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The value of anthropology for missiological engagements with context: The case of witch accusations

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Abstract
This article reviews an earlier history where anthropology came to be valued as playing a significant role within missiological education, and considers the more recent partial decline of professional anthropology within missiological institutions. It calls for a revaluing of anthropology for what it contributes to missiology and contextual theology. To illustrate the sorts of strength that anthropology brings to missiology, the article examines the old anthropological topic of witchcraft accusations, a topic that turns out to be remarkably contemporary because of its significant revitalized presence in churches in major regions of the world. The article considers contemporary dynamics where church leaders themselves participate in witch accusations, and attempts to showcase the sorts of considerations that an anthropological approach contributes to missiology.

Keywords
anthropology and missiology, witchcraft accusations, world Christianity, contextualization

On a Sunday morning 18 years ago Americans opened their newspapers to see a *Parade Magazine* interview with Dr. Billy Graham, the former president of the University of Northwestern where our American Society of Missiology (ASM) meetings are being

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held. When asked, do you have any regrets, Graham replied, he wished he had "studied more . . . (and) gotten a PhD in anthropology" (Greer, 1996: 6).

What a remarkable regret. Graham himself had majored in anthropology at Wheaton College, a reflection of his interest in becoming a missionary (Graham, 2007: 64, 65, 73). Anthropology was a popular major for Wheaton students planning to be missionaries. Many missiologists in that era were narrowly focused on sociological "who" questions: Who does the evangelism? Who pays the bills? Who calls the shots? And later, who does the theological education, the theologizing? If it was local people doing each of these, then the church was said to be indigenous—even if local Christians and their churches were culturally conflicted and foreign. But Wheaton College students planning to be missionaries majored in anthropology under accomplished professors like Dr. Grigolia. They called themselves "culture vultures," and made cultural considerations in service of Christian mission a central concern. Summers for many involved traveling to Norman, Oklahoma to study linguistics and anthropology under famous missionary scholars like Ken Pike and Eugene Nida. Many Wheaton graduates went on to have notable careers as missiological anthropologists (such as Marvin Mayers, Charles Kraft, Sherwood Lingenfelter, and Miriam Adeney), either doing their doctoral work in standard anthropology departments, or, like Kraft, going to the Kennedy School of Missions at Hartford Seminary, where they could do doctoral work under noted linguists William Welmers, William J. Samarin, and Al Gleason, the sociologist Peter Berger, and anthropologists Absolom Vilikazi, Paul Leser, Morris Steggerda, and Edwin Smith.

In 1953 Robert Taylor, a Wheaton college anthropology professor, founded the journal *Practical Anthropology*, intended to demonstrate the value of anthropology for missionary practice, a journal subsequently edited by Eugene Nida of the American Bible Society. A team of linguist-anthropologists (including Charles Kraft, Jacob Loewen, Marie Fetzer Reyburn, William Reyburn, William Smalley, Charles Taber, and William Wonderly) led by Eugene Nida formed an "invisible college" of missiological anthropologists communicating closely with each other, reading and providing feedback on each other's work, consulting with field missionaries, and filling the pages of *Practical Anthropology* with field-based and practically oriented anthropological articles for field missionaries. As a result there was an explosion of interest in anthropology by field missionaries, with thousands subscribing to the journal. My own parents, Bible College graduates, made their summer pilgrimages along with hundreds of other young people to Norman Oklahoma to study with Ken Pike. And as missionaries my parents each published articles in the flagship journal *The American Anthropologist* (Anne Priest, 1964, Perry Priest, 1966).

From its beginnings in the mid-1960s Fuller's *School of World Mission*, benefitting from the interest in anthropology that the journal *Practical Anthropology* had inspired among field missionaries and following the earlier lead of the Kennedy School of Missions at Hartford, hired anthropology faculty (Alan Tippett, Ralph Winter, Charles Kraft, Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, Sherwood Lingenfelter), with other seminaries such as Asbury (Darrell Whiteman, Mike Rynkiewich, Steve Ybarrola, and Sue Russell) and Trinity (Paul Hiebert and Robert Priest) following Fuller's lead. In addition to anthropologists at these schools, missiologists today have studied under a wide variety

of missiological anthropologists, including Louis Luzbetak, Tony Gittins, Enoch Wan, Miriam Adeney, Marvin Mayers, and Douglas Pennoyer, to name a few. Far more than in Europe, anthropology historically played a central role in American missiology—bringing the concern with culture and human context to the center of missiological scholarship, with a high proportion of American missiologists having acquired anthropological understandings and skills under such professors.

In the 1970s there was a shift in missiological vocabulary from indigeneity (which fixated narrowly on sociological "who" questions) to contextualization (which made cultural dynamics a more central concern); but this vocabulary shift long postdated the actual shift to a culture focus exemplified during the preceding decades in the pages of *Practical Anthropology*. And of course the contributors to *Practical Anthropology* had been largely either anthropologically trained missionaries or Christian anthropologists serving as field consultants to missionaries. The journal thus had limited links to American theological institutions, and did not formally frame its contribution as "missiology."

The year 1973 marked the founding of the American Society of Missiology, an important milestone in the institutionalization of missiology departments within American theological education. The ASM took over the journal *Practical Anthropology* and rebranded it *Missiology: An International Review.* Its first editor Alan Tippett was an anthropologist and former missionary, but his social location was that of seminary professor. The very name "missiology" located the field as a subset of theological studies, and over the years six out of seven editors of the renamed journal have been seminary professors. Missiology was a discipline that integrated anthropology with other theological disciplines towards the end that Christian mission be wisely and effectively carried out. This created an expanded space for missiological anthropology within theological education and helped introduce thousands of missionaries and missiologists to anthropology. And the very fact that I, an anthropologist and seminary professor, speak to you this year as president of the ASM might seem to signal the ongoing institutionalized centrality of anthropology to American missiology. But matters probably are not what they seem.

A couple years ago Darrell Whiteman introduced me at the ASM as the "youngest" anthropologist he was aware of in any missiology program. In the last weeks as I've visited doctors' offices for help with gout, it's dawned on me that maybe Darrell wasn't complimenting me on how youthful I am but rather sounding a warning about the gout-ridden state of anthropology within missiological institutions. As an older generation of anthropologists in missiology programs increasingly moves off the scene, and with a younger generation of anthropologists not (yet) being brought in to replace them, reassessing where we are with missiological anthropology would seem in order.

At one level missiology's increasing disconnect with anthropology is surprising, given the emerging and exciting focus on Christianity within anthropology today, led by wonderful scholars like Joel Robbins, Brian Howell, Marla Frederick, Edwin Zehner, or Naomi Haynes. Never before has there been a time when the potential overlap of anthropological and missiological research and writing interests has been greater. And yet at no time in the last sixty years has the outlook for missiological engagement

with anthropology looked more dismal. There are doubtless many reasons for this. Given space constraints, let me briefly discuss one.

The social location of missiology within theological institutions exposes missiology to the pervasive preference by theologians for interdisciplinary interaction with the humanities and against the social sciences. Consider the pattern as exemplified in an influential non-theologian, the philologist C.S. Lewis. The hero of Lewis's science fiction is the philologist Ransom, while the wimpy sociologist Mark Studdock is mocked for false pretentions to knowledge and insight (*That Hideous Strength*). Lewis's fictional demon Screwtape tells his demon nephew Wormwood that students should be kept away from physical science—because the physical sciences lead to God, but that if they wish to study, they should be encouraged to study sociology, a discipline presumably firmly in the devil's camp (Lewis, 1942: 4).

Consider theologian Alister McGrath. In his *Scientific Theology* (2006: 7ff.) he points out that historically theologians made philosophy their dialogue partner (their *ancilla theologiae*), and sets forth his own proposal to make the physical sciences serve as a new dialogue partner for theologians (an *ancilla theologiae nova*). But in a several-page disquisition (15–18), McGrath insists that the social sciences must not be allowed to play such a dialogue partner role. McGrath is not an outlier. The pattern is long-term, but in recent decades has intensified under the influence of John Milbank's (1990) misrepresentations of social science. Like Lewis, McGrath and Milbank locate social science in the devil's camp. The result of such a pattern is that even when theologians choose to focus on topics that are the bread and butter of anthropological and sociological research and writing, such as in Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*, it is Nietzsche and Derrida that Volf interacts with, not the anthropologists and sociologists who've actually empirically studied ethnicity, caste, racial categorization, red-lining, and so on. The social sciences, in the minds of many theologians, should not be allowed a dialogue partner role. And this unfortunately influences the environment in which missiology must justify its own existence.

Some will remember ASM meetings a decade ago where we were invited to consider missiology's relations with key disciplines. For history, two historians, Dana Robert and Jehu Hancile, described how as historians they interface with, and contribute to, missiology. But for anthropology, rather than hear in a parallel fashion from anthropologists, we heard from radical orthodoxy theologian Barry Harvey, who informed us that anthropology had no legitimate place within missiology. Darrell Whiteman and I were allowed short responses, but had to focus on rebutting attacks on our very presence in missiology rather than positively spelling out how as anthropologists we interface with and contribute to missiology.

In his recent award-winning book *Understanding Christian Mission*, Scott Sunquist indicates that a key part of the argument "of this book is that missiology must resist being taken captive by the social sciences" (2013: 2). While I certainly agree that the missiological use of anthropology or sociology poses challenges, I question whether the "taken captive" language is helpful for considering the complexity of appropriate engagement with the social sciences. Consider church-growth theory. While I'm sympathetic to some critiques of McGavran's church-growth theory, I've argued elsewhere

that McGavran's weaknesses were less because of too much social science, as many have alleged, but rather because of too superficial an engagement with the human sciences (Priest, 2009). Admittedly sociologists and anthropologists sometimes propagate ideas inconsistent with Christian faith. Indeed I have spent much of my life exploring this (see for example Priest, 1987, 1993, 2001). But this is equally true of historians and philosophers. Missiology as an interdisciplinary field naturally must work hard to think critically and theologically about ideas and assumptions of scholarship from every discipline that we engage—whether from the humanities or the social sciences. And while one can certainly find hostility to Christian faith in anthropology or sociology departments, such hostility would appear to be higher in English departments (C.S. Lewis's field) than in sociology departments, and roughly the same as in anthropology departments (Yancey, 2011: 75, 117, 120). Furthermore many top sociologists (such as Peter Berger, David Martin, Robert Wuthnow, James Davison Hunter, Christian Smith) have been influential in shaping their discipline, which to a lesser but surprising extent has also been true of anthropology (see Larsen, 2014). And missiology itself historically has been deeply indebted to the work of Christian anthropologists, and would benefit from stronger links to sociology.

In the last few years at the ASM we've reflected on the state and future of our discipline from a number of vantage points. Last year Dana Robert for example provided a wonderful overview from the standpoint of a historian. Since no one spoke of the state and future of missiology from the perspective of anthropology, I figured I'd use my platform here to put this in front of us. Let me acknowledge bluntly my biases. I am an anthropologist married to a sociologist. I think anthropology and sociology are wonderful fields for Christians to enter and use in service of Christian mission. I am excited that never before has there been greater and more sympathetic interest in world Christianity in these disciplines than today. Never before has there been more openness in anthropological settings to Christian scholars. But this appears to me to coincide with a contrasting pattern in many theological seminaries, where the dangers of social science are stressed and where social science is becoming less present in missiology than in previous decades.

Let me clarify that I'm not primarily concerned with whether younger anthropologists get hired in missiology departments, although naturally I will be disappointed if they are not. My concern rather is with missiology's relationship to the strength that anthropology represents. Anthropology represents a sustained focus through high-quality empirical research on understanding contemporary human sociocultural realities in all the variable contexts in which people live, and in which ministry is carried out, with such understandings informing ministry strategies, discourses and practices. A positive relationship with anthropology helps ensure that missiologists more broadly will continue to exemplify such a strong and sustained empirical focus on contemporary human realities. This is an important strength of American missiology at its best, a strength which I believe needs to be nurtured, valued, and protected.

Of course in the modern world, older cultural patterns related to relatively bounded ethno-linguistic groups have been transformed into new patterns involving global flows, hybridities, and new cultural formations. Thus it becomes very important that

our understandings of sociocultural dynamics are grounded in the contemporary world, not some imagined or idealized past. This is as important to remember in Africa as in America. However, some people imagine that new globalizing patterns create a global cultural homogeneity where everyone may be presumed to share a single culture, and thus where the strengths of anthropology are no longer needed. Such people assume that theological education in Nairobi, Hong Kong, and Chicago need not differ, since such education prepares people for ministry where context no longer varies. But in fact our world continues to exemplify new and variable sociocultural dynamics that continue to challenge us with how wisely to live out Christian witness and faith within diverse contexts.

Missiology at its best calls for interdisciplinary engagement with contextual realities—with anthropological strengths an essential part of this engagement. That is, a healthy missiology will not pit the theological and anthropological or historical in opposition to each other—but will allow each to contribute strategic strengths to the task. I value my four-year Bible College education. I value my three-year M.Div. Missiology allows for each of these, as well as my studies in social science and anthropology, to feed into the integrative work that missiology demands. In the remainder of my time, rather than attempting to justify in theoretical terms the importance of a missiology that integrates the anthropological with the theological, let me simply invite you to consider an old anthropological topic that continues to pose difficult challenges for contemporary Christian response, the topic of witchcraft. Since one whole track of the 2014 ASM meetings is devoted to this, let me use this occasion to introduce the topic and issues at stake, while simultaneously highlighting the limits of a theology divorced from anthropological understandings.

A couple years ago Rev. Basua (I use pseudonyms here) of Congo told me a story while showing me an accompanying home-made film of the key events. Basua's older relative, Nzuzi, an elder in a Methodist Church, had in more prosperous times paid for Basua's theological education. But Nzuzi's family, after experiencing financial setbacks, chronic illness, and family deaths, showed up at Basua's home seeking shelter and help.

Soon Nzuzi's children told Basua that they wondered if their family's mysterious financial problems, health problems, and deaths might be due to a witch—and named Nzuzi as their central suspect. While they knew Rev. Basua would be opposed to consulting a non-Christian diviner, they wondered if he was willing for them to consult a Christian prophet. Rev. Basua agreed, and the prophet was called.

Nzuzi, who, like me, suffered from pain in one foot, was misled into believing the prophet had come to treat his foot. The prophet told him he had a needle in his leg that needed to be removed. (As an aside my doctor asked me a few weeks ago if the pain in my foot felt like a needle piercing me. I said yes.) The prophet asked Nzuzi if he could feel the needle in his leg. Yes, he could! And so with everything on film the prophet proceeded to cut a hole, two inches in diameter, in the bottom of Nzuzi's foot. Nzuzi stoically endured. And then from the cloth being pressed against the wound a burst of smoke erupted, and when the cloth was removed, a needle was seen sticking out of the hole in his foot. The prophet then poured "olive oil" in one corner of the

room, with smoke rising from the oil (all of this on film) and picked up a tooth. Also on film were two serious burns on Nzuzi's upper back. Rev Basua said the Christian prophet had probed Nzuzi's back, and from two spots flames had spewed forth, but died out before filming could restart. All this time Nzuzi's participation in this painful process was based on his belief that he was being treated as a victim of witchcraft. But at the end of the session the prophet pronounced Nzuzi the powerful witch who killed people with the needle in his foot, who "ate" people with his witch tooth, and who traveled overnight supernaturally to distant places like Europe propelled by the jet engines in his back. The prophet claimed to have removed Nzuzi's witch power.

When anthropologists studied cultures around the world, they learned that in a small number of societies, as in the book of Job, the wise counselors, shamans, diviners or prophets of the culture told people that their afflictions were based on a karmic logic of punishment for their own sin. Much more commonly, anthropologists found societies where the wise counselors attributed misfortune (infertility, illness, economic setbacks, deaths) to a neighbor, relative, or colleague thought secretly to cause harm through a mysterious and malevolent power. While societies like Job's asked, "What did you do to deserve this?", these other societies asked, "Who did this to you?" Some of these societies treated the malevolent power as magical (involving acquired skills in manipulating words—such as with curses—or manipulating objects like voodoo dolls or graveyard dirt), others conceived the power as psychic (simply an in-born power requiring no verbal conjurations or manipulation of physical substances), and yet others as tied to spirits and their powers. In some societies, like the Aguaruna of Peru, only men were accused of killing through witchcraft. In others it is largely elderly widows. In yet others like the Ashaninka, also of Peru, it was mainly orphan children, and especially little girls. A wide variety of ideologies explained their supposed powers—although in pre-Christian societies this was virtually never associated with a supernatural Satan figure. In many societies people said that witches did not even know they were witches, with their malevolent power operating unconsciously to bring harm to others. In others the power was thought to operate through socially learned and manipulated magical technique. What these cultures shared in common was the pattern of attributing misfortune (infertility, economic problems, deaths, and health problems) to other neighbors, relatives, or colleagues—like Nzuzi—thought to have caused these misfortunes through mysterious and powerful evil.

The English word "witch" is like the word "football." For Americans football refers to a sport where a funny-looking ball is carried and thrown by hands. What everybody else in the world calls football, since the ball is guided by the foot, Americans insist on calling soccer. Conversations about football can be humorous when two people don't understand that even though they are using the same word, they are talking about two different realities. A similar issue arises with the words witch and witchcraft. For some these terms reference shamans, diviners, or traditional healers. But in most societies words that anthropologists translate as shaman, diviner, or traditional healer (such as *mganga* in Swahili) are lexically differentiated from a completely different class of persons thought to exercise malevolent, evil, supernatural power to harm relatives, neighbors, and colleagues. It is the latter concept (in Swahili *mchawi*) that anthropologists

translate as witch or sorcerer. In our case, it is Nzuzi, not the prophet, who was accused of being a witch. For some in the West these words bring to mind new forms of neopaganism or Wicca, often with feminist and ecological values and where the core ethical principle is said to be "first do no harm." But while Wiccans are certainly free to call themselves witches, which they do, just as Americans are free to call their sport football, I focus tonight on a usage just spelled out that is much more common worldwide.

Those who attend the ASM 2014 witchcraft track will learn from Steve Rasmussen about the scores of elderly widows among the Sukuma of Tanzania hacked to death with machetes each year, after being blamed for secretly murdering others through witchcraft. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu will allude to the witch camps of Ghana—so powerfully portrayed in Yaba Badoe's award-winning film *The Witches of Gambaga*—witch camps where hundreds of women have fled for their lives against the charge that they've harmed people through witchcraft. Mulumba Mukundi will describe the relatively new phenomenon now prevalent from Nigeria to Congo, Angola, and Malawi where orphan boys and girls are accused of having caused their parents' deaths through witchcraft. Zachs Gaiya will examine what happens when a pastor in Nigeria is accused of witchcraft. Timothy Nyasulu will reference the large number of Presbyterian church members in Malawi who undergo church discipline for consulting diviners trying to figure out who has bewitched them. Every presenter will report on witch realities, not from ancient history, but from our contemporary world.

A couple years ago I was invited to speak in chapel on witchcraft at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology. I agreed to do so on the condition that I could first survey NEGST seminarians. In the survey, co-prepared with Steve Rasmussen, we asked if people had ever had a relative, colleague, or neighbor that others had accused of having killed someone through witchcraft. More than 80% of the 161 respondents answered yes, with one out of ten saying they knew ten or more such accused neighbors and family members. In a seminary in the Congo Tim Stabell reported that 100% of respondents said they knew neighbors or family members accused of murdering others through witchcraft. In a follow-up survey (also with Rasmussen) in Kenya of another group of theologians and seminarians, 95% of respondents said they'd had people tell them they suspected that their health problems were due to a witch, with two thirds estimating that at least 20 people had told them their health problems were caused by a witch. Nearly two thirds reported that someone had told them they suspected their infertility was caused by a witch. Similarly 91% reported that people had told them their financial problems were due to malevolent witches. The same 91% said people had reported the death of a family member as caused by a witch, with a quarter of respondents saying at least 20 people had told them some family death was caused by a witch. When we asked people who reported personally knowing someone accused of being a witch what happened to the accused, 90% indicated they were shunned and avoided, 70% that they were verbally mocked or attacked, 68% that they were beaten up and physically attacked, 53% that they were driven out of home and community, 50% that their property was taken or destroyed, and 32% that they were killed. Of course, since it is often widows and orphans being

accused, even the milder consequence of being shunned and avoided is terribly consequential, as John Jusu's presentation will make clear.

Before I spoke at NEGST, I surveyed a group of 50 American seminarians in a New Testament course at Trinity with the same questions. Only two American students (4%) reported ever hearing anyone attribute a misfortune or death to the witchcraft of a neighbor, relative, or colleague—and one of them wrote a note on the side of his questionnaire clarifying it was while he was missionary in North India that he had experienced this.

When wanting to survey American seminarians, I asked a systematic theology professor who was teaching a course on the "The Problem of Evil" if he would be willing to administer my survey to his students. I suggested I could give him the comparative results of American vs. African seminarians, and that this would create a natural conversation for his course, given its focus. This theologian replied, "My course isn't concerned with things like that. This is a course on the problem of evil." Despite teaching students from around the world this professor did not immediately recognize that the problem of evil as experienced globally might appropriately consider a different set of concerns and conversation partners than he was used to.

While seminarians in America, Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria are intellectually gifted and sophisticated, and will have read many of the same authors, the mix of pastoral challenges and existential questions faced in contemporary Nigeria or the DRC will vary significantly from the mix of pastoral challenges and questions that most American pastors regularly face—and nowhere more so than for our topic tonight.

And it is missiology, with its incorporation of anthropological concerns and tools for understanding variable human sociocultural dynamics, that helps connect the theological with the grassroots experiential realities around the world that need to be understood and engaged. Missiology, at its best, values the interdisciplinary—positively valuing linguistics, anthropology, history, biblical studies, theology, and so on—while allowing the strengths of each to inform the others through the right sorts of healthy integration.

What does such an integrative approach look like? Let me mention two issues: one concerns the various disciplines that ought to inform the conversation, and the second concerns how the various disciplinary strengths ought to be brought into connection with each other.

Take history as a discipline. Between 1450 and 1770 Europeans attributed many misfortunes to the agency of witches, with European courts jailing and prosecuting roughly 90,000 people as witches, and executing roughly 45,000 of them (Levack, 2006: 23). As with America's own famous case in Salem, MA, the historical records are often detailed and rich, allowing for sophisticated analyses by historians. This judicially exercised violence was often more systematically extreme than much of the extra-judicial violence exercised today towards supposed witches in places like New Guinea or South Africa. But the parallels from European history with what is happening in New Guinea, parts of Asia and Latin America, and various regions of Africa today are numerous. In European history one finds children accused of being witches—as with Dorcas Good in Salem, identified as a witch and thrown in jail for eight months,

at the age of four. One finds pastors accused and killed, as with George Burroughs of Salem. One finds the testimony of accusing children playing central roles, as it did in Salem. One finds confession, elicited under questionable social pressures, being appealed to as definitive proof. One finds appeals to a wide variety of folk beliefs about moles or whiskers on women as evidence that someone is a witch. One finds pastoral authorities playing key roles in accrediting the accusations, just as with Cotton Mather or the Christian prophet referenced earlier.

But an odd thing happened historically in Europe and North America. Although one can find contemporary Americans and Europeans espousing astrology, reincarnation, new-age channeling, spiritism, belief in Bigfoot, and a wide variety of forms of neo-paganism, the idea that one person's misfortunes might have been supernaturally caused by another person acting through witchcraft was largely abandoned long ago, present today primarily among recent immigrants. This is not the place to examine possible explanations of this shift. Here I simply want to point out the following.

Although Western theologians are quite aware of the history of witch accusations in Europe, this is largely treated as an idiosyncrasy from the distant past, not as posing compelling pastoral questions that require serious theological response today. Even church historians, who necessarily touch on this history, minimally engage the broader theological questions and fail to explore links between such a distant European past and what is playing out in New Guinea or Congo today. In short, those historians with specialized expertise in the topic are unlikely purely as historians to engage in the interdisciplinary conversations that missiology fosters. Missiology invites historians to bring all their specialized historical knowledge into a sustained integrative conversation with theologians, anthropologists, and field practitioners.

Or consider biblical studies. While biblical scholars know a great deal about biblical languages and contexts, they often fail to understand critical anthropological distinctions between two families of terms—one set of terms for the claimed identities of those exercising power to heal, to divine the future, or to impress others (shamans, diviners, traditional healers, wonder-workers, prophets), and a second set of terms (related to our English words witch or sorcerer) for those thought to secretly be the cause of other people's misfortunes. When the woman at Endor is referred to using indigenous words for secret killer/witch, this is a mistranslation. Her identity was not secret killer, but a diviner, someone consulting the dead on behalf of the living. In Israel this was understood as wrong, but it was a different wrong from that of murder. In Acts when the Greek word *magos* is applied to Elymas, and translators select words from African languages, words that mean sorcerer/witch/secret killer, to translate such passages, these translations misconstrue the nature of the identity attributed to Elymas. Interestingly in African Bible translations that I've consulted, none of the African words used to label Elymas a witch or sorcerer was used to indicate that the men bringing gifts to the child Jesus were sorcerers or witches, although it is the same Greek word applied to Elymas. Perhaps more difficult is the Exodus 22:18 "You shall not allow a *kashaph* to live." As translated into languages across Africa, but not languages of northeast Asia, *kashaph* is translated with words meaning secret killer—and is understood by readers as recognizing that there were secret killers in Jewish

society that needed to be ferreted out and put to death. Of course the only two passages in the Old Testament where actual people are named as *kashaph* are in Exodus 7:11 where Pharaoh calls for his *kashaph*, his religious professionals, to perform amazing deeds, and Daniel 2:2 where Nebuchadnezzar calls for his *kashaph*, religious professionals, to divine the dream. In both settings, the context is not that of *wachawi* (the plural of *mchawi*), secret killers, but of religious professionals involved in magical and/or religious practices similar to that of *mganga*. The word *kashaph* in Korean Bibles is translated *mudang* or *baksoo*—shaman—and no Korean understands the passage to be a warning about secret killers that need to be ferreted out and killed. Interestingly even the Septuagint translation of *kashaph—pharmakous*—does not entail the secret-killer idea. Only later with the Latin Vulgate's use of *maleficos* do we get the witch idea clearly required by the text, with consequences for European history. Or consider the challenge of translating the idea of Satan into languages where there is no historic image of Satan, but rather where the discursive focus of evil is the image of a human being, a witch. In such contexts words for evil are witch-inflected. In the extreme, as with the Ewe of Ghana, the very word missionaries used for Satan, *Abonsam*, is an Akan term understood by Ewe as a synonym for witch. One finds the interesting situation where Koreans and Ewe read completely different Bibles. Koreans read a Bible where no secret occult killers exist in their text, while Ewe read a Bible permeated by the witch idea. Bible translations matter. And Bible translators need to be informed not only by conversations with biblical scholars, but also with the broader sustained integrative conversations that missiology ideally fosters with anthropology.

Anthropologists like Richard Shweder (2003: 74–133) indicate that some societies, like that of Job's comforters, systematically articulate a moral causal ontology—where every misfortune is due to one's own sin (maybe in an earlier life). In such societies one does not imagine that secret human killers around you are causing your misfortune. But other societies operate with interpersonal causal ontologies, where other evil persons are understood as causing the misfortune. In witch societies, there are special words for these secret killers, and misfortunes such as infertility, sickness, poverty, or death trigger a quest to identify an evil person causing the harm. Not surprisingly people thought of as murderers are not treated kindly. And in such societies Christians pray regularly for God to protect them from witches, something that Korean and contemporary American Christians do not.

Here then is one part of our challenge. Our Bible appears to have been given against a cultural backdrop where biases were much more towards a moral causal ontology ideology than an interpersonal causal ontology. Even though the Bible is filled with references to misfortune, to infertility, economic crises, illness, and death (the very topics that witch ideologies attempt to explain)—there is not a single instance anywhere in the Bible that any person attributes any misfortune to another human being thought to have caused the misfortune by means of evil supernatural power. Nowhere in the biblical narrative does misfortune trigger a quest to ferret out and prosecute or exorcise the supposed witches. And even though the Bible is filled with prayers, no one ever prays that God will protect them from a witch or sorcerer.

That is, the Bible involves sustained dialogue with cultural ideologies similar to that of Job's counselors, which makes it easy to apply biblical teaching in contexts where people espouse the same cultural ideologies. But since Job's comforters did not espouse the witch idea, we simply do not have Scripture (in Job or elsewhere) systematically addressing the belief that certain people's misfortunes are caused by other people using evil supernatural means. I am not claiming that what Scripture tells us is insufficient to address these questions, but simply that the task of theological contextual reflection is much more difficult because of the distance between the cultural settings in which Scripture is given and the settings in which witch ideas are normative. Such contextual reflection is even less likely when theological scholars are located in societies where witch ideas are not experienced as present or compelling. Scripture of course does teach the reality of demonic powers, and the very idea of demonic or Satanic power does force new considerations when witch ideas are in view. But nowhere does Scripture itself directly address the question of whether certain people really are the supernatural cause of other people's infertility, poverty, or death. And nowhere does Scripture itself allude to the exorcism of accused witches.

Let me return to Nzuzi's story. Notice that in a Christian setting, a non-Christian diviner was not consulted, although historically it was diviners who were thought to be knowledgeable about witches. Notice also that the Christian prophet has now taken over the space formerly occupied by the diviner, with a similar message and role. In a recent survey[1] carried out in Kenya where African seminarians and theologians were asked about people they knew who were accused of being witches, respondents reported that pastors had more frequently played a key role in endorsing the accusation than had diviners. And indeed there are reasons to believe that many Christian leaders and Christian institutions are today at the forefront of propagating the witch idea, including the idea of children as witches.

In his own writings, Dr. Opoku Onyinah (2004, 2012) has demonstrated that new "witch-demonologies," to use his phrase, have become prevalent in many churches. But he interestingly demonstrates that an important building block of these new witch-demonologies is the writings of American and European spiritual warfare authors (Fred Dickason, Kurt Koch, Charles Kraft, Derek Prince, Peter Wagner). On his telling of the story, unless we read and understand the writings of these Western authors we are missing a significant part of what is influencing these new hybrid witch-demonologies. Onyinah himself exemplifies the interdisciplinary and integrative missiological sort of approach needed, attentive to the anthropological, pastoral, and theological in the context of global flows of ideas and influences.

Let's return to Rev. Basua, Nzuzi, and the prophet. An anthropological approach is never satisfied only with belief, but is always interested in how belief plays out interactionally in social process. That is, an anthropologist does not fixate on *beliefs* about witch needles, witch teeth, or a witch jet engine enabling instant travel to Europe, and is not overly concerned with, or unduly impressed by, how to produce smoke on command, but rather is very interested in the *social outcomes* of any pastoral engagement. Let me identify four social outcomes of this sort of pastoral response.

First outcome

The Christian leader claiming power to identify and deal with witchcraft, in this case the Christian prophet, gains great publicity and credibility through the performance, with many new followers. The accredited power to identify witches, in a world where witches are believed always to be present, carries with it enormous prestige and influence.

Second outcome

Mainstream Christian leaders are shown in a poor light, and marginalized. While Rev. Basua's authority as guardian of orthodoxy was critical to giving the prophet a platform, the prophet's dramatized powers implicitly reflected invidiously on Rev. Basua who claimed no such powers. As Rev. Basua commented whimsically to me, "My seminary did not teach me how to get the needle out of the witch's leg." Pastors claiming the new powers create a crisis of authority for pastors and churches unable or unwilling to claim these powers and exercise these ministries.

Third outcome

The accused is adversely affected by this encounter. Prior to this, there had only been whispered speculative gossip that Nzuzi *might* be a witch. Now there was a dramatic and public certification by a Christian prophet that he was a witch. Even Nzuzi's own words agreeing that he could feel a needle in his leg were later interpreted as his confession. And while the prophet claimed to remove the witch power, he also warned that witches easily retrieve their powers, and in fact everyone assumed that Nzuzi had done so. When I asked about Nzuzi's later situation, I learned he subsequently lived alone in a tiny hut, cut off completely from family and friends—with everyone deeply convinced he was a witch-murderer. Let me state this bluntly: any story about a pastoral intervention with a supposed witch is incomplete unless it considers empirically the long-term consequences of the intervention in the life of the accused. As a contrast, one could explore the pastoral interventions in Yaba Badoe's film *The Witches of Gambaga*, where elderly women accused of being witches are helped by Ghanaian Presbyterian church leaders, with positive social outcomes.

Fourth outcome

The witch idea is accredited as a Christian idea. In earlier decades in most of Africa, it was non-Christian diviners that were identifying individuals as witches that caused the misfortunes of others. But increasingly it is Christian spokespersons and leaders. The result is that people encounter the witch idea on the lips of Christian leaders as a thoroughly Christian idea, justified through biblical language, and reformulated in new Christian witch theologies. The witch idea now comes with the cognitive authority of Christianity, with many contemporary Christians inclined, like Cotton Mather and John Wesley of an

earlier era, to equate any disbelief in witches as tantamount to atheism. Whether the witch idea merits being considered a Christian idea deserves careful scrutiny.

Two observations and a conclusion

First, to apply the term witch to someone is to accuse them of criminal harm. If the accusation is accepted as true, this has enormous consequences for the accused. Theologian Samuel Kunhiyop, in the witchcraft track, will invite us to consider the epistemological issues involved. If an old woman has whiskers on her chin, is this evidence that she is a witch? If a chicken is killed, and the way the chicken falls, reveals that someone is a witch, should this be trusted? Even if someone confesses to witchcraft, under social dynamics fostering such confession, should this be trusted? In America we are learning from genetic testing and the advocacy of the Innocence Project that many who confessed to Chicago police that they were murderers are in fact innocent. Is gossip a reliable source of information? Since Satan is a liar, it makes sense that a theologian like Dr. Kunhiyop would be interested in possible ways in which falsehood might underpin the process.

Second, in his presentation John Jusu will highlight the fact that when people accuse individuals of having harmed others through an amazing and evil power, and then take retaliatory action towards them, the people supposedly exercising this incredible power are often in fact the most weak and vulnerable members of society: the elderly, widows, orphans, the poor, and strangers. Interestingly these are the very categories the Bible calls on us to have special empathy and love for, to actively help. But the witch diagnosis invites us to withdraw empathy and love—to imagine them not in the image of Jesus or an angel that we should care for, but in the image of the devil. This is how Salem Christians were able to ignore the sobs of four-year-old Dorcas Good, and hold her in jail for eight months.

Since the Bible identifies Satan as an accuser, who sows discord and death, it is worth considering the possibility that Satan is active through the accusation itself, that Satan is active in the accusers, rather than the accused, just as happened with the death of Jesus. It is possible that the self-righteous accusers are the ones actually doing the work of the devil, as is argued in multiple books by the anthropologically informed theologian René Girard.

In a classic article entitled “The Dark Side of the Shaman” anthropologist Michael Brown (1989) has suggested that anytime shamans or diviners have a diagnosis that attributes misfortunes to third parties who supposedly are secretly witches, such shamans and diviners are actually sowing discord and death. The shaman claims to give life, but if one explores the outcomes of the social process, they contribute to suspicion, discord, and retaliatory violence.

I’ve always been struck that at one moment Jesus attributes Peter’s words to God (Matt 16:17), and a moment later Jesus indicates Peter’s next words are from the devil (Matt 16:23): “Get behind me Satan.” That is, I’ve been struck by the possibility that even ministers and spokespersons for God, like Peter, or Cotton Mather, might express ideas that are wonderfully of God, but that this does not preclude the possibility that

the same persons might simultaneously and mistakenly express words that accomplish the work of the devil. For a pastor to declare a six-year old orphan a witch responsible for his parents' death, as sometimes happens, is either an impressive ability to ferret out evil in the most unlikely of places, or it is to do the work of the devil—inviting us to treat orphans the opposite of how God has told us we should.

I chose this topic partly because it happens to be what I'm working on at the moment, and I wanted to give you a glimpse of the sorts of things an anthropologically informed missiologist grapples with, bringing to the fore topics Western theologians would normally be unlikely to seriously consider. But I was willing to make this a focus in this context because my words will not be the final words. John Jusu, Steve Rasmussen, Timothy Nyasulu, Mulumba Mukundi, Timothy Stabell, Samuel Kunhiyop, Harriet Hill, Zachs Gaiya, John Morgan and Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, among others, will be carrying on this conversation further. Issues here are incredibly difficult, and this paper should only be one small contribution towards a sustained and focused effort on the part of a whole community of missiologists and theologians around the world.

Finally I want us to be reminded that missiological issues desperately need an integrative approach. I hope we recognize that the work of anthropologically informed missiologists in concert with church leaders has the potential positively to inform the church and its witness in the modern world, and positively to help in problematic situations—as with our topic, where thousands of orphans, widows, and poverty-stricken elderly men and women are being identified and treated as witches. That is, I hope to cast a vision for a contextually wise missiology being consequential. Much is at stake in whether we do our work wisely and well.

Note

1. At a March 2013 conference in Nairobi, sponsored by the Carl F.H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding, with the survey again prepared by Robert Priest and Steve Rasmussen. See http://henrycenter.tiu.edu/witchcraft-accusations/nairobi-colloquium.

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