She initially had great success, even threatening the capital Kampala, but her army suffered eventual defeat at Jinja in 1987, after which her followers presumed the spirits had left her, and she fled to Kenya and died soon after. Related movements took over, most notably the LRA of Joseph Kony who introduced completely new spirits, including one named after Bruce Lee.²⁸

Consider another case from Liberia. The late John Peel was an anthropologist of renown. Peel spent many months of several of his last years in the Robertsport area in Liberia's southwest where his wife was promoting human rights with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). He used to accompany his wife on her duties, essentially to attend witch-finding sessions to ensure that no illegal force or violence was used but "without intervening in local *cultural* activities." In letters to friends, Peel describes these in detail and with admirable academic objectivity, but after recounting one witch-finding session in which 22 villagers had confessed to being witches and the village had managed to reduce the community's witch-cleansing fee to \$200, Peel's objectivity fails him. Peel wrote that these recurrent witch-finding procedures

...(drive) away most of my anthropological relativism and (make) me feel like a missionary: "O may the Lord open their eyes"...What is more depressing: the humiliation of these wretched souls by their neighbors and kinsfolk for their absurd supposed misdeeds, or the spectacle of poor people in a poor community blaming themselves for their poverty, with the connivance of a state that preaches development at them?²⁹

Note Peel's suggestion that a missionary would take a less neutral stance than an anthropologist towards such cultural practices. One may wonder whether that is still the case.

Numerous studies reveal the same enchanted thinking: Heike Behrend in Western Uganda; Harry West in the northern plateau of Mozambique, Mary Douglas in Zaire, David Lan in Zimbabwe's Zambesi Valley, Isaac Niehaus and Adam Ashforth in South Africa,

²⁷ Behrend, *Alice Lakwena*, xii; 133.

²⁸ Behrend, *Alice Lakwena*, 185.

²⁹ JDY Peel, *Letters from Liberia* (London: Center of African Studies SOAS, 2016), 66.

Bob Priest's studies of the 50,000 alleged child witches in Kinshasa.³⁰

The result is a bizarre schizophrenia characterising contemporary Christian presence in Africa. The mainline churches, perhaps particularly the Catholic Church, are almost defined by their involvement in development – schools, now universities, clinics, public health, literacy – development projects of every kind, to the extent that in their huge dedication to furthering this functional rationality, Christian bodies make up arguably the biggest single development agency on the continent. But, equally salient are the mushrooming newer churches often called Pentecostal, a label which with appropriate qualification is not too misleading. I have long argued that the greatest single reason for the success of so many of them is that they cater specifically for this enspirited mindset; no longer is it necessary to practice what has been labelled 'dual allegiance,' attending a mainline church on Sunday, but quietly visiting the healer-diviner on a weeknight to identify the spirit forces responsible for misfortunes. In so many of these churches, you can have this done on Sunday by the pastor. I have elsewhere described many of these churches in Ghana, Liberia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe.³¹ As you would expect from the argument here, I do not see such churches contributing much to bring Africa into the modern world. Because, for all the problems associated with this functionally rational mindset, not least for Christianity and theology itself, that is the way the world runs today. If Africa is to take its rightful place in the modern world, it will, in my opinion, need to come to terms with it.

It is to make the same point to say that the term 'African epistemologies' needs to be unpacked. Laura van Broekhoven, director of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, argues: "Real decoloniality is to see each

³⁰ Heike Behrend, *Resurrecting Cannibals: the Catholic Church, Witch-Hunts and the Production of Pagans in Western Uganda* (New York: James Currey, 2011); Harry West, *Ethnographic Sorcery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Harry West, *Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press West, 2005); Mary Douglas, "Sorcery Accusations Unleashed: the Lele Revisited 1987," *Africa* 69 (1999): 177-93; David Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (London: James Currey, 1985); Isak Niehaus, *Witchcraft and a Life in the New South Africa* (Cambridge: CUP for IAI, 2013); Adam Ashforth, *Madumo: a Man Bewitched* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

³¹ Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (London: Hurst; New York: OUP, 2015).

other's knowledge systems as equal."³² Similarly, Ellis and ter Haar write of "taking African epistemologies seriously."³³ Athanasio Dzadagu argues that Europeans should take no pride in bringing school education to Africa, for "this was primarily in order to destroy African languages and modes of original thinking, as well as to get Africans to understand instructions that would serve to increase economic production for the Eurogenics."³⁴ What exactly is implied by 'African modes of original thinking'? It is hardly adequate to allude in passing and move on. Dzadagu laments that with Western education, "the African way of viewing the world gets thrown out the window."³⁵ He does not elaborate. But does he consider the 'Eurogenic world view' the functional instrumentality that has created the world of air travel, computers, and the Moderna anti-Covid vaccination? Is it helpful to label it Eurogenic, if that implies it must be rejected? Is a causality of pervasive spirit forces to be preferred? As I have argued, the glaring inequality of power of diverse cognitive styles is the defining fact of our times. Other forms of knowing cannot compete:

One particular style of knowledge has proved so overwhelmingly powerful, economically, militarily, administratively, that all societies have had to make their peace with it and adopt it. Some have done it more successfully than others, and some more willingly or more quickly than others; but all of them have had to do it, or perish. Some have retained more, and some less, of their previous cultures.³⁶

Here I have tried to argue that our modern world is something totally new; and present affluence, well-being and freedom depend on the cognitive style that underpins it, a cognitive style which peripheralises a worldview attributing causality to spiritual forces. This cognitive shift and the resulting affluence haven't brought paradise; far from it, the problems it has posed are becoming inescapable and require urgent solutions, not least from churches and theologians. However, these are the problems of our time, and if Africa is to take

³² Laura van Broekhoven, cited in *Economist*, February 15, 2020, 24.

³³ Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, "Religion and Politics," *JMAS* 45, no. 3 (2007): 385-401.

³⁴ Athanasio Dzadagu, *Recollections and Reflections: the British Journey of One Former African Priest* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2016), 107.

³⁵ Dzadagu, *Recollections and Reflections*, 56.

³⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), 21.

its rightful place in the community of nations, it must take its share of responsibility for addressing them too.

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