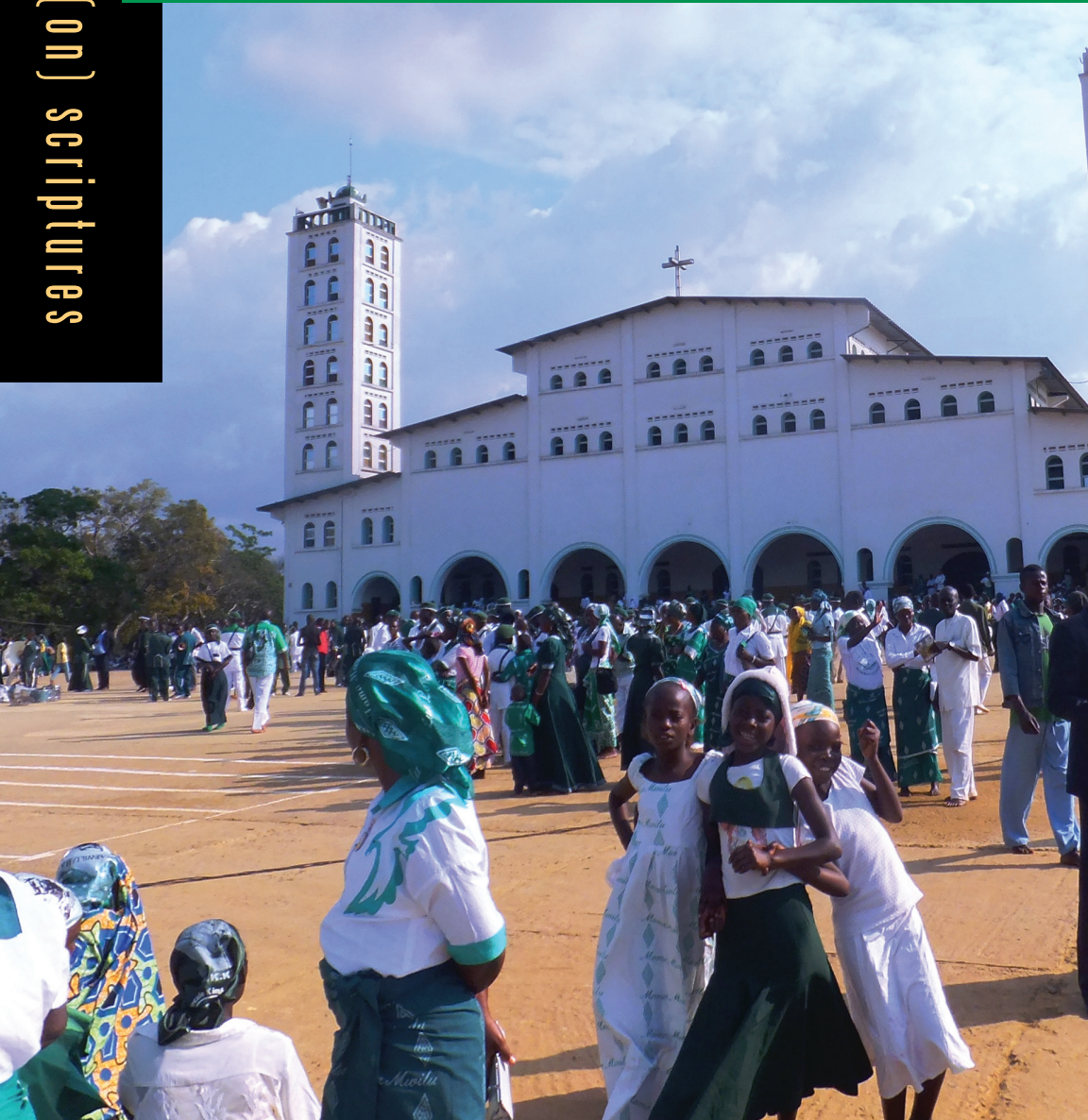


Kimbanguism

AN AFRICAN UNDERSTANDING
OF THE BIBLE

AURÉLIEN MOKOKO GAMPIOT
TRANSLATED BY CÉCILE COQUET-MOKOKO

signifying (on) scriptures



Kimbanguism

VINCENT WIMBUSH, GENERAL EDITOR

EDITORIAL BOARD:

William E. Deal (Case Western Reserve University)

Grey Gundaker (William & Mary)

Tazim Kassam (Syracuse University)

Wesley Kort (Duke University)

Laurie Patton (Duke University)

R. S. Sugirtharajah (University of Birmingham, UK)

Signifying (on) Scriptures, a project of the Institute for Signifying Scriptures at the Claremont Graduate University, invites and challenges scholars from different fields and disciplines to engage the phenomenon of signifying in relationship to “scriptures.” The focus of these works is not upon the content meaning of texts but upon the textures, signs, material products, practices, orientations, politics, and power issues associated with the sociocultural phenomenon of the invention and engagement of scriptures. The defining interest is how peoples, especially the historically dominated, make texts signify as vectors for understanding, establishing, and communicating their identities, agency, and power in the world.

OTHER BOOKS IN THE SERIES:

Velma Love, *Divining the Self: A Study in Yoruba Myth and Human Consciousness*

Jennifer Reid, *Finding Kluskap: A Journey into Mi'kmaw Myth*

Isra Yazicioglu, *Understanding the Qur'anic Miracle Stories in the Modern Age*

Leif E. Vaage, *Borderline Exegesis*

Kimbanguism

An African Understanding of the Bible

AURÉLIEN MOKOKO GAMPIOT

TRANSLATED BY CÉCILE COQUET-MOKOKO

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
UNIVERSITY PARK, PENNSYLVANIA

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Mokoko Gampiot, Aurélien, author. | Coquet-Mokoko, Cécile, translator.

Title: Kimbanguism : an African understanding of the Bible / Aurélien Mokoko Gampiot ; Translated by Cécile Coquet-Mokoko.

Other titles: Signifying (on) Scriptures.

Description: University Park, Pennsylvania : The Pennsylvania State University Press, [2017] | Series: Signifying (on) Scriptures | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Summary: "A comprehensive study of Kimbanguism, founded by Simon Kimbangu in 1921. Compares it to other African-initiated churches, and examines its role, alongside other global religious movements, in Black liberation"—Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016046613 | ISBN 9780271077550 (cloth : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Eglise de Jésus-Christ sur la terre par le prophète Simon Kimbangu. | Kimbangu, Simon, 1887-1951. | Nativistic movements—Congo (Democratic Republic) | Bible—Black interpretations. | Christianity—Africa.

Classification: LCC BX7435.E44 M635 2017 | DDC 289.9/3—dc23
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016046613>

Copyright © 2017 The Pennsylvania State University
All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

Published by The Pennsylvania State University Press,
University Park, PA 16802-1003

The Pennsylvania State University Press is a member of the
Association of American University Presses.

It is the policy of The Pennsylvania State University Press to use acid-free paper. Publications on uncoated stock satisfy the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Material, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

This book is printed on paper that contains 30% post-consumer waste.

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations / vii

Acknowledgments / ix

Introduction / i

Part I General Background

- 1 Europe in Africa / 15
- 2 African Responses: The Birth of African Christianities / 34
- 3 Kimbanguism as a Social Movement / 62

Part II Kimbanguism and the Bible

- 4 The Three Sources of Kimbanguist Theology / 83
- 5 The Identity of Simon Kimbangu in the Contemporary Kimbanguist Faith / 122
- 6 Miraculous Healing and Worship / 155

Part III Expressions of Kimbanguist Messianism

- 7 Kimbanguist Prophetism, Messianism, and Millenarianism / 175
- 8 A Theology of Identity Reconstruction in a Global Context / 196
- 9 Reclaiming Kimbangu's Prophetic Heritage / 228

Conclusion / 260

Notes / 265

Bibliography / 279

Index / 287

ILLUSTRATIONS

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs appear courtesy of PRESKI (Presse Kimbanguiste).

Maps

- 1 Kingdom of Kongo, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries / 17
- 2 Democratic Republic of the Congo. Map courtesy of d-maps.com, http://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=14168&lang=en. / 64

Figures

- 1 Kimbangu in front of the Lubumbashi jail / 72
- 2 Photograph of Marie Muilu superimposed on the temple of Nkamba / 77
- 3 One of the “small soldiers” of Armageddon / 92
- 4 *The Rise to Jerusalem* / 94
- 5 Simon Kimbangu’s image hovers over Diangienda Kuntima and Simon Kimbangu Kiangani / 130
- 6 Simon Kimbangu Kiangani / 131
- 7 Dialungana, Kisolokele, and Diangienda / 133
- 8 Painting of the creation of man starring the sons of Kimbangu / 140
- 9 Marie-Louise Martin greeted by Elizabeth Mvete / 145
- 10 Kimbangu’s mausoleum in Nkamba. Photo: author. / 159
- 11 The Kimbanguist band, conducted by Diangienda / 163
- 12 The Lord’s Supper, conducted by Diangienda / 169
- 13 Diangienda healing two church members / 170
- 14 Temple of Nkamba / 186
- 15 Rev. Figueiredo with the author. Photo courtesy of the author. / 207
- 16 Kristin Shrader-Frechette kneels in front of Kimbangu’s portrait. Photo: Gabriel Nzau Ngoma Wagaza. / 208
- 17 Corinne Kumar D’Souza receives a blessing from Diangienda. Photo: Gabriel Nzau Ngoma Wagaza. / 209

- 18 David Wabeladio Payi teaches church members the Mandombe script. Photo: author. / 222
- 19 Members of the Saint-Denis congregation graduate from their Mandombe course. Photo: author. / 223
- 20 Armand Wabasolele Diangienda and the Kimbanguist Symphonic Orchestra. Photo courtesy of the Kimbanguist Symphonic Orchestra. / 226
- 21 Kimbanguist Symphonic Orchestra in concert. Photo courtesy of the Kimbanguist Symphonic Orchestra. / 226
- 22 President Mobutu visits Diangienda / 232
- 23 President Joseph Kabila visits Dialungana / 246

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would never have been published without the help and input of Professor Vincent Wimbush, who not only suggested a new approach for my research, but also welcomed me into his Institute for Signifying Scriptures and gave my work a home in the Signifying (on) Scriptures series at Penn State University Press. I am immensely grateful and indebted to him. I am also deeply appreciative of the help, suggestions, and understanding of Kathryn Yahner, acquisitions editor, and Hannah Hebert, editorial assistant, at Penn State University Press, who accompanied me through the editing process with as much kindness as professionalism.

I have been encouraged by the interest of colleagues who invited me to present and discuss my research in their departments: Professor Thee Smith of Emory University, Professor Maha Marouan of the University of Alabama, Emerita Professor Rosa Bobia of Kennesaw University, and Professors Marla Brettschneider, Carol Conaway, Penny Moreau, Courtney Marshall, and Faina Bukher of the University of New Hampshire. Your support has been greatly appreciated.

I am also indebted to Professors Michael Gomez of New York University, Drew Smith of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, John Jackson of the University of Pennsylvania, Edith Bruder of SOAS, Zekeh Gbotokuma of Morgan State University, Clément Akassi of Howard University, Pamela Gay-White of Alabama State University, David Garbin of Kent University, and Metka Zupancic and Emeritus Professor Michael Mendle of the University of Alabama. Each of you has been a steadfast friend, and your support has always been highly valued.

By introducing me to sociology and supervising my research at the University of Rennes 2, Emeritus Professor Pierre-Jean Simon has been a crucial influence and a real mentor. My fellow researchers at the Groupe société, religions, laïcité of the French national research center (CNRS) hosted by the University of Paris, Sorbonne, are also deserving of thanks for their interest in my work and their encouragement. I am especially

grateful to Professors Philippe Portier, Jean Paul Willaime, Jean Baubérot, Sébastien Fath, Joëlle Allouche-Benayoun, and Martine Cohen.

Emeritus professor Georges Balandier expressed interest in my work and encouraged me to publish it in the United States; I was very honored when he offered to write a preface for this book, but health issues unfortunately made this impossible. Professor Elikia M'Bokolo helped by inviting me to speak on his radio program, *Mémoire d'un Continent*, on Radio France Internationale, thus making my work more visible, and by organizing a historic international conference in Kinshasa called "Simon Kimbangu, the Man, His Work, and His Contribution to the Liberation of Black People," which successfully connected the work of scholars with that of the members of the Kimbanguist Church.

I am also extremely grateful to the leaders of the Kimbanguist Church, particularly the spiritual leader Simon Kimbangu Kiangani for his support and encouragement, and Maestro Armand Diangienda Wabasolele for his interest, the interview he gave me, and his invariable helpfulness. I am indebted to King Kipula Nsimba Wise for his help with information and pictures of the Kimbanguist Symphonic Orchestra; to Gabriel Nzau Ngoma Wagaza, who generously shared archival material and images he took as the church's official photographer with PRESKI until 2001; and to the many interviewees, especially the late David Wabeladio Payi and Véronique Kabeya, as well as the other inspired people and church members who answered my questions with honesty and confidence. Jérôme Makiadi, Enock Mban, Sylvain Mbote Munzila, Adrien Fwakasumbu Luwawanu, and Joseph Shiashia honored me with an invitation to be a guest of the first Kimbanguist Book Fair in the greater Paris area. My longtime friends Saturnin Ngoma, Gody Dia Kongo, Fortuné Mboussa, Darius Azika-Eros, David Biangué, and Erick Siassia have been helpful and supportive. May all the Kimbanguist community find here the expression of my heartfelt appreciation.

My final thanks are for my family: my wife, Dr. Cécile Coquet-Mokoko, introduced me to Professor Wimbush and prioritized the translation of my manuscript into English; our two sons, Antoine Elikia and Vincent Luka, were patient during the years-long process of writing and revising the manuscript, which kept their father engrossed in his work. I am also grateful to my sisters, Madeleine Ambembé, Antoinette Mabouéré, and the late Jeanne N'Gania; my brothers, Joseph, Gustave, Roger, and Blanchard Mokoko; and all my relatives for their unwavering helpfulness and support.

INTRODUCTION

“Black race, you must know that you were only the dregs of mankind”; “Africa, oh Africa, all riches are yours”; “You, Black person, God has loved you from the beginning”; “Black is the skin God had chosen in this world”: these literary, biblical-sounding calls to the Black race come from hymns, which are one of the sacred theological sources of Kimbanguism. An African-initiated church born in the 1920s from the preaching and healing campaign conducted by Simon Kimbangu, a Congolese Baptist catechist, in reaction to the colonial situation in the Belgian Congo, Kimbanguism has cultivated a theology of Black liberation by offering a unique understanding of the Bible.

Because the Bible was inseparable from the European colonial enterprises in sub-Saharan Africa, its use, circulation, and promotion rapidly became a political instrument as much as a religious one. Consequently, the Christian religion has been among the most effective tools of colonial domination of African natives, who were exposed to the Bible from the fifteenth century onward. When Christian missionaries began spreading the gospel in African societies, they introduced the Bible as a unique account of the history of humanity, which was endowed with a logic of racial classification putting Whites on top and Blacks at the bottom. According to this logic, even before they were subjugated, Africans had been long prepared to occupy the lowest rung on the ladder of humankind, a position to which they are still assigned today. The most familiar and striking example of this

is, no doubt, the biblical myth of the curse of Ham. For this myth to take on ideological and legal dimensions, the Christian colonial message had to bring the dominated to accept their own domination, so that Blacks would participate in and collaborate with their own inferiorization. The philosopher Albert Memmi recalled, “As a child, I often heard people tell me very seriously about the origins of black bondage: we all know that of the three sons of Noah, Shem begat the Semites, who received the law, Japheth begat the northern peoples, who inherited technical skills, and Ham fathered the Hamites, who—well, who didn’t get anything. And that is why Europeans can, with the blessing of Holy Providence, dominate the Africans. This was the first attempt to explain the colonization process by the ‘colonizability’ of indigenous peoples.”¹

This is how many columnists of the colonial press used the religious metaphor of a biblical ancestor’s sin to justify the inferiorization of the Black people, as the Guinean historian Ibrahima Baba Kaké explained: “Black people, it is said in Christian schools, are the descendants of Ham, and the curse uttered by Noah against the son of Ham who had disrespected him still weighs on his posterity. This assertion was so categorical and was repeated over so many centuries that it ended up in history books.”²

Claiming to be universal, Christianity was imposed as the religion of all, regardless of ethnic and racial difference. But the Eurocentric nature of its message entailed a phenomenon of counter-acculturation, which led Africans to observe themselves using all possible modes—concern, questioning, self-deprecating humor, self-criticism—whether or not they defined themselves as believers. For instance, a philosopher from Burundi related a debate he had with some friends on African atheism; one of them began complaining about the lot of Black people everywhere: “I can’t believe in God. . . . If God exists, He must be evil. I can’t forgive Him for letting blacks all over the world be poverty-stricken and despised by every human being.”³ This view is not unique. It echoes a conversation with one of my maternal uncles, who had never received a formal education and explained his atheism in these words: “For me, God does not exist; God is just the White man. He’s been able to invent the radio, electricity, planes, and the like.”

What these two examples reveal is not so much the notion that God is truly evil or is actually the White man, but a critique of the oppressed status experienced by Blacks. This critique was also echoed, from a Christian perspective, by a famous Congolese singer who was very popular in the 1970s, Georges Kiamuangana Mateta (aka Verckys). In his hit “Nakomitunaka”

(I Am Wondering), the artist questioned the manner in which Blacks had been Christianized:

I am wondering (bis)
 My God, I am wondering: (bis)
 Where on earth does black skin come from?
 And who was our ancestor?
 Jesus, the son of God, was a White man.
 Adam and Eve were White people.
 All the saints were White people too.
 Why is that so, my God?
 I am wondering (bis)
 My God, I am wondering! (bis)
 In the books about God we see
 that all the angels
 are pictured as White people,
 and all saints
 are pictured as White people.
 But when it comes to the Devil,
 then he is pictured as a Black man!
 Where does this injustice come from, oh mother?
 I am wondering (bis)
 My God, I am wondering: (bis)
 Where on earth does black skin come from?
 The colonists keep us from understanding.
 They reject the statues of our ancestors,
 and the fetishes of our forefathers
 are not accepted by them.
 But we can all see that in church,
 we pray with rosary beads in our hands.
 We pray
 to the images that fill the church:
 But all these images show only White people.
 Why is that so, my God?
 I am wondering (bis)
 My God, I am wondering: (bis)
 The prophets of the Whites
 are accepted by us,
 but those of the Blacks

are not accepted by them.
 My God, why did You make us so?
 Where is our ancestor, that of Black people?
 Africa has opened her eyes.
 Africa, there's no turning back for us (ah mother)
 I am wondering! (bis)⁴

This song, which belongs to the tradition of Congolese rumba, was written by Verckys in 1971 and was well known to the Congolese from both sides of the river and to the Angolans as well. It reflects the Eurocentricity behind the Christianization of Africans, with angels represented according to European codes equating Whiteness with perfection, beauty, and purity. When positive values are only represented through White characters, it is impossible to develop a positive image of Blackness. To a certain extent, this approach was the result of the “discovery” of the African continent, which compelled Africans to come to terms with Europeans’ presence and ultimately to embrace religions designed for others. Black people could only find a place for themselves in this worldview by assimilating it and accepting their condition as slaves or subalterns. But this did not preclude the possibility of a backlash. The song above is an example of the reactions of Black people who, instead of accepting the imposed order, challenged it by questioning the reason for their oppressed situation.

The large-scale Christianization of Africa was shaped by the Berlin Conference of 1884–85. From then on, Black people were perceived only as children to be disciplined by the White man or as objects of pseudo-scientific studies, to be used for theorizing on evolution. Space does not allow an exhaustive list of all the theories developed to explain the low rank of Black people in the social order, but let me briefly discuss the most relevant one, social Darwinism, which posits a global evolution of all societies, whose growth is supposed to follow three stages, from savagery (the inferior stage) to barbarity (the medium stage) to civilization (the superior stage). As the French historian *Éric Savarèse* pointed out in writing about colonial representations of African peoples in the West, “without a doubt, it was the Black man—as abstractly defined in many works—who appeared as the most infantilized.”⁵ But how to designate African societies? With a colonial term such as “tribe”? In terms of race, ethnicity, community, or society? Until the colonial bureaucrats defined specific usages of the concepts of race and ethnicity, finding the right term was a problem. In the field of science, the Western conception of the African Other was

warped by its ethnocentric character, and this was even more true in the field of religion. As Vincent Wimbush stressed, the need to define the term “religion” also revealed a hierarchy between “civilized” and “savage” nations, which was invented in the wake of the first contact between the West and the worlds of the Other: “In this new situation and the discursive political climate, dominated peoples—savages/primitives—could now be seen as being either hyperreligious or not religious at all, or not religious on the right terms.”⁶

The concept of religion has generated a “Tower of Babel of definitions,” as the French sociologist Yves Lambert used to say. The word comes from the Latin *religare*, which means “to tie” or “to link together,” thus designating the connection between human beings and the deity, as developed by the thinkers Lactantius (A.D. ca. 260–ca. 325) and Tertullian (A.D. ca. 155–ca. 220). A second understanding of the term was proposed by the linguist Benveniste, for whom *religere* meant “to gather or collect; to accomplish scrupulously,” thereby joining together the authority of tradition and the punctilious performance of rituals. How is religion to be defined in an age when religious affiliations are increasingly shifting all over the world? In his search for delimiting criteria, Lambert stressed that the human quest for origins was always inseparable from the assumed existence of one or several deities or of a form of transcendence, which may be embodied, such as in the notion of mana, where a living being may be comprehended as a power or entity. It also seems important to distinguish religion from magic and witchcraft “on the basis of the existence or absence of communal activities, since magic and witchcraft are usually practiced in the private sphere.”⁷

In the African context, it makes sense to ask whether it is most appropriate to use the concept of religion or the concept of a belief system. Indeed, many scholars have tended to designate as “African religion(s)” a suite of behaviors in which customs and rituals intersect with kinship systems and superstitions, thus creating a hazy notion from which it is difficult to extract any specifically religious content. In his study of religions among the Beti people of Cameroon, the French sociologist Philippe Laburthe-Tolra observed, “There was no term to accurately translate ‘religion’ in their language. . . . In the realm of conscience and belief, the most difficult thing to grasp for a modern Westerner was, no doubt, the sense of a continuous and immanent presence of the invisible world, interweaved in the visible one.”⁸ Thus it is possible to retain as functional the definition of religion proposed by Lambert: “a system of beliefs and

practices related to supernatural forms of reality—whether they are living beings, entities, or forces—in connection with human beings via symbolic means, such as prayers, rituals or meditation, and giving birth to communal forms of expression.”⁹

This definition seems relevant insofar as it encompasses all the elements pertaining to religion, religiosity, or new religious movements establishing systems of beliefs and practices in relation to the metasocial sphere, as well as communal forms of expression. Yet it remains inadequate to account for elements pertaining to identity construction, particularly religious shifts in African belief systems. Indeed, defining religion in a contemporary context implies taking into account the motivations, thought patterns, and social interests at work behind the subjective choices of actors, which shape their behaviors. The field of religions is a particularly rich one when it comes to exploring ethnic identities, thought patterns, ethics, and *weltanschauungs*. Every religion claims to be, in the words of Claude Rivière, “both a system which accounts for human nature and the universe and an organized system of action seeking to remedy whatever is unpredictable, uncanny, and accidentally tragic in social and individual life.”¹⁰ For Clifford Geertz, “It is a matter of discovering just what sorts of beliefs and practices support what sorts of faith under what sorts of conditions.”¹¹ Through their actions, words, and behaviors, human beings define their ways of life, their relations to others and the world, and their understandings of the forces at work behind all these interactions.

It is thus easy to grasp the religious and political motivations behind the Christianization of Africans. The missionaries, whose purpose was to preach the gospel, actively contributed to the colonial venture by preparing, training, and socializing the colonized peoples so that they would adopt certain types of moral behavior and promulgate a system of beliefs based on White superiority. While the ideology of social hierarchy put into place a specific order for social classification, the processes of social differentiation and hierarchy began to be questioned and contested. Thus, political, regionalist, nationalist, and religious movements emerged among subaltern peoples as challenges to the social order or as movements of counter-acculturation or appropriation of the self-image imposed by the colonizers. One of these Black ideologies was the *négritude* movement, initiated in the 1930s by intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, who inspired other Black leaders. It was followed by Afrocentric theories developed in the 1950s by Cheikh Anta Diop and Théophile Obenga, who claimed that African civilizations predated White ones.

These new ways of theorizing Blacks and Blackness, though adopted by many, did not remain unquestioned. The following comments by a Cameroonian theologian illustrate this point: “As such, the thesis of the preexistence of African civilizations does not change anything in the present situation of black people. Even worse, there has been a decline of the trailblazers, and one wonders why the first have become last. The knowledge of our creativity is of no use whatsoever if it does not allow us to take up historical initiative in the here and now.”¹² The answer to the question “Why did the first become last?” is at the core of the quest of African-initiated churches, for they provide answers to the question of Blackness from a different perspective. The paradox of African Christianity is that it has embraced the Bible and the Christian message while implementing resistance to it, so there have been two antagonistic forces: on the one hand, the dominant culture, which aims at maintaining the dominated in an oppressed status, and on the other hand, religious resistance, which has taken all sorts of shapes. In some cases, Africans seem to uncritically accept the Bible that came from abroad; in other cases, they have appropriated it more actively, transforming it radically into systems of belief addressing their own situation in the here and now.

Some African churches have organized a process of counter-acculturation, reversing the stigma, reconstructing their identity, and rereading or reinterpreting the Bible. Throughout the history of the colonization of Africa, the political claim for national independence went hand in hand with religious movements of resistance known today as African independent, African-initiated, or Afro-Christian churches. Operating from within the closed space of the Christian scriptures, which had been introduced as a universal history that Black people had no choice but to internalize, African-initiated churches succeeded in restoring a positive historical or mythical role for them. As Lewis Gordon explained, “Rejecting the thesis of thought as fundamentally white requires liberating it from the economy of rationalizations that assert this. The liberation of thinking, then, becomes also an important dimension of liberation *praxis*. It requires addressing the dimensions of thought that have been barred from their potential or reach.”¹³ To give a satisfactory account of the way African-initiated churches have implemented such a liberation *praxis*, it is necessary to shed light on a number of concepts, namely, prophetism, messianism, millenarianism, nativism, and syncretism. The definitions offered by the American theologian David Barrett, who was an expert on African churches, are the most useful for a study of contemporary Kimbanguism:

- (1) A prophetic movement is a religious awakening founded and led by the charismatic figure of a prophet or prophetess, who speaks from within a consciousness of being set apart for some divine purpose, adopts a critical stance towards the established order, proclaims a new religious idea or allegiance, and in the process attracts a considerable following.
- (2) A messianic movement is one which, centred around a dominant personality, claims for [the leader] special powers beyond the prophetic and involving a form of identification with Christ. This definition is applicable to the African scene but differs somewhat from the current usage in the history of religions, where messianism refers to belief in the future advent of any being, singular or plural, expected by a community as the future savior who will end the present order of things and institute a new order of justice and happiness.
- (3) A millennial movement is one which preaches an imminent millennium, Golden Age or End of the World, involving the overthrow of oppressors from outside Africa, the expulsion or throwing into the sea of the white race, the return or resurrection of a culture-hero or of the ancestors bringing unlimited quantities of material goods, the rejuvenation of the old, and often the reversal of colour roles.
- (4) A nativistic movement is an organised attempt on the part of a society's members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture, usually resulting in a rejection of European culture and a return to the old ways of traditional religion; often allied with it is an immunity cult rendering initiates immune from European assault.
- (5) A syncretistic movement is one which amalgamates the Christian religion with traditional beliefs and concepts, and often with other non-Christian religious systems such as astrology, to such an extent that the revelation in Jesus Christ, and the Lordship of Christ over all other gods, is obscured, challenged or denied, leaving only an outwardly Christian appearance with a pre-Christian content.¹⁴

In chronological order, the oldest African messianic movement, Antonianism, was led by a Congolese prophet called Kimpa Vita, also known as Dona Beatriz (her Christian name), in the early eighteenth century. She initiated a nationalist and spiritual revival movement with a discourse that perfectly suited the mentality and expectations of her compatriots, whom she successfully mobilized for the restoration of the kingdom of Kongo.¹⁵

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth witnessed the emergence of Black African churches in South Africa, first researched by Bengt Sundkler,¹⁶ which fell into two groups: the so-called Ethiopian churches and the Zionist churches. The former were the result of interethnic relations: an African Methodist pastor, Mangena Mokono, left the European churches to create an African independent church in 1892. Out of this church several other “Ethiopian” religious movements were born, all of them preaching the liberation of Black people from bondage. The Zionist churches, which emerged in southern Africa, were syncretic churches that took after Daniel Bryant’s African American church, the Christian Catholic Church in Zion.¹⁷ Quite probably, the Nazareth Baptist Church, initiated by the Zulu prophet Isaiah Shembe in 1911, played a significant role in the Zionist movement in South Africa, since he insisted on the worship of a Black Christ and on interpreting the Bible in the context of Zulu religion. Another historic African-initiated church discussed by scholars is the Harrist movement, launched by William Harris on the border between Liberia and Ivory Coast. Its goal was to bring Bible-based answers to the colonial problem.

The Kimbanguist movement, which is the focus of this book, was initiated by Simon Kimbangu in the early 1920s in the southwestern portion of the former Belgian Congo. Since then, it has become a major African-initiated church, as Jean-Claude Froelich pointed out: “Of all the African churches of classical messianic or prophetic type that were born from a reaction to colonial domination, the Kimbanguist Church is no doubt the most remarkable.”¹⁸ Although it is difficult to know the exact membership of the Kimbanguist Church, which has been a member of the World Council of Churches since 1969, Kimbanguists officially claim to be 17 million strong. The church’s success has triggered unrelenting interest from sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, historians, journalists, and theologians. The first scholar who developed an interest in Kimbanguism, and who remains the best known, is the French Africanist Georges Balandier. Analyzing Congolese messianic movements as part of the dynamics of social change he was witnessing, Balandier perceived two alternatives: either the messianic movements of Africa were essentially religious, or they betokened the awakening of people who saw themselves as having neither past nor future, but were reacting against violations of their dignity. “They express a passionate desire for change; and because they assert the universal nature of human dignity, they represent a step towards universality.”¹⁹ Balandier’s work is centered around this time-hallowed tradition, which he described in the 1950s as a reaction to the colonial situation.

Subsequent research on Kimbanguism includes works by Marie-Louise Martin, a Swiss theologian and missiologist. The best known of these is *Kimbangu: An African Prophet and His Church*. Her theological approach has centered on two main questions: Is the Kimbanguist Church a Christian church or a cult? Does it run the risk of insisting on syncretic elements that could end up drawing it away from Christ as the only messiah and redeemer? Her observations throughout the 1960s and 1970s led her to conclude, “It is wrong to call the Kimbanguist Church a cult in the theological sense of the term, since it is in the process of ‘becoming and being a Church,’ which, I hope, we are all engaged in.”²⁰ Also worthy of notice is the reference book written by the Congolese historian Martial Sinda, *Le messianisme congolais et ses incidences politiques*, published in 1972 with a preface by Roger Bastide called “Les Christs noirs.” It describes Kimbanguism and its splinter groups through the prism of Bakongo historical and religious traditions and in the Belgian and French colonial contexts. Other specialists on Kimbanguism who did extensive fieldwork in post-colonial Zaire between the 1960s and the mid-1980s are the American anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey—who analyzed the church through the prism of Kongo cultural patterns and beliefs in his classic *Modern Kongo Prophets*—and the American sociologist Susan Asch, whose discussion of the Kimbanguist Church was articulated around the relations among religion, politics, and socioeconomic development in Zaire in the late 1970s and early 1980s.²¹

Yet, since then, no in-depth research has been published on this major African independent church in the post-Simon Kimbangu era. My book aims to fill this gap, providing historical data and offering new sociological and theological analyses of the church’s understanding and interpretation of the Bible, grounded in an insider’s knowledge of the religion and a native command of the African languages spoken by the members of this church. The two studies I published in France on the Kimbanguist Church in Central Africa and in the diaspora (now reference books for French-speaking researchers) offered new insights by analyzing contemporary Kimbanguism using the sociological perspective of the relationship between religion and ethnicity. I took as my starting point the Kimbanguist religion in order to understand its relation to ethnicity—not the other way around, as Balandier did. To accomplish this, I investigated the massive body of oral traditions, which had remained absolutely untapped by scholars, although it represents for the Kimbanguists a source of faith and wisdom as sacred as—and inseparable from—the scriptures.

The present book includes a new analysis, inspired by the American theologian Vincent Wimbush, who suggested that I focus more on the theological appropriation of the Bible by this church and include a comparative study with other African churches. In this book I show how the scriptures are read, understood, and appropriated by these churches, and how they use the Bible as a foundation to assign a history and a future role for African and Africana people. But my documentation of the processes of appropriation of the Bible by African-initiated churches in both colonial and postcolonial times remains mostly centered on Kimbanguism. I chose to keep building on my twenty-year knowledge of this church because it is the most important and famous African-initiated church today, and also because I have cultural and family ties with this field of research. My late father, Antoine Mokoko, was one of the first pastors of this church, and my mother, Joséphine Elo, is still a member of the clergy in the Congo-Brazzaville branch of the EJCSK (*Église de Jésus Christ sur la terre par son envoyé spécial Simon Kimbangu*). I thus offer an insider's analysis of Kimbanguism; my major assets are a mastery of Congolese languages, which helps me decipher the hymns, speeches, and messages addressing believers, and an intimate knowledge of Congolese culture and the Kimbanguist religion. I observe from the inside, combining the findings of participant observation and semi-structured interviews with an analysis of inspired hymns and spiritual leaders' speeches. These elements offer a rich potential for cross-disciplinary observation, at the junction of sociology, ethnology, history, Africana studies, and biblical studies. Indeed, the Kimbanguist reading of the Bible reveals a process of self-identification based on a critique of Africana people's oppressed position throughout the world. How are African history and the history of enslavement and colonization by Europeans interpreted through this Afro-centered approach to the Christian scriptures? How is Blackness reinterpreted through the Kimbanguist reading of the Bible?

The answers offered in this book are developed in three distinct parts. The first exposes the background and context of the European Christian presence in Africa in order to offer a comparative analysis of African-initiated churches as phenomena of appropriation of the Bible and to discuss the role of Kimbanguism as a social movement. The second part is dedicated to an analysis of Kimbanguism and the Bible. It is especially focused on theological sources—the interpretive template of the biblical text and subtext that Kimbanguism offers. I show how the Bible is read, understood, and appropriated by Kimbanguists, and I investigate the particular role

given to Simon Kimbangu in the Kimbanguist reinterpretation of scripture. Indeed, from being a special envoy of Jesus Christ to the Black people, to the embodiment of the Holy Trinity, Kimbangu's presence and sacralization pervade the whole process of understanding the Bible, negotiating a new status for Blacks within and thanks to the sacred text, as well as healing practices—a crucial dimension in African Christianity. Finally, the third part of this book explores the messianic and millenarian dimensions of this African understanding of the Bible, delving into the complex relations the church has created and maintained with political leaders and exploring the beginning of the fulfillment of Kimbangu's prophecy in the increasing presence of African American and African-descended people as sojourners and benefactors in the holy city of Nkamba.

A Note About Names

In Congolese tradition, last names are not family names, but the traditional names given to each person based on the circumstances of her or his birth, as a tribute to an ancestor, or to ward off evil (such as sudden infant death). This is completely different from the Western system of naming, in which the children of the same father and mother have the same last name. In the years after independence, if the family was Christian, a Christian name was added to the traditional name when the child was christened. Then, beginning in 1972, the policy of Zairianization—"authenticity"—made it compulsory for each citizen to choose an additional name in a local language, either to replace the Christian name or to serve as a surname in the European sense of the term. This is how the three sons of Kimbangu chose, respectively, the "Zairian" names Lukelo, Kiangani, and Kuntima. This is also why some of the books by Diangienda appear with "Joseph Diangienda" as the author's name, while those written after Zairianization use "Diangienda Kuntima." The grandchildren of Kimbangu were free to choose their own last names as they wanted; only some of the children of Dialungana have chosen "Kiangani" as a last name. There is further explanation in chapter 7 about Congolese naming traditions.

PART I

GENERAL BACKGROUND

1

EUROPE IN AFRICA

To understand Kimbanguism, it is necessary to situate it not only in the history of the territory where it was born, which used to be known as the kingdom of Kongo, but also against the backdrop of traditional African religions, which reflect a coherent worldview.

Although it is difficult to reconstitute this history completely, let me try with the existing documents to give an account of the political, ethnic, and religious elements that are the background of the Kimbanguist religion. More often than not, when evoking the kingdom of Kongo, scholars tend to refer to the linguistic area corresponding to the Kongo ethnic group. But whenever they try to depict the different groups making up this kingdom, it becomes clear that there were several kingdoms—including those of the Kongo, Angola, Loango, Anzico, and Teke. The research by the Jesuit father Joseph Van Wing in his *Études ba-Kongo*; by Georges Balandier on daily life in the kingdom of Kongo from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries; by Cuvelier and Jadin; and by Kabolo Iko Kabwita help build fuller knowledge of the ethnic, political, and religious background of the kingdom of Kongo.¹

The origin of this kingdom has been lost in the oral traditions. But, unlike other African political systems, the kingdom of Kongo has benefited from several written accounts left by European missionaries and other Western explorers.

According to a myth that became famous thanks to the writings of the Italian explorer Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi (published in 1687), a man

called Ntinu Wene, or Nimi Lukeni, the youngest son of the king of Bundu (or Vundu, near the present-day city of Boma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), resented having to live under the authority of his elder brothers; he left his kinsmen to emigrate with a group of followers to a region south of the Congo River. There, he mustered his men into an armed band, which exacted a toll from anyone wanting to cross the river. Then, Cavazzi wrote, "one day, he argued with his paternal aunt, who refused to pay the demanded sum. He ripped her belly open, though she was pregnant. Out of fear of his father's wrath, Lukeni then settled down on the southern bank of the river, where he founded the kingdom of Kongo after defeating a local chief called Mambombolo."²

This murder was the starting point of the gradual conquest of the territory that came to be known as the kingdom of Kongo. But the authority of a king is not legitimate until he earns the support of both his subjects and their (dead) ancestors, who rule the territory. The lands that Ntinu Wene had conquered did not hold the remains of his ancestors. In the Kongo system, the property of land is exclusively held by ancestors, and it can be neither divided nor ceded; the living only benefit from the use of it. Consequently, Ntinu Wene's conquest of the territory represented a violation of the sacred, vital link among the ancestors, the living, and the land.³ It was outside of the initial society that he built a new kingdom and subjugated it to his law. He imposed his authority by filling his subjects with awe.⁴

Balandier wrote that three elements marked the nature of this newborn kingdom.⁵ The first was sacred violence, which is the privilege of a double-faceted monarch—a brutal and domineering person, yet also a righter of wrongs and a peacemaker. Second, Ntinu Wene was considered to be the inventor of the art of forging metals, thereby endowing his people with weapons for waging wars and tools for agriculture. Third, he instituted a court of justice that was both respected and feared.

Beyond the brutal power exerted by Ntinu Wene lay another power based on ancestor worship. If the observers of the early kingdom of Kongo are to be believed, Lukeni, while conquering the Congo plateau territories located around his city of Mbanza Kongo, was regarded as a foreign invader until he had obtained the blessing of the ancestors guarding his new possessions. He thus became interested in legitimizing his reign through a matrimonial alliance with a woman from the lineage of the conquered Nsaku clan.

The early history of the kingdom of Kongo, as described by most observers, gives the picture of relentless ethnic warfare between populations from



Map 1. Kingdom of Kongo, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

regions now situated in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Congo-Brazzaville. The boundaries that enclosed the ancient kingdom of Kongo are blurred due to its coexistence with other kingdoms and because those kings often exaggerated their territories,⁶ but it was mainly located in present-day Angola. The kingdom bordered the Atlantic Ocean on its western boundary and spanned the Zaire River toward the Bateke Plateaux to the east. Its northern boundary extended toward present-day Gabon and its southern boundary beyond the Kwango River, totaling more than 115,000 square miles. The kingdom never had one common government, but it shared a common civilization.⁷ As time went by, the invaders merged with the natives, and together they formed a vast kingdom whose splendor amazed the Europeans who arrived by the late fifteenth century.

The kingdom of the Kongo is commonly divided into six provinces or main territories: Mbamba, Soyo, Mpemba, Mbata, Mpangu, and Nsundi.

Other authors claim that the territory was once inhabited by the Batswa ethnic group—that is, the Pygmies, who now live in the forest regions of the areas mentioned above—and that the Bakongo, coming in successive migratory waves, took hold of the territory and enslaved them to build the kingdom of Kongo and its capital city, Mbanza Kongo.⁸

The general trend nowadays is to describe the kingdom of Kongo as having been composed of the three present-day countries of Congo-Brazzaville, the DRC, and Angola. Actually, it was the king of the Bateke people, known as the Makoko Teke, who gave the land of what is now Congo-Brazzaville to the explorer Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, who was acting on behalf of France in 1880. This allows us to infer that the land belonged to the Bateke kingdom.⁹

Oral tradition does not give a specific date of birth for the kingdom of Kongo; the only existing written sources date to the year the kingdom became known to the Portuguese, who settled there from the 1490s. Further, the kingdom of Kongo left no tangible traces apart from remnants of the Christianization period, such as the ruins of the old cathedral of Mbanza Kongo, which remain to this day and hold a particular significance for Kimbanguists, as I discuss below. Around the new kingdom, a number of elements typical of oral traditions congregated, shaping a distinctive political and religious worldview.

It is also difficult to get a clear picture of the political nature of the kingdom of Kongo, particularly as regards the relations between the king and his subjects and their perception of him. How did the succession of the monarch take place? Was it a dynastic or a democratic process? Only through the remnants of sociopolitical structures observable in present-day Congo and Angola can we infer what the kingdom of Kongo may have been as a political entity. Historians have reached a consensus about the duality of the kingdom's political power, which seems to have been both temporal and spiritual. The Kongo social universe, as the Congolese historian Kabolo Iko Kabwita explained, is a tripartite community, consisting of God, the ancestors, and the members living on their own soil. In Kongo tradition, the king, who is mainly considered to be the head of a clan, is the repository of traditional religion. That is to say, he is the priest of ancestor worship.¹⁰ The American anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey clearly analyzed the nature of such worship:

In Kongo the important distinction lies between ordinary persons, of any age, and those who exercise occult power (*kindoki*), including both the dead and powerful living elders. In many instances such elders, especially those initiated as “chiefs” were regarded as spirits (*binzambinzambi*, “little gods”) and treated as cult objects, as containing some extraordinary soul that could be constrained to produce extraordinary effects, good or bad. Chiefs (sing., *mfumu*) were persons initiated to the cult of a particular spirit on behalf of the groups they represented. . . . Like other initiates, they incorporated attributes of the spirit whose powers they mediated. . . . The dualism of chief and priest, the latter clearly dedicated to local spirits responsible for weather and fertility, is evident in accounts of the former Kingdom of Kongo.¹¹

It may then be inferred that temporal power was also a matter of spiritual power, which was given by the “gods” or “ancestors.” In this sense, a chief, and especially a king, was entrusted not only with the temporal care of his subjects, but also with their protection by acting as a go-between with Nzambi a Mpungu (literally, God Almighty). It was impossible for a person not born into the clan or ethnic group to rise to the throne. To become the ruler, the king or king-to-be must have been born in the Kongo ethnic group.

In traditional Kongo society, social organization is based on a minimal unit, which is not the nuclear family but the lineage, that is, the whole group of descendants of an ancestor, who is often known to them all, but also has a mythical dimension. Lineage in Kongo society includes those who live on the surface of the earth (the living), those who are below the surface of the earth (the dead), and those who are not yet born. The line of descent is the governing principle of the transmission of kinship. It determines a more or less exclusive degree of affiliation within and between groups of individuals sharing the same ancestor. In the Kongo cultural system, the line of descent is usually traced from a single parent, the mother: a child is her or his mother’s and only belongs to her kin. The line of descent is therefore matrilineal, and kinship ties are transmitted by females only. Hence a male, unlike his sister, cannot transmit his kinship to his children—the latter are no kin to him, because they belong to their mother’s kinship group. Yet all his nephews and nieces (the children of his sister) are members of his kinship group.

Since individuals belong to their mother’s kinship group, female children represent a real source of wealth, for they are the ones who perpetuate

the clan. A man is considered to be the husband of the children's mother, but his physiological fatherhood is ignored, while the "social" father, the children's legal tutor, is actually his brother-in-law. The matrilineal system is not a matriarchy, giving the mother exclusive authority over her children. In this system, women are just progenitors, while actual power inside the family is in the hands of maternal uncles. The matrilineal system, which is still recognized in modern Kongo society, determines who is entitled to inherit from whom property rights, titles, and duties, and who transmits to whom social identity and status.

This does not mean that the head of a family or kinship group is necessarily a king or the head of the whole ethnic group—even though a king may be the head of his family or kinship group or be a local chief for a region or village. This is probably the way the king of Kongo identified, since he ranked above the heads of all families and the heads of all kinship, tribal, and ethnic groups and just under Nzambi a Mpungu. The order of succession may have been systematically dynastic, as was the case for King Nzinga Nkuvu, a descendant of the first Kongo king, Ntinu Wene/Lukeni. In some cases, it was the council of elders that made decisions about the succession or the nomination of a new sovereign, granting him legitimacy by transmitting to him the relics of different sorts of ancestors, such as albinos (believed to be reincarnations of the dead) or previous incumbents of the office.¹² The French anthropologist Albert Doutreloux's discussion of the "rod chief" (from the Kongo *mvwala*, "rod") allows a better understanding of one aspect of the authority of Kongo chiefs—and, by extension, kings—over their people:

1. When the chief travels and the *mvwala* is brought out, the members of his clan must remain in their houses until the Children and Grandchildren have passed.
2. No member of the clan may touch the *mvwala*, for to do so would mean he presumed to be chief.
3. If the chief plants his *mvwala* in the market, everybody must sit down and hear what he has to say.
4. If the chief comes to confer a title, his *mvwala* will be planted in the middle of the village until the investiture is over.
5. *Mvwala* is to be kept next to the house post at all times.¹³

Below, I discuss the ways the kinship system and the *mvwala*, as defined in the kingdom of Kongo, remain alive in, but are at the same time disrupted

by, the ideology of succession at work in the Kimbanguist Church. But first, it is important to stress that, as the explorers Filippo Pigafetta and Duarte Lopez remarked in 1591, “In the whole kingdom of Congo, absolutely no one can claim to possess anything that he may freely dispose of or bequeath to his heirs. Everything belongs to the king, who divides charges, valuables, and lands as he deems fit. The king’s sons are themselves subject to this law. For this reason, if anyone fails to pay him the annual tribute, the king strips him of his power and gives it to another man.”¹⁴

This passage is particularly illustrative of the absolute nature of the power wielded by the king over his subjects, collaborators, and sons. It is also useful to note that the socially established values described by Western observers constructed a common law that regulated the principle of primogeniture by requiring the submission of both younger brothers and women, thereby delineating an essentially male hierarchy. The aim of this subordination and dependency in social and family life was—and still is—to have women fulfill the roles of wives and mothers; depend on men for their material, affective, and social security; and perpetuate the clan’s lineage by giving birth.

Matrimonial alliances are also regulated by the common law, which requires the payment of a dowry. This, as Balandier explained, establishes the distinction between the legitimate wife, on the one hand, and the concubine or the (purchased) female slave, on the other. The dowry payment involves a ceremony that reveals the role of the young bride’s brother through the “option” he takes on his sister’s future children, who will have judicial and sentimental ties to him.¹⁵

The kingdom of Kongo is a foundation for the Kimbanguist religion, which builds its work of identity reconstruction on that kingdom and its civilization, with its distinctive religious and cultural worldview. While differing from the moral code of European missionaries, the Kongo moral code and respect for hierarchy included two types of sanctions. A negative sanction might have been meted out to offenders, based on the condemnation of certain actions regarded as vices—namely, adultery, theft, homosexuality, and pedophilia.¹⁶

Positive sanctions were like a good neighbor policy with the ancestors, since infringement on a taboo could cause their wrath. Here, morality was essentially social and knew neither of a Judgment Day nor of any notion of retribution; a purgatory was totally absent from Kongo representations of the hereafter. The Kongo conception of death and the hereafter derived

from a spiritual domain that is usually designated as animism: “Animism, strictly speaking, attributes a vital force or soul (*anima* in Latin, hence its name) to all elements in the world; it therefore involves worshiping the spirits and all the invisible beings endowed with personalities, wills, and powers, and also ancestor worship, which implies a belief in the notion that souls are independent from bodies and liberated by death.”¹⁷

A number of elements delineate the content of traditional Congolese beliefs, which never aimed to be universal, since only tribe members are allowed to worship. The first structural feature is the belief in a maker, known as God Almighty in each vernacular language (here, Nzambi a Mpungu). This belief is found in many traditional African religions, and God’s action is understood to coexist with the interventions of intermediary, more approachable deities and tribal ancestors. For the French Africanist Jean-Claude Froelich, the fact that archaic peoples had the concept of a single maker is an indicator that the belief is extremely ancient.¹⁸ Today, Kimbanguists still pray to the God of the Bible under the name Nzambi a Mpungu.

The second element that characterizes Congolese animism is the belief in invisible, more or less anthropomorphic spirits, which haunt springs, rivers, rocks, and forests. Froelich classified them into two categories: half-mythological, half-divine beings inhabiting trees and caves in human or animal guise, and local spirits, who serve God and inhabit the earth like human beings, but who are invisible and much more powerful than the former and are in direct contact with human beings. This aspect of animism is recognized in the Kimbanguist Church, but it is combated as evil, as I discuss below.

The third essential feature of Congolese tribal religions is ancestor worship, which is linked to beliefs about life in the hereafter. According to these beliefs, every human being is endowed with a soul, which either leaves the body after death to continue living in the invisible world of the ancestors or is reincarnated in his or her own family—especially if the deceased was a young person. Old people who die after a virtuous life become ancestors, whom their descendants worship with sacrifices and offerings of alcoholic beverages. The *bankulu* (plural of *nkulu*, “elder”) are the dead members of a clan. The land is their realm; they inhabit the woods and rivers, where they live in perfect harmony in villages similar to those of the living.¹⁹

Ancestors sometimes morph into deities—when they have become more remote through the succession of generations of their descendants. Paradoxical though it may seem, an ancestor may at the same time be considered as reincarnated and still be worshiped at his or her grave, as Froelich

pointed out: “an impalpable part of his being, the consciousness of his self, survives somewhere in the realm of the dead.”²⁰ Today, the Congolese still worship ancestors by paying tribute to the dead members of their families: it is a common sight in Congo on the feast of All Saints Day (November 1) to see people in cemeteries talking to their dead, settling old scores with them, or thanking them for their protection. As I discuss below, the Kongo belief in reincarnation is clearly recognizable in the Kimbanguist dogmas on the incarnation of the Holy Spirit and the Second Coming of Christ.

While, as Froelich pointed out, the notions of chastisement and reward seem absent from a moral system essentially based on social values, Balandier showed that the end of the trip is the realm of the ancestors and the goal is to obtain a “lasting life.” The dead are the “living *par excellence*”; they are outside of time and wealthy; they have power that allows them to control nature and human beings. From their villages underneath riverbeds or the floors of lakes, they can go out to mingle with the living (without being seen) and tamper with the order of things.²¹

Witchcraft and anti-witchcraft are also important components of animism. These twin but antagonistic forces are revealed through the witch and the anti-witch, who inspire, respectively, distrust and trust. According to the social beliefs held by tribal people and by Congolese people, the witch is the person who spreads fear because his or her supernatural powers allow him or her to cause death or madness, attract thunder and unleash thunderbolts, make women barren, or spread epidemics. Anything out of the ordinary can be blamed on witchcraft. Based on anthropological observation in the region, the witch (*ndoki*) is purported to shape-shift and can live “in the guise of a human being or animal, and dissolve the boundaries of nature.”²²

On the contrary, the anti-witch (*nganga*) is able to control the actions of the former: identifying the source of disease or misfortune, repairing what has become paralyzed, and healing the witch’s victims and those made sick by him or her. The anti-witch enjoys social recognition as the counselor, the protector, the healer who provides fetishes, and, most important, the fighter of witches. The *nganga*’s influence on individual destinies cannot be overestimated.²³

One might assume that this logic of antagonistic forces ruling the lives of Congolese people has totally disappeared nowadays, but nothing is further from the truth. The opposition between the witch and the anti-witch is still at work in Congolese social representations, and it does not seem to have been substantially modified by modernity. As the Congolese historian Martial Sinda pointed out, “Witchcraft has ramifications even in the cities

that are home to Africans with a European education. To this day, witchcraft, which causes actual panic in this milieu, remains far more formidable than any other misfortune.”²⁴

Even before Christianization, witches were already identified as the devil’s minions, known in the Kikongo language as *kadiapempa*. This notion was further reinforced by exposure to the Manichaean opposition of God and evil. However, the role of the anti-witch today seems to be yielding ground to both European rationalism and the tremendous success of preachers-cum-exorcists trained in American-style holiness churches, which have mushroomed since the 1990s in Brazzaville and Kinshasa. Still, among Kimbanguist believers, it is forbidden to resort to either witches or anti-witches.

Another feature of traditional Congolese beliefs was the system of initiation, which was a form of socialization of young men and women, helping them to internalize the norms and beliefs specific to the Kongo group. By keeping the members of a given age group secluded from the rest of the community for the period of time dedicated to their initiation, this system functioned as a school where rights and duties were made clear and obligations were explained. It may also be compared to a church, in which young men and women were inculcated with core beliefs about their relations to the universe and particularly to supernatural beings. In the kingdom of Kongo, a well-known rite of passage was *kimpassi*, which was recorded by many chroniclers and observers.²⁵ The local masters of *kimpassi*—led by a woman, the *ngudi ngang*a—were in charge of conducting the rituals: teaching the novices in an outdoor shed far from the village and making sure the young men and women complied with their new rules of conduct.

The initiation ritual took place in three phases. First, the novices went through a symbolic death: stripped of their clothes, lined up like corpses, bound by a pact, they were carried into the shed to be rebirthed by Ma Ndundu (Mother Albino). Then, each of the “newborns” took part in the specific *kimpassi* dance, recited the pledges of allegiance, and chose his or her initiation name. Their training in civic values and ritual practices, as well as the learning of secret languages, could then begin. Finally, after months or years of ordeals, the initiates could return home, where they were greeted with demonstrative celebrations and presents. *Kimpassi* most probably played a part in the struggle against Portuguese colonization, for the missionaries perceived it as a major obstacle.

Beyond *kimpassi*, the education of community members was based on narratives, proverbs, and songs explaining the meanings of names and

mottoes. In addition to this oral literature, which buttressed religious and political authorities, there were “revealed texts” (transmitted by the spirits, the ancestors, or the dead), formulas and prayers, and songs facilitating communication with Nzambi a Mpungu and the ancestors. It seems that the Kimbanguist Church’s spiritual retreats and renaming processes may be traced back to the tradition of kimpassi, since the inspired hymns of Kimbanguism reflect the supernatural relation between human beings and the angels or the departed, sending them spiritual messages.

Human beings’ relation to time was part of what may be called the traditional calendar. Indeed, in the kingdom of Kongo, there were not seven days, but four: Nkandu, Konzo, Nkenge, and Nsona. Each of these four days was associated with social and religious rituals: Nkenge and Nsona were the days of the ancestors and of resurrection, while Nkandu and Konzo were associated with the transmigration of souls.²⁶

It is clear that the Congolese system of beliefs and values starkly differed from those of Europe, although some Western explorers were capable of appreciation and enthusiasm about its level of “civilization.”²⁷ But eventually, after centuries of colonization, the traditional Congolese system was destroyed by Christianization, schooling, and urbanization, which profoundly disrupted the social and religious organization of Kongo society.²⁸

Christianity aims to be a universal religion, and European missionaries assumed it was their calling to convert all non-Westerners, without questioning the nature of their “heathen” beliefs. But from the outset, missionaries were confronted with an epistemological issue. Were non-Europeans able to become Christians? The question was first raised after the beginning of the colonization of the New World, where the indigenous peoples of the Americas were seen as devoid of souls and therefore impossible to Christianize. From the mid-1510s to his death in 1566, the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas argued Aquinas’s theological assertion that society is part of nature and hence all societies, whether Christian or pagan, are equally endowed with dignity and legitimacy. His priority was to spare the natives from further cruelty and slaughter on the part of the Spaniards.²⁹

Las Casas’s insistence earned him the title of “defender of the Indians,” awarded to him by Cardinal Cisneros as early as 1516. Paradoxically, his acute concern with human dignity faltered when it came to the Africans’ fate. Indeed, Las Casas suggested that the tragic depletion of the indigenous West Indian population be compensated for by importing slaves from Africa. From then on, sub-Saharan Africa and particularly the

kingdom of Kongo became a reservoir for an enslaved human workforce. Later, Las Casas recanted this position; his apologetic history of the Indies testified that the ability to progress and to receive the message of Christ belonged to all of humanity, for “all the races of the world are men.”³⁰ Still, it remained doubtful whether Africans could—or should—be evangelized, for the Christianization of sub-Saharan Africa and particularly the kingdom of Kongo was irretrievably tainted by practices of oppression inseparable from it.

Indeed, the Congolese territory officially entered history only after it was “discovered” by the dominant Other. In 1482, the Portuguese navigator Diogo Cão reached the mouth of the Congo River, on the coast of what was to become Luanda, Angola. As early as 1484, the Portuguese created trading posts along the Atlantic coast of the Congo and Angola. In 1575 they founded São Paulo da Luanda, which became their main trading and military post. The conquest of Africa was seen as guaranteeing both salvation and earthly bliss to those going there—soldiers, merchants, priests, all of them colonizers. Today, because of a lack of primary sources, it is impossible to relate precisely how the Congo was Christianized. It seems to have been an uneven process with varying degrees of success from one region to another and from one ethnic group to another.³¹

Still, it appears that sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the kingdom of Kongo, was Christianized in two phases. The first occurred in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and concerned mostly Portuguese colonies, such as the kingdom of Kongo, and islands in the Atlantic Ocean, such as Cape Verde, Príncipe, and São Tomé. The Portuguese were the first Europeans who settled there after the existence of natives was publicized by the “discoverers.” Subsequently, the Christianization process involved many different religious orders. Georges Balandier’s research shows how it was launched over and over again, involving one Catholic monastic order after another with little consistency. But ultimately, “the two centuries of Christianization had very poor results, with a heavy toll in terms of sufferings and human losses, due to either the climate or the journeys.”³²

Hence, the complex history of the Christianization of Congo and Angola shows the long-standing presence and influence of the Portuguese, until the kingdom of Kongo was officially divided up among three European powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884–85.³³ This conference resulted in what is commonly known as the General Act of Berlin, or the sharing of Africa. The ancient kingdom of Kongo was partitioned by colonial powers, which split its population among the so-called Belgian Congo (now the

Democratic Republic of the Congo), the French Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), and Angola.

Territorial limits being set, there were now further encounters between Christianity and traditional Kongo religion; the penetration of the three Congos by Europeans went hand in hand with a modernizing mission, which introduced not only market economics but also Roman Catholicism. The Berlin Treaty of 1885 was amended by the Convention of Saint-Germain-en-Laye,³⁴ which guaranteed freedom of religion and worship and reaffirmed the right of all missionaries to enter, travel, and reside on the African continent. While Christianization had often predated colonial penetration and occupation in many African countries, it was significant that this act put all Christian churches on an equal footing, inviting them to further compete for new converts.

Colonial archives also show another form of religious orders dividing up Africa. The key actor in this process was Cardinal Charles Lavigerie, who founded the Society of Missionaries of Africa (aka the White Fathers) in 1868 and the order of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa in 1869. The Holy See put him in charge of the apostolic delegation to Sahara and Sudan, granting him the title of primate of Africa. In 1889–1890, in a context of competition with Protestant missionary societies, which had begun gaining substantial ground in Central Africa, Lavigerie obtained permission from King Leopold II of Belgium for an international conference in Brussels on the abolition of slavery. An international treaty was signed both to put an end to the slave trade and to protect all missionary communities fighting against human trafficking. Lavigerie thus secured protection for Catholic missions in Central Africa while associating the penetration of the Catholic Church with the cause of civilization.³⁵

The Berlin Conference thus ushered in the second phase of Christianization, marked by the free circulation of missionaries and the settlement of missionary posts and institutions in all the countries delineated by the Association internationale africaine. This new *modus operandi* for Christianization further strengthened the ties between the missionary societies and their home governments.

Following the long-standing and unchanging policy of the Roman church, any process of Christianization potentially entailed the construction of a state, that is, a temporal structure. The Catholic Church had an interest in politics and did not just send missionaries to Africa: the Holy See dictated the carving of states out of Africa as it was gradually being Christianized. The church, whose mission is to preach the gospel, remained

closely associated with the colonial venture, but this was done on the condition that the church's political action would not clash with the interests of the imperial states of Europe. Christianization was not supposed to lead to political empowerment of the natives. Evidence of this can be seen in the following declaration by Pope Benedict XV, who reiterated in 1920 the doctrine of separation between the Christianization of natives and their politicization, which had been inaugurated in 1880: "When dealing with the populations they are in charge of, the missions shall carefully banish any idea of paving the way to a political awareness of their nationhood. Hence they shall never meddle in any kind of political or temporal interests of their own nation, or any other nation."³⁶

How did the Christianization of Africans effectively take place after the Berlin Conference? How did Christian missionizing deal with questions pertaining to ethnicity and African values and belief systems?

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the missionary movement gained momentum with the founding of the *Séminaire des missions étrangères* (Seminary of Foreign Missions) and missionary orders. Among the leaders of this movement was Father François Libermann, who initiated the first mass journey of missionaries to sub-Saharan Africa and founded the Society of the Holy Heart of Mary, which eventually merged with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (or Spiritan congregation); he is often considered to be one of the cofounders of the latter.³⁷ Frequently named by historians of Cameroon are the German Pallottine father Herman Nekes and the Spiritan father Alexandre Leroy, while scholars of Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon regularly mention Msgr. Prosper-Philippe Augouard, and scholars of Rwanda and Burundi discuss Msgr. Jean-Joseph Hirth.

Famous Protestants include the explorers of the inland territories, such as Dr. David Livingstone, a Scottish missionary and physician who was instrumental in the promotion and expansion of the British commercial empire, the Christianization of the southern countries of Africa, and the fight against the slave trade. Rev. George Grenfell was a British Baptist missionary and explorer who spent thirty-two years of his life surveying sub-Saharan Africa and founding missionary settlements, particularly in Cameroon and Congo.

Joseph Merrick, a Baptist pastor hailing from Jamaica, is considered to be the first Black missionary; in 1843 he tried to found the first Christian Baptist mission among the Duala people of Cameroon. In spite of his failure in this attempt, "the ideology of negritude, which was then in the making in the British West Indies, may take pride in the fact Blacks were

Christianized by other Blacks. Yet, these mixed-race Jamaican literati were considered to be ‘Whites’ and were called by this name among the people of the coast of Cameroon.”³⁸ This hampered their initiative, which was later stopped by the standards defined by the Berlin Conference. Pastors William Holman Bentley and Thomas Comber, both members of the Baptist Missionary Society, settled in the Belgian Congo. Their accomplishments included the *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language*, published in 1887. When Comber passed away that year, Bentley settled in Ngombe Lutete in Lower Congo, where he “devot[ed] his linguistic expertise to the translation of the New Testament into Kikongo, which was completed in 1893. He also translated Genesis, Proverbs, and part of the Psalms.”³⁹

Thus, in the southern part of the Belgian Congo—the future birthplace of Kimbanguism—the Baptist Missionary Society had already put down roots before the Catholic missions arrived, and this was a source of tension. As a result of this competition, Christian missions moved inland, far from urban areas, which proved to be a key factor in their methods of Christianization.

The two main methods implemented by Western missionary societies to penetrate Africa and found settlements were, first, gaining the trust of local chiefs and kings, and second, creating schools for the education of the natives. Western missionaries actually invented the figure of the local chief, an authority they established in parallel with preexisting traditional chiefs. Sporting their medals, the local chiefs were often in conflict with the traditional chiefs, whose voices conveyed a sense of continuity with the precolonial system of values and beliefs, independent from the colonial power structure that had bestowed honors on their rivals. Under such circumstances, the medal-bearing chiefs and their conversions to Christianity were essential in the process of development of missions in sub-Saharan Africa, and these chiefs were the most commonly mentioned by colonial ethnographers.⁴⁰ In Cameroon, for instance, the princes had a vested interest in relying on the White man and his God, which were of great import in a world centered around a keen sense of antagonistic forces, social prestige, and awe toward invisible powers.⁴¹

This is how a new elite, composed of catechists, bilingual assistant teachers (known as *moniteurs*), and medal-bearing chiefs emerged as an intermediary category between White missionaries and the majority of natives. This native elite was complicit with the Christianization process, the expansion of missions, and the wider colonial order. The intrusion of

Christianity thus entailed profound transformations of the social and political systems, both of which were closely linked to religion.⁴²

In this context, Christianization went hand in hand with the preservation of the political order. King Nzinga Nkuvu, a descendant of the first Kongo king, Ntinu Wene/Lukeni, converted to Roman Catholicism and was baptized as Afonso I (aka Joaõ I). This baptism was not a simple individual conversion, but a political act. According to the historian Luc Croegaert, personal baptism also entailed political calculations on the part of African heads of state. Indeed, they saw it as a way to build alliances with European powers and to thwart the plots of rival family members and their allies.⁴³ During the twenty years of his reign, King Afonso corresponded regularly with the king of Portugal and requested the help of missionaries to Christianize his kingdom.

Starting in 1491, the year the Capuchins arrived in Kongo, the nation's religious landscape was transformed. At first, the North was scarcely affected by Christianity, while other people were gradually Christianized. In 1492 the church of Angola was born, and in 1518 Don Henrique, the son of King Afonso, was consecrated as the first native bishop of sub-Saharan Africa by Pope Leo X.

Still, the king of Kongo did not outwit the colonizers; although converting to Catholicism with his subjects meant placing his kingdom on the international scene, it did not establish an independent Congolese church outside of the grip of the Vatican and Europe. Although the king's son was a bishop, this never paved the way for other nominations of Congolese men to the bishopric; Henrique remained the first and only Black bishop in the kingdom of Kongo. After Henrique passed away in 1521, King Afonso wanted two of his nephews to be granted the same title, but his efforts were to no avail. The king of Kongo's wish to appoint his own clergy was rejected by the king of Spain, who appointed all members of the regular clergy in São Salvador (the capital) and paid them. Even attempts by the Jesuits to found seminaries in Congo at the time proved unsuccessful.⁴⁴ And "in 1596, when King Álvaro II had won Vatican approval for Kongo to have its own bishops at a cathedral in São Salvador, the crown of Portugal had managed to squeeze the right to nominate bishops in the See of Kongo and Angola from the Vatican."⁴⁵

Meanwhile, the Christianization process went on, relying on, besides the conversions of chiefs and their subjects, schools and churches, which were two inseparable institutions insofar as the moniteurs were usually catechists as well. Regarding education, Croegaert stressed that "the priests

immediately acknowledged its importance and always considered it as the bedrock of their missionizing work.”⁴⁶ Indeed, through the school system, children were disciplined and (re)educated away from the traditional value system, which the missionaries perceived as inherently pagan. Consequently, an actual social change was implemented in the confrontation between the biblical values conveyed by Christian missionaries and the traditional Congolese values. A Christian society emerged from the Congolese people’s perception of the need to embrace European values and thus be defined as “civilized” beings.

While new values were being shaped out of the first contacts between the dominant Whites and the subjugated Africans, the book as an object of learning had a considerable impact on the subjectivities of Africans, as the American theologian Vincent Wimbush pointed out in his analysis of the narratives of enslaved Africans, particularly the famous Olaudah Equiano.⁴⁷ The introduction of books, and in particular the Bible, elicited curiosity among Africans, who, like Equiano, were used to oral traditions. Books soon represented a locus of the secrets or magic of White men.

Yet in the eyes of the dominant Other—the White man—was a Black person really seen as a full-fledged Christian once baptized? How did Western missionaries perceive Black identity when reading and teaching the scriptures?

The Catholic and Protestant missionaries no doubt believed in their missionizing work; they were primarily concerned with bringing salvation to Africans by spreading the gospel among them. But what exactly did they want to save them from? Colonial archives hold materials written by missionaries that give clear indications of their perception of Black people. In effect, the image that colonial missionaries had of Africans coincided with the definition of pagans in Christian theology; it was based on a Manichaean opposition between good and evil, light and darkness, God and the devil. This is reflected in the first catechism published in Kikongo in 1624 for the Kongo catechumens’ preparation for baptism:

M[aster]. Why do you say, “By the grace of God”?

D[isciple]. Because it is neither thanks to my own merits, nor those of my father and mother or any other mortal creature that I have become a Christian, but thanks to the goodness and forgiveness of God and the merits of Christ.

M. What dignity does man receive when he is made a Christian?

D. He becomes the adopted child of God and an heir to Heaven.

M. And he who is not a Christian?

D. He remains a cursed son, a slave to the Devil; he is cast out of Heaven.⁴⁸

In this theological worldview, human beings were either children of God, once they had received a Christian baptism, or children of the devil, if they had not been christened. They were children of the devil because of original sin, which was said to bind all human beings as descendants of Adam and Eve, until they were christened.⁴⁹ When people got baptized in the church, they went from darkness to light. When European missionaries landed in Africa, of course, none of the natives had been baptized, so every African was supposed to be under the influence of the devil. The socially codified values of the kingdom of Kongo, described by early European observers and condemned by White missionaries, became subsumed under three significant social practices: polygamy, dancing, and the use of fetishes. The first two were closely associated in the judgmental perceptions of Kongo culture conveyed by missionaries.⁵⁰ Consequently, Africans had to be freed from sin through conversion to Christianity. But until then, they were considered by their instructors to be children of the devil, pagan, polygamous, fetish believing, animist, savage, and barbaric.

But once baptized, were Africans—in this case, Congolese people—regarded as full Christians? This question was addressed by Kabwita, who explained that Christian missionaries' interest in the African continent, particularly the kingdom of Kongo, was primarily spurred by economic priorities. At a time when the triangular slave trade was by far the most lucrative form of trade, the Catholic Church also possessed its own slaves to ensure its financial self-sufficiency.⁵¹ The enslaved captives, bound for the Americas, had to be christened, but they received no religious education prior to their baptism. Priests merely gave the future slaves a "simulacrum of baptism," that is, a collective baptism, for which the celebrant was paid with a per capita tax.

In reality, such christenings had no other function than increasing the zone of influence of the Catholic Church and its secular allies in their competition with Protestant kingdoms, then defined as heretical. This is why first the government in Lisbon and then the Spanish administration insisted that all captives be baptized.⁵²

Therefore, although baptized, the Congolese who remained on the continent were clearly perceived as incomplete Christians by a number of missionaries. "In 1603, a missionary declared that Congo was totally ruined

where good morals were concerned and was Christian only in name.”⁵³ Bishop Manuel Baptista Soares, who was known for his numerous excommunications, wrote the following remarks about the Congolese in his 1619 report: “Christianity is so imperfect among them that the king himself has official concubines. Among this numerous people, only very few regard the vices of the senses as sins. Many among them take the title of defender of the faith and send ambassadors to the courts of Rome and the Catholic king. They do so out of vanity rather than a sentiment of zeal for religion.”⁵⁴

However, a different assessment was given by other missionaries, such as Father Liévin-Bonaventure Proyart, who, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, insisted that the Congolese people publicly professed a genuine attachment to the Catholic faith, though they lacked competent clergy to exhort them and give them the sacraments.⁵⁵ In 1906, Msgr. Henri Vieter was eloquent when challenging his European audience’s assumptions about African Christians: “See for yourselves. . . . There are many black Christians who put some white people to shame. Many whites have not done for Christ in their whole lifetime one-tenth of what blacks must offer to be given baptism.”⁵⁶

This brief historical overview of the religious experience of African Christians shows to what extent Black people, even when baptized, were considered to be second-class Christians who were members of the church only as slaves or as statistics for competing missionary societies. From the standpoint of European missionaries, Africans were christened either without their consent or in order to benefit from the charity work of the church, which provided them with clothing, food, and medical care. Hence, for Europeans, Africans remained “savages and barbarians, who were happier under the yoke of Europeans than in the dire poverty and cruelty of their despicable milieu.”⁵⁷ The link between Christianization and ethnicity was unbreakable in a worldview that assigned Africans to the lowest rung in the hierarchy of human beings.

Given this context, how did Africans perceive the religious messages that were preached to them, particularly the Bible? What place did they assign to the dominant Other, that is, the White man, in their own worldview?

2

AFRICAN RESPONSES

THE BIRTH OF AFRICAN CHRISTIANITIES

Three elements help in understanding Africans' reactions to the missionary enterprise in their midst. The first is the Bible, which was translated by missionaries into local languages, allowing Africans to approach and, eventually, appropriate the Christian message.¹

By translating the Bible into African languages, European missionaries gave the natives the possibility of not only becoming familiar with the scriptures, but also, in the context of Protestant missions, interpreting and understanding the gospel in an autonomous manner. This obviously facilitated the emergence of independent African religious initiatives, such as the independent Baptist church, which was founded and led by Black missionaries and pastors with the support of the Baptist Missionary Society based in Cameroon. African versions of the Bible sometimes led readers to diverge from the message given by the missionaries. The African audiences who read these texts were often more preoccupied with identifying familiar notions than exotic ones in the Bible, which led them to appropriate the scriptures through the prism of their preexisting worldviews, shaped by their own traditions (see parts II and III).

Second, the Christianization process entailed forms of syncretism, incorporating African values and belief systems. Indeed, the complexity and difficulty of the missionary venture may perhaps be explained by the natives' desire to protect their culture from invasion: the Congolese did not want a foreign god to be imposed on them. They covertly resisted this

deity by keeping up the worship of trees, springs, natural forces, and ancestors; many testimonies give evidence of this in fifteenth-century Congo. Consequently, a misunderstanding appeared in this syncretism, since Africans, including the Bakongo, adhered to Christianity on the sole basis of their needs and the rules of their own logic, twisting Christian symbols and images to fit their traditional religious worldview.

The third element to be taken into account to grasp the natives' reactions to the missionary enterprise is their perception of White men and their God, since the rising influence of the latter significantly transformed Africans' traditional worldview and representations. How did the Congolese understand their first encounter with Whites and their subsequent exposure to European belief systems?

To understand the image Africans had of Europeans, it is necessary to investigate the accounts of the first encounters between the two groups. As mentioned in chapter 1, the "discovery" of the mouth of the Congo River by the Portuguese navigator Diogo Cão resulted in the massive arrival of European missionaries and settlers, who penetrated the region from the Atlantic seaboard. According to some chroniclers, when the Congolese discovered White people, they considered them to be ancestors, because in their collective psyche, the departed were represented as white-complexioned beings. It may be assumed that this first perception of Whites was a positive one, since ancestors have the status of benefactors, protectors, messengers of good news, and soothsayers (when they appear in dreams). This positive image seems to have persisted for a rather long period of time—long enough for the Christianization process to have been facilitated, in spite of the cross-cultural misunderstanding that had led the natives to believe that these white-colored beings had come to bring them riches.²

This need for the early Congolese to understand and rationalize the abnormality of White presence was made even more explicit by MacGaffey: "The Kongo understanding of what sort of people the Europeans were and what their arrival meant was very different from what the Europeans themselves thought. In Kongo thought to this day, the universe is divided into the two worlds of the living and the dead, separated by water. Africans who die travel to the land of the dead, where they change their skins and become white."³ A prayer dedicated to the British sailor Andrew Battel, who was temporarily detained by the Angolans in 1608–1610, says, "Baliani ampembe muenyeye ke zina," which means, "my white-faced companion has come out from under the surface of the earth, and he shall not stay with

us for long.”⁴ This misunderstanding led the Congolese to integrate the Europeans as nonhuman beings who would not stay permanently.⁵

However, the behavior of the Portuguese was such that they soon lost their characterization as spirits to become threatening, possibly dangerous men.⁶ Once the myth that Whites were ancestors had been debunked, Africans were in a position to judge them by their deeds, and consequently ranked them among the evil and dangerous people. Still, the paradoxes of colonization and its ideological representations resulted in the natives’ ambivalent acceptance of White men as embodiments of both God *and* the devil, as benefactors *and* malefactors, liberators *and* oppressors. As the French ethnologist Pierre Erny observed, “Skin color, maybe more than any other element, is conducive to a surprisingly persistent imagery, which often upsets communication when men from different races come into contact.”⁷

The representation of Whites as messengers from the next world first facilitated the missionizing project, but that image was gradually deconstructed, particularly when missionaries began spreading the biblical myth of the curse of Ham as an instrument of and a justification of the domination of Whites over Blacks. In the person of his son Canaan, supposedly standing for all of his descendants, Ham was cursed by Noah in favor of his brothers, Shem and Japheth (Genesis 9:25–27). The scriptures remain silent on the racial origins of Ham and his descendants. Indeed, the concept of race and the racist ideologies of domination attached to it did not appear until 1555. The sociologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse observed, “In the early Church of Augustine the curse of Ham or Canaan was regarded as an explanation of slavery, but not of blacks, simply because slavery at the time was ‘colourless.’ The association of the curse of Canaan with blackness⁸ arose only much later in medieval Talmudic texts. In the sixteenth century it became a Christian theme and by the seventeenth it was widely accepted as an explanation of black skin colour. From here it was but a small step to the interpretation of the curse of Canaan as an explanation of and justification for the slavery of black Africans.”⁹

The circulation of ideas from one culture to another is a timeless phenomenon that affects in various ways every facet of culture. In the realm of religions, the transfers usually happen in only one direction, since the dominant religion usually conveys an ostensibly universal message with an ethnocentric discourse. European Christianity, essentially rooted in Mediterranean cultures, gave Africans the Bible as the only history book for humankind, in which Blacks also were supposed to find meaning.

Racial ideologies thus built a racial classification of human beings on the basis of this chapter from Genesis. The episode of the curse of Ham/Canaan fueled Christian ideologies of the role of Providence as well, since it led a number of missionaries and Western defenders of imperialism to believe that theirs was God's chosen race and that they had been entrusted by him with the mission of civilizing the other, necessarily benighted, races. This myth of the curse of Blacks has been a major underpinning of Christian European ethnocentrism throughout world history. *An Essay on the Inequality Among Human Races*, the infamous book written by the French writer and diplomat Arthur de Gobineau in 1853, rapidly became one of the cornerstones of racist and xenophobic ideologies.¹⁰ Gobineau's racist speculations on the Bible contributed to the emergence of Christian eurocentrism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He contended that Black identity was altered forever as a consequence of the curse of Ham, which had already been used to justify the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas and the enslavement of Africans by Europeans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These theories are recognizable in several schoolbooks used in Christian missions in Africa, which taught children about the origin of races by tracing them, as Gobineau did, to the three sons of Noah. Other schoolbooks added a geographical partition of these races: "The children of Shem went to Asia; the children of Ham went to Africa; the children of Japheth went to Europe."¹¹

In the French Congo, the religious order Fathers of the Holy Spirit began missionizing quite early. One of them, Augouard, left his mission in Gabon to set out for the Congo as soon as Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza had conquered the region, in 1880. An explorer and a builder, known as "the bishop of the cannibals," Augouard made regular trips along the river, in the swamp-land, and through the rain forest. He was convinced that Africans were still under the curse of God as descendants of Ham: "The black race is indeed Ham's accursed race, God's accursed race. There is nothing in particular that indicates it, but it can be felt and seen everywhere, and one can't help but feel compassion and terror at the sight of the poor wretches. Pagan blacks are lazy, gluttonous, given to stealing and lying, and indulging in every vice. This is no flattering portrayal, and yet it is less ugly than the truth."¹²

In one of the many letters sent to his mother, Augouard wrote "that he was really certain now that he was living among blacks, that they actually were the descendants of Ham—a descent of which the prelate seemed to lament the existence."¹³ Finally, one of his dialogues with Pope Leo XIII illustrates the distance he kept from his fold:

“Is it true,” Leo XIII asked him, “that your diocesans eat human flesh?”

“Yes, Holiness, every day.”

“How strange, not one of our holy martyrs was ever eaten!”

“Well, Holiness, I will try to be the first.”

“Don’t you do such a thing,” the pope replied, “we would have no relics!”¹⁴

This exchange shows how Africans were seen as alien human beings, to be approached and Christianized on the basis of specific criteria. Even the schooling of African children integrated this notion, since they were taught about the curse on their ancestors to encourage them to internalize the myth and accept their inferior status vis-à-vis White people. For instance, a songbook used in missionary schools, which was published in 1911 in the Belgian Congo by the Order of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, includes three songs in Lingala written by Sister Arnoldine Falter that explicitly mention the curse of the Blacks, with one song entirely dedicated to the theme. The title of this song is “Esisezelo ea Kam” (Punishment of Ham):

O Father Ham, what did you do?
 We are suffering so much
 By God we are punished
 Harshly without pity
 The punishment that He inflicted on you,
 is inherited by us all.
 And Noah, as a punishment for you
 humiliated you
 And thus Ham always works for his brothers.
 And now, we your descendants,
 [we are] slaves on earth.¹⁵

Another song, “Nkongo Salangana” (Congo Delight), celebrates the liberation of the Congolese from Arab slavery. The true reason for this enslavement, however, is related again to the curse of Ham:

Cursed by our Father Noah,
 Look at us, all the Blacks of this country,
 Oppressed because of his terrible insult!¹⁶

The psychological impact on Black children of such a form of schooling was assessed in the United States by the famous “doll test” invented and used by Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the 1940s. The American scholar Joe Feagin related a more recent incident, which took place at a private Christian elementary school. A nine-year-old Black girl was told in class by her White teacher, “Black people were born of sin, let’s pray for the black people.” The girl returned home wishing she were White.¹⁷ Feagin related this typical example of racial insensitivity to the story of Noah’s curse of Ham’s descendants, which was used as an ideological justification for the teacher to inflict psychological harm on a child. The teacher did not even think about the repercussions of such an ideological reading of scripture, let alone equip her Black pupil with any means of fighting back systemic racism and “the pain of white oppression.”¹⁸

In a similar process, schools in sub-Saharan Africa were used in parallel with missions to inculcate the beliefs that colonial domination by Europeans was justified by Ham’s being cursed by God and that Blacks should be maintained on the bottom rung of humanity as a result. The Christianization of Africans was implemented both in churches and in schools, and the children were thus prepared to collaborate in their own domination, internalizing the myth of their stigmatization and the notion that their only salvation must be brought by the White masters’ gospel.

Although ancestor worship was a source of blessings in traditional African belief systems, it became blurred and was turned into a source of oppression by these teachings. Indeed, not only did the myth of the curse of Ham upset the place of ancestors in traditional African cosmogonies by replacing them with an entirely new set of White forebears, but it also ingrained in Africans’ minds the acceptance of submission to Whites as preordained by God. Liberation from this fate could not be achieved without help from the White conqueror, as shown in the following excerpts from the same songbook. The instrument of the liberating divine intervention is a “strong King sent by God to this country.” King Leopold II, who is alluded to here, acts as the intermediary of the Belgians:

A Country elected by God
to release your brothers and sisters!
O Belgium, may Heaven make you prosperous!

A third song (number 43) teaches the children that they actually belong to a cursed race:

Look at Ham, the son of Noah,
 He made fun of his own father
 He was cursed by his father
 So are the Blacks, his children.

The affliction of being of the same stock as Ham and necessarily miserable is strongly emphasized in the texts of most Christian songs taught to Africans; these are only some examples. A second booklet of hymns, *Njembo y'Eklezia* (Joy of the Church), published in Bamanya by the same religious order, had the children sing (number 52):

O mother of Jesus, mother of the Congo,
 Look with benevolence on your country.
 Protect your black children
 Who are in pains and misfortune!
 We were the slaves of the devil,
 we were in death and in darkness.¹⁹

An excerpt from a schoolbook published in 1951 by the Dominican fathers taught African children their history in the following terms:

Long ago . . . the Arabs used to mistreat the Blacks very much; they captured women and children and sold them. . . . The great chief of Europe, called Leopold II, sent soldiers . . . and the war against Arabs came to an end. . . . Not long ago, our fathers were pagans; they did not know God, they had superstitious beliefs; they were lazy, distrustful, and envious of one another. Diseases came from the East. When Leopold II learned of this great misery, he asked the Fathers and Sisters to come here and help us. Now we see churches, schools, hospitals, and maternity wards everywhere. . . . The natives are gradually becoming Christians. . . . The ignorant are liberated and cured of their diseases thanks to the doctors and Sisters. Nowadays, animosity and jealousy no longer exist among blacks, for the Kingdom of God has already come to the Congo. Glory to the King.²⁰

Surprisingly, the king who is glorified here is not Jesus Christ but the Belgian king Leopold II, and God's elect are not presented as Christians or even Jews, but Belgians. This shows that there was a deliberate intention to impose on Africans an ideology of domination allegedly blessed by Providence.

The criteria chosen to consolidate the myth may be tied to the perception of Africans by colonial missionaries. The passages above show that being a pagan, holding “superstitious” beliefs, or being lazy, jealous, distrustful, sick, poor, or derelict are read as so many signs of the curse on Africans, and their salvation is thanks to the Belgians—made visible in Catholic social work and charities. These qualities also correlated with missionaries’ racist perceptions of phenotypical features, such as skin color, which buttressed their theological representations of Africans and elicited emotional responses to articles of faith or beliefs. This observation is valid for nations throughout Africa, as is shown in Wimbush’s analysis of the narratives of enslaved Africans. Skin color was an “easy and obvious point of difference, that was made to signify the dominance” of Whiteness around a “rather dramatic focal point . . . [which] turned out to be something mysterious (of course), variously referred to as beauty, sentiment or sensibility, imagination or reason. In all categories and all respects that [were] said to matter, blacks [were] found wanting.”²¹ Indeed, a schoolbook entitled *Practical Lingala Lessons* (Lingala is the national language spoken in both Congos) asserted, “Men around the world are divided into four categories—White, Black, Yellow, and Red. Whites inhabit Europe; they are scattered around the world, in Asia, Africa, and America. They surpass all others in intelligence.”²²

The Protestant missionary J. E. Carpenter, from the Congo Balolo Mission, evidenced his own belief in deterministic theories of geography and climate when he asserted, “Arabs in the north and Europeans in the south of Africa surpass Africans in knowledge.” He further explained, “The first reason is that they do not live in hot regions; as a result, they work hard for food and clothing. Another reason is that in Europe and Asia, people knew how to read and write for hundreds of years, and they brought their knowledge together. Africans do not know about writing.”²³ All differences between Blacks and Whites were fraught with moral implications and value judgments. Black people were assumed to be less intelligent because of their lack of written language (despite their rich oral traditions) and thus incapable of recording their knowledge and transmitting it from one generation to the next. Such racist ideologies necessarily had an impact on many Africans, triggering among them reactions of either submission or revolt when they became aware of their subaltern position.

Black intellectuals in Africa reacted to the racist content of the myth of Ham in the same way as James Baldwin when he wrote, “I realized that the Bible had been written by white men. I knew that, according to many

Christians, I was a descendant of Ham, who had been cursed, and that I was therefore predestined to be a slave. This had nothing to do with anything I was, or contained, or could become; my fate had been sealed forever, from the beginning of time.”²⁴ Denouncing the superiority complex of Europeans and their descendants, Baldwin concluded, “It is not too much to say that whoever wishes to become a truly moral human being (and let us not ask whether or not this is possible; I think we must believe that it is possible) must first divorce himself from all the prohibitions, crimes, and hypocrisies of the Christian church.”²⁵

In the late 1950s, Afrocentric theories became attractive to many African intellectuals and elites. Among them, the thesis of Cheikh Anta Diop—a Senegalese scholar who studied Egypt, who remains as contested by Westerners as he is revered by Africans—was that Ham was Black, contrary to his brothers, Shem and Japheth. Diop wrote: “In fact, we know that the Egyptians called their country *Kemit*, which means ‘black’ in their language. The interpretation according to which *Kemit* designates the black soil of Egypt, rather than the black man and, by extension, the black race of the country of the blacks, stems from a gratuitous distortion by minds aware of what an exact interpretation of this word would imply. Hence, it is natural to find *Kam* in Hebrew, meaning heat, black, burned.”²⁶

Diop’s contention is that the biblical ancestors were therefore Black and that White men appeared only recently, from the stock of Shem (ancestor of the Semites), whose name designates “a white man who bears the more or less weakened traits of a very old race-mixing with the black element.”²⁷ Consequently, Afrocentric theorists who agree with Diop that Ham was Black do not embrace the myth of the curse of Ham but consider Blacks to be of older human stock than Whites. This leads many to consider the biblical forebears to be Blacks.

On the political plane, African elites also reacted to the process of inferiorization of Blacks. The movement known as *negritude* has varying definitions. Aimé Césaire said, “*Négritude* is the consciousness of being a Black person, the simple acknowledgment of a fact that implies the acceptance and assumption of one’s destiny as a Black person, as well as one’s history and culture,” while Léopold Sédar Senghor popularized the concept by defining it as “constituted by the body of values of Black civilization.”²⁸

But *negritude* was not simply imposed as a concept; it was used as a tool of response to White discourse. This conception of Blackness was challenged, however, by many authors. For instance, Thomas Melone saw it as a process of recuperation by members of an elite speaking on

behalf of all Africans without their consent: “The African people feel by no means concerned in this case; they are not in a position to participate in the sacred meal to which they are invited by . . . *négritude*.”²⁹ In his book *Orphée noir*, Jean-Paul Sartre, seeing in *négritude* an “anti-racist form of racism,” warned that it was thereby contributing to perpetuating the myth of White superiority. It must be admitted that the movement was trapped in the stereotypes of colonial ethnology and that it remained focused on the idea of a Black race while turning into positive traits the aspects depicted as negative in colonial discourse. “[It] is still the same language about race that *Négritude* took up to overturn it and exalt black beauty, black originality, and intuitiveness. The ‘haven of race’ thus sustained politics, poetic creativity, and the fight for and construction of pan-Africanism. *Négritude* is a racialism that could not do away with the assumptions of colonial ethnology.”³⁰

Nevertheless, despite fierce debates over its legitimacy, *négritude* did have great literary and political importance in French-speaking Africa up to the 1970s, and it favored the emergence of the theories of Diop, Théophile Obenga, and Joseph Ki-Zerbo, all of whom searched for an African past—no matter how mythical or real it might be—to herald a positive Black identity in the face of White colonizers. All of these scholars claimed that because Egypt, the cradle of science and civilization, was peopled by Blacks, Whites come from Blacks, and civilization originated from Africa to then reach the rest of the world.³¹

Several Black leaders built on *négritude* to redeem and extol Black identity. Joseph Mobutu, the president of the Republic of Zaire, addressed the United Nations in 1973: “Pseudo-scientific arguments were not lacking to justify the dehumanization process while treating the black man as an inferior being, for, they said, the white colonist was different from the black colonized, so the white man was superior to the black one.”³²

On the religious plane, reactions came both from White missionaries sympathetic to the Black cause and from Africans themselves. From the same Bible also emerged salvation myths, and several protests were framed as religious arguments rooted in the Bible. The Cameroonian theologian Jean-Marc Ela related that “in 1870, a group of missionary bishops circulated a document begging the popes to release the black race from the curse of Ham, which weighed them down.”³³ The awareness of the ethnocentric nature of the Christian message as a tool of domination also triggered reactions among African leaders and, understandably, led to the emergence of African independent churches. In the early eighteenth century, a young

Congolese prophet initiated the oldest African independent movement derived from Christianity. Her name was Kimpa Vita.

The movement she inspired is known as the Antonians. It was one of the first instances of African appropriation of the Christian message and the Bible, combining political and religious aims into what would become a long ethno-messianic history. Kimpa Vita, who would become known as Dona Beatriz, was born around 1684 to parents who were members of the highest group of the Kongo aristocracy. Because her father served as a commander in the king's army, he was often on the battlefield, warring for King Álvaro X. The army was composed of men, but it also included female members who followed their husbands, brothers, or sons to cook their food and take care of them. Consequently, it may be inferred that Kimpa Vita was raised in a military-inspired culture, steeped in patriotic values.

Her hometown was on Mount Kibangu, a few miles away from the capital, Mbanza Kongo (São Salvador in Portuguese), in the province of Sundi. Chroniclers of the kingdom of Kongo had already noted the importance of this province in the monarchical system; indeed, it was always ruled by the firstborn sons of kings and heirs to the throne.³⁴ It was on Mount Kibangu that the *mani vunda* (king), Pedro IV, had found refuge with his followers during the war and chaos that followed the death of King Antonio I of Kongo. Though legitimately presenting himself as the rightful heir to the crown and as a Catholic sovereign based in São Salvador, Pedro IV had been unable to secure the backing of the Capuchin father Bernardo da Gallo in his attempt to reconquer his subjects. He dared not return to the capital, fearing assassination attempts from his rivals; yet the Congolese people felt an ardent desire to see the kingdom restored under one sovereign, who would live in the re-peopled capital. He was prompted to act in response to this popular aspiration by the politico-religious movement initiated by the twenty-two-year-old Kimpa Vita.³⁵

From historical accounts of her life, it appears that Kimpa Vita had a dual relationship to Christianity. First, her religious experience included the Kongo mystical tradition of kimpassi (described above), into which she is said to have been not just initiated, but inducted as a priestess. In the accounts of her contemporaries, she was an "anti-sorceress" who practiced healing, and this status necessarily enhanced her prestige among her fellow Congolese, for the *nganga*, the anti-witch or medicine (wo)man, was rather well perceived in the Kongo society of the time. Before Kimpa Vita launched her movement, another woman, Mafuta, who was also a *nganga*,

had attempted to organize a struggle against the foreign presence in Kongo. She was considered to be a harmless mystic by the colonial authorities, and they made no moves to stop her.³⁶

Second, because Kimpa Vita had been baptized in the Catholic Church, her knowledge of the Bible was restricted to the catechism, which had been translated into her native Kikongo in 1624. Because the Catholic Church discouraged free access to the Bible, she grew up in an environment steeped in devotion to the Virgin Mary, the saints, the sacraments, and liturgical objects, such as the crucifix and the rosary. The catechism focused on prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary; the Articles of Faith; the Ten Commandments; the sacraments; and discussions of sin and the Christian life.³⁷ Kimpa Vita had no exposure to the Bible, but she seems to have received the standard type of education in the Catholic tradition that was available at the time. This is what she used as a lens to interpret the oppression of the Congolese in particular and Black people in general. For Georges Balandier, the Bible, "which presents the Africans with a society comparable to their own, provides a possibility of transcending the inferiority they have suffered, of denying their state of 'savagery.' By identifying with the people in the Book, they can re-establish an equality which in their eyes is the condition of all future progress."³⁸

Thanks to its missions in the kingdom of Kongo, the Catholic Church offered the Congolese—whose ethnic belongingness was and remains very strong—a communal and spiritual framework that fit with ancestor worship and Kongo cultural norms. Black people could hardly find a satisfactory message in the Bible, and it was overshadowed by the rituals and saints of the Catholic Church (particularly Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint James, Saint Francis, and Saint Alexis). Africans could only inscribe themselves into humankind's history by embracing and appropriating the Catholic history and traditions surrounding them. As mentioned previously, the Christianization of the kingdom of Kongo took place in two stages. The first stage, from the fifteenth century into the sixteenth, was led by the Portuguese under the spiritual patronage of Saint James and involved coercion, as did the struggle against Islam in Iberia. The second stage occurred in the mid-seventeenth century under the patronage of Saint Anthony and was characterized by the more pedagogical approach chosen by the Capuchins, typically hailing from Spain or Italy. Saint Anthony was presented as an intercessor, whom the Congolese could look to for salvation from hardship. This can be seen in the following prayer:

Si quaeris miracula,
 If you are seeking for miracles [see for yourself:]
 Death, error, and calamity
 The Devil and leprosy are disappearing
 Sick people are healed and rise again
 The sea recedes, and shackles are broken;
 As for lost things and limbs,
 The young and elderly ask for and retrieve them.
 Dangers are warded off and poverty ends.
 Let those who know tell all about it,
 All that Paduans say.³⁹

Saint Anthony is also invoked by women seeking marriage:

My dear Saint Anthony,
 I pray you very fervently
 To give me my first husband;
 The next one I'll find on my own.
 My dear Saint Anthony,
 My Saint Anthony of flesh and bone,
 If you give me no husband,
 I will leave you in the well.⁴⁰

It is quite understandable that Congolese resistance was organized on the basis of the identity parameters the people had been given, involving a form of identification with biblical characters as well as Catholic saints and traditions. When Kimpa Vita became convinced that she had received a mission from Saint Anthony to restore the kingdom of Kongo, she began a process of identity reconstruction.

Kimpa Vita's prophetic mission came at an important point: the kingdom was filled with hopelessness and disappointment with the political leaders' subservience to the Catholic missionaries. Quite significantly, the founding moment of the Antonian movement was the attempt by Kimpa Vita to fell a cross that stood right next to the king's court.⁴¹ The Capuchin chronicler Father Bernardo da Gallo wrote that this happened after a first encounter with the king, whom Dona Beatriz had asked to meet to tell him about her mission.

Although she came from the aristocracy, Kimpa Vita successfully drew villagers' attention and won their support. Her message met their expectations

in the socioreligious field as well as the political and economic ones. Indeed, being a *nganga*, she was able to fight a phenomenon that all dreaded—witchcraft—but also bring a message of hope based on eschatological promises. She claimed to have visions of Saint Anthony, who took possession of her body. The oldest testimony from the period is that of da Gallo: “The event occurred thus, she said: while she was sick and on the verge of dying, in her throes, a friar dressed like a Capuchin appeared to her. He told her he was Saint Anthony, sent by God into her head to preach [to] the people and announce the restoration of the kingdom.”⁴²

Because the intrusion of the Christian religion had upset the traditional system of Congolese religions, which was centered on ancestor worship, challenging the new religious order implied an appropriation of the Bible. This is why, having no direct access to scripture, Kimpa Vita appropriated aspects of Catholic identity, particularly the figures of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Saint Francis, Saint Alexis, and Saint Anthony of Padua, by turning them into Kongo ancestors. The young prophet deliberately opted for a Congolization of the Christian religion, as da Gallo explained: “She used to say that Jesus was born in São Salvador, which was Bethlehem . . . baptized in Nsundi, which was Nazareth, and that Jesus Christ as well as the Madonna and Saint Francis were originally from the Congo, from the Black race . . . that Saint Francis was born in the clan of the Marquis of Vunda and that the Madonna, the mother of Jesus, was the descendant of a female slave or a servant of the Marquis Nzimba Npanghi (Mpangu).”⁴³

Because this was happening in the early eighteenth century, nation-states were not yet the norm around the world, particularly in Africa. Thus, identity rhetoric rooted in ethnic belonging was extremely common; following this logic, people could have no access to history save by thinking in terms of ethnicity. This is why the kingdom of Kongo was sacralized, since Jesus, his mother, Mary, and the saints, Beatriz claimed, had been part of its history.

In this identity reconstruction, Kongo names were subjected to a mimetic process, with the Portuguese titles *Dom* and *Dona*, normally reserved for the nobility, being appropriated by all men and women.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Portuguese Christian names “were rapidly ‘kongolized’ and adapted to the phonetic exigencies of the Kikongo language. . . . Certain names received an indigenous justification: they were explained by means of analogies. . . . This usage of foreign names has continued from the sixteenth century to the present, and has led to the formation of veritable ‘fraternities’ of homonyms.”⁴⁵

Christianity also offered the Congolese people an avenue for ancestor worship through expressions of reverence for the dead, particularly through the Feast of All Saints,⁴⁶ allowing them to reconnect with their ancestors in the spirit of traditional religions. Hence, Catholic prayers and sacraments were revisited. The *Salve Antonia*, as Dona Beatriz's new prayer was called, was more like a critique: "God wants an intention, it is the intention that God grasps. Baptism serves nothing, it is the intention that God takes. Confession serves no purpose, it is the intention that God wants. Good works serve no purpose: intention is what God wants."⁴⁷ Obviously, this state of mind was closer to the Protestant ethics of free interpretation and universal priesthood than to the confession of sins, which is one of the core sacraments in the Catholic Church.

Kongo culture gives crucial importance to intention, specifically in the elaboration of harmful or curative fetishes (*nkisi*). Hence, it is not surprising that Kimpa Vita should have considered intention to be key to understanding sin and being cleansed from it. The emphasis she placed on intercession was also characteristic of both traditional Kongo representations of Nzambi a Mpungu's intermediaries and the syncretic effects of Christianization on Kongo conceptions of God, as John K. Thornton pointed out: "In the final portion of the prayer, the *Salve Antonia* shifts from denying the validity of the sacraments to reasserting the concept of advocacy of the Virgin and the saints before God which characterizes the original prayer and, indeed, Catholic theology, but with one exception. The new prayer takes the virtues of Mary from the *Salve Regina* and substitutes Saint Anthony, progressively increasing his power and significance until he becomes a figure equal to God Himself, starting with the popular images of Mary holding the baby Jesus."⁴⁸

Bernardo da Gallo's account of the facts helps illuminate the nationalistic dimension of the project, by quoting one of the hymns taught by Kimpa Vita: "Saint Anthony is the merciful one. Saint Anthony is our remedy. Saint Anthony is the one who will restore the kingdom of Kongo. Saint Anthony is the comforter from the kingdom of heaven. Saint Anthony is the gate to heaven. Saint Anthony holds the keys to heaven. Saint Anthony is above the Angels and the Virgin Mary."⁴⁹

It is useful to remember that the doctrine Kimpa Vita was building on was that of the Portuguese Catholic Church and that allusions to Saint Anthony abounded in the prayers of Portuguese sailors. But the act of appropriating Saint Anthony and having him intervene in Congolese politics with other attributes than those of Christ and the Holy Spirit (see John 14:15–17) was entirely novel.

The importance of kinship has already been noted as crucial both in the succession of chiefs and in ancestor worship. Hence, it comes as no surprise that Jesus and his mother were perceived as being Africans and were included in the lineages of ethnic or kinship groups. Indeed, it is only by being part of the ethnic/kinship group that ancestors may be worshiped and answer the prayers of their children. Likewise, whenever Whites needed to gain acceptance from the Congolese, they allowed themselves to be assimilated as if they were ancestors returning from the next world. This image remained embedded in the Congolese psyche for hundreds of years until the colonial rule imposed by Europeans became intolerable, leading the Congolese to dispel the confusion.

Kimpa Vita did precisely the work of deconstruction of the representations that conflated Europeans with the ancestors, first by stressing that the former's Whiteness should not be mistaken for that of the African spirits. As her contemporary Father da Gallo wrote, "She taught that white men originated from a certain soft stone called 'fama.' This is why they are white. Blacks come from a tree called 'musanda' (*nsanda*). It is from this tree's bark or envelope that they make ropes and loincloths, which they use to cover their nakedness; this makes them black, or the color of this bark."⁵⁰

Kimpa Vita's choice of stone as the matter Whites were made of was quite significant to her rejection of them; to this day, Congolese people still say of callous people that they have a heart of stone. Her comparing Whites to a stone was thus symptomatic of her resentment of colonial oppression and her efforts to disconnect self-esteem from Eurocenteredness among her followers. Conversely, the bark from the tree she defined as the origin of Blacks was given a positive connotation, since this dark-colored bark possesses therapeutic virtues. In providing her followers with a new, positive self-identification, she was effectively helping them free themselves from negative stigma. This also explains why Kimpa Vita appropriated Christian beliefs. As William Randles explained, "This nationalization of the Christian religion with a geographical transposition of the Christian tragedy seems to have occurred in parallel with the praise of blacks over whites."⁵¹

In Kimpa Vita's eyes, the kingdom of Kongo was the real holy land, and the forefathers and foremothers of Christianity belonged to the Black race. Thus, as Sinda pointed out, "Dona Beatrice was trying to found a Congolese church by imitating the Catholic Church she was vigorously fighting because of the latter's influence on the kingdom's political staff. A Christian herself,

Dona Beatrice intended to create a national church that would be freed from all the antagonisms that divided the kingdom's political society."⁵²

Along with this transformation of the Portuguese Saint Anthony (the patron saint of preachers), Kimpa Vita's extolling Blackness went hand in hand with a rejection of Whiteness, which was connected to evil. Bernardo da Gallo voiced his indignation over this matter quite explicitly:

More than anything else, what those Antonians achieved was to make us missionaries the targets of hatred. They prevented parents from presenting their children for baptism and adults from getting married in church. They made us an object of popular odium, to such a point that upon seeing us, people call their false Saint Anthony to the rescue, crying, *sadi, sadi, sadi, Jesus Mary* (here comes the Nkadiampemba [devil], find protection!). In each village we crossed, we heard them crying this to ask their false Saint Anthony to rescue them from us, whom they considered to be devils.⁵³

The phenomenon of appropriation of the devil—a character from the Christian pantheon—to serve as an explanation for the disruption and evil wreaked by Whites is similar to the more recent appropriation, in the cosmogony of the Nation of Islam, of the figure of Jacob as the “evil scientist” who created a race of white-skinned, blue-eyed devils.

Just as significantly, in Kimpa Vita's discourse Whites also appeared as the ones who held the secret of divine revelation and economic development. Indeed, she accused foreign priests of “having monopolized the secret of divine revelation and the riches associated with it for the sole benefit of White people and of opposing the effort of salvation led by ‘Black saints.’”⁵⁴ The simple fact of reproaching Whites for not sharing the secret of divine revelation and wealth was revealing of her awareness of the gap between Blacks and Whites and the resulting underdevelopment of African societies. In response to these concerns, the Antonian movement focused on the hope of bringing about the reunification of the kingdom of Kongo and its liberation from White oppressors for a future of peace and prosperity.

The movement created by Kimpa Vita was not anchored in any specific location. Historians' accounts indicate that it was made up of several thousand followers who roamed in a sort of pilgrimage, praying and singing on the roads and in public places. Although her increasing influence earned her popular support in many villages, Kimpa Vita was negatively perceived by the Kongo aristocracy and the official church.

The prophet publicly proclaimed that she held the *santísimo sacramento* (holy sacrament) that would help restore the kingdom; this eventually drew the attention of King Pedro IV, who lived on Mount Kibangu. He sent emissaries to verify her assertions, but Kimpa Vita turned them away, arguing that the king should come and see for himself. Reluctant at first, the king eventually chose to take advantage of the young woman's impressive popularity for his own political benefit.

Meanwhile, the official branch of the Catholic Church in the kingdom of Kongo was beginning to fret about Kimpa Vita's rise and making plans to bring about the demise of the Antonian movement. Da Gallo, a Capuchin missionary, showed his determination in his dealings with the Congolese people, but he also maintained good relations with political powers. He had perceived the prophet Mafuta to be harmless to the Catholic mission, but his reaction to Kimpa Vita's movement was unequivocal condemnation, because she preached a form of heresy that attacked the Catholic faith. Not only did Kimpa Vita work miracles, but she also preached the restoration of the kingdom of Kongo, denouncing missionaries, the Holy See, and the sacraments of the Catholic Church, and burned the crosses as so many other fetishes. Finally, her giving birth to a child (Antonio), even as she advocated chastity and claimed to be a virgin and a moral example, was used against her by the missionaries.

The Capuchins quickly put pressure on King Pedro IV after he had prevailed over his two rivals under the banner of Catholic orthodoxy. He eventually ordered Kimpa Vita to be arrested. On July 2, 1706, the Congolese prophet was sentenced to death by an ecclesiastical tribunal; she was burned at the stake with her lover.

Even after her death, the movement she had initiated did not lose all momentum; instead, it kept alive the nationalist consciousness of the Congolese people, thanks to the eschatological promises of the prophet, who had proclaimed the impending judgment of God. According to the Swiss Africanist and theologian Marie-Louise Martin, it was Kimpa Vita who launched for the first time the idea of a Black Christ who would come to free oppressed peoples from bondage. Kimpa Vita also predicted the upcoming restoration of the kingdom of Kongo, which would coincide with the return of prosperity.⁵⁵

The execution of Kimpa Vita did not bring about the atonement of the Antonians. On the contrary, according to some historians, her movement turned her into a mythical figure. Another missionary, Father Lucques, observed:

After their [Beatriz's and her lover's] deaths, the Antonians, instead of asking for forgiveness and reintegration, became more obstinate than ever. They proclaimed that the woman they revered as a saint had appeared on top of the tallest trees in São Salvador. Soon after, another woman began preaching that she was the mother of the false Saint Anthony [i.e., Kimpa Vita]. She encouraged people to have no fear, telling them that while the daughter was dead, the mother remained. She insisted on being called "the mother of all virtues." May God assist us with His grace so that the holy faith may not be lost in this country.⁵⁶

The final comment of the missionary is revealing of the long-term impact left by Kimpa Vita in the minds of her fellow Congolese. Indeed, while the Antonian movement did not endure for long after the death of its founder, the kingdom, although weakened by civil war, was able to remake itself in a new shape after the death of King Pedro IV in 1718. Father Cherubino de Savonna, a Capuchin who lived in Kongo from 1760 to 1767, described the new political structure as "a cluster of independent local chiefs, who were allied between themselves through a system of matrimonial alliances—a sort of empire gathering separate kingdoms."⁵⁷ As Georges Balandier retrospectively analyzed, Kimpa Vita's dream of an "ideal kingdom of liberty and fullness of life" reemerged when her "mystical heirs . . . without even knowing her name" took the same path.⁵⁸ These spiritual heirs are undeniably Simon Kimbangu and his followers, who were clearly inspired by the same hope to nationalize Christianity and rebuild the kingdom of Kongo both mystically and spiritually. Yet, before Kimbangu appeared on the scene, another African-initiated movement of spiritual revival was launched by a prophet named William Wadé Harris, although he was far away from the former kingdom of Kongo, on the border between Liberia and Ivory Coast.

Westerners' preoccupation with Christianizing Africans had not remained restricted to Congo and Central Africa; it took them everywhere on the continent, particularly to Ivory Coast and Liberia on the so-called Gold Coast of western Africa. The Capuchins, the Dominicans, and the Society of African Missions of Lyons, France, undertook this mission in 1895. However, theirs was a difficult task, since the population was either already converted to Islam or still attached to animist beliefs. By the early twentieth century, fewer than 2,000 of the tribal residents of the coast had been baptized.⁵⁹

It was not until Harris launched a prophetic movement that the region was won over to Christianity. In 1914, the First World War caused the French settlers and missionaries present in western Africa to return home. Yet the missionizing work was not disrupted, for the impact of Harris's preaching led to a remarkable breakthrough of the Christian churches in Ivory Coast. His activities led to more than 100,000 Africans being baptized in the span of eighteen months—most of them in Protestant denominations (which French colonial authorities tended to consider more loyal to the British Empire), but a sizable number in the Catholic Church.

William Wadé Harris was born in Liberia circa 1860 in the Grebo ethnic group. The Grebos belong to the Kru people, who are found on both banks of the Cavalla River, in the center and southeastern portion of Liberia and in the western part of Ivory Coast, in a forest area. Liberia had been founded twenty years before, in part by African American freed people who had decided to leave the United States and go to Africa. When they landed on African soil, they were greeted by the Grebo people, who gave them part of their lands. As a member of this welcoming group, Harris, a native of the town of Sinoe, was constantly in contact with the African Americans who had settled there.

By 1910, tension had risen between the American-born Black people and the native Liberians as a result of cultural clashes and diverging political interests. The former were perceived as new colonizers by the latter, who called them "White Negroes," for they had concentrated into their own hands the management of all public affairs. This situation of domination and subordination triggered conflicts, which were exacerbated by the British and French colonists who were also present in the country; they were trying to curry favor with certain native groups in boundary disputes with the other groups of settlers.⁶⁰

This was the context in which William Wadé Harris was jailed in 1910 for taking part in protest movements, which the Liberian government considered to be a coup. In his prison cell, he claimed, he was visited by the Archangel Gabriel, who entrusted him with the special mission of converting the pagans and spreading the gospel and set him on his prophetic path: "You are not in prison,' the Angel said. 'God is coming to anoint you. You will be a prophet. . . . You are like Daniel.'"⁶¹ Mrs. Neal, Harris's daughter (whose full name has not survived in the historical record), provided the following details in an interview she gave to the missionary Pierre Benoit: "He saw the Lord in a great wave of light and was, he said, anointed by him. He felt the water pour on his head. God told him to burn the fetishes,

beginning with his own, and to preach everywhere Christian baptism; he must, by divine command, leave off all the European clothing he was then wearing and his patent leather shoes, to reclothe himself in a kind of toga [toga] made with a single piece of stuff [material]. . . . He seemed so exalted and talked so incoherently that all the world thought him mad.”⁶² Once out of jail, Harris chose two female collaborators to help him in what was to become a mass religious movement, spreading over Liberia, Ivory Coast, and the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana).

William Wadé Harris’s career was relatively long compared with other founders of prophetic churches. He was born a Methodist; his mother was part of the first generation of Christians in a coastal village of the Grebo country, which was often visited by Episcopalian and Methodist missionaries. At age twenty-one, he joined the American Methodist Episcopal Mission of Harper, Cape Palmas, where he had been baptized and had learned to read and write both in English and in his native Grebo. He then became an active lay preacher in the tradition of the American Methodist mission. Around 1885–1886, he married in the Episcopal Church a woman named Rose Farr, who was the daughter of a renowned catechist and schoolteacher from the Episcopalian mission of Spring Hill. Harris was still a young man when he found work as part of the crew of a British merchant ship, which traded along the coast of West Africa, and later as a brickmason. These experiences exposed him to other African civilizations. After the birth of their first child, Harris left the Methodist Church to join his wife’s church, and he became a lay preacher in the Episcopal Church and an assistant schoolteacher at the American Protestant Episcopal mission of Half Graway in 1892. This job not only put him in charge of many native students, but eventually earned him an influential position in the government as an interpreter and cultural intermediary. His proficiency in English caused the Catholic fathers Hartz and Harrington to praise his abilities, the former writing in 1914 that Harris “speaks the pure and flawless brand of English which is Britain’s pride” and the latter, in 1917, that Harris “spoke in perfect English, a very remarkable acquisition for a Kruman whose pigeon [*sic*] English is usually unintelligible except to the initiated.”⁶³

Thus, William Wadé Harris’s religious and educational background was strong enough to allow him to read the Bible without an intermediary and to gain a personal understanding of the scriptures on the basis of his own spiritual quest and rootedness in African cultural values. His work as a preacher consisted of translating into local languages and offering interpretations of chosen biblical passages for his people. His accurate knowledge

of scriptures and the depth of his Christian beliefs were remarkable to many of his European contemporaries; yet, he had been educated not by foreign missionaries, but by African converts, with whom Harris shared a similar worldview.⁶⁴

His preaching focused on three main points. First, he attacked witchcraft and fetishes, a stance that was all the more significant and convincing because he was said to have inherited from his mother the status of a conjure man—like most other African spiritual leaders. Second, he published ten commandments that espoused African cultural practices, condoning polygamy but banning adultery. Finally, the prophet used the scriptures to deliver a message of hope to his fellow Africans on the basis of eschatological promises, telling them that “the time is fulfilled, the devil is defeated” and baptizing them “in the name of the Father, and his Son who died for your sins on the cross, and of the Holy Spirit who will change your hearts.”⁶⁵

As mentioned earlier, his success was largely due to his linking the scriptures to issues pertaining to Blackness. Prophet Harris’s attachment to the Bible is perceptible in one of the messages he sent to his followers: “Read the Bible, it is the word of God. I am sending you one in which I have marked the verses that you should read. Seek the light in the Bible. It will be your guide.”⁶⁶ Yet, although he taught the Bible and christened thousands of people with the blessing of Catholic and Protestant missionaries and colonists, Harris did not condone the subjugation of his fellow Africans. The human losses of the First World War led the French authorities to recruit soldiers among the natives of their colonies, including the Ivorians; along with other leaders, William Wadé Harris expressed his reluctance to comply in a letter sent to one of his followers, in which he wrote: “France is making war on the king of Ethiopia and on his subjects. Let no Black man go to Europe.”⁶⁷ From then on, his relationship with the French colonial authorities changed.

In addition, his belonging to a Protestant church had led more converts to join British missions than Catholic missions, which were supported by the French settlers. Hence, he was eventually arrested in Ivory Coast and deported to Liberia, since he was not a French subject. There are two versions of this arrest, the first of which stresses the brutality of the colonial forces, who allegedly manhandled him and one of his Liberian singers, Helen Valentine, to such a point that Valentine died of her wounds. The other version emphasizes that the officer in charge of deporting him waited until Harris was done preaching and baptizing converts on the beach of

Port Bouët before he notified Harris that he was to leave French territory and take a boat to Liberia.⁶⁸

Following Harris's deportation, three types of reaction were observed. First, the Catholics, whom the Ivorian natives saw as connected with the French colonial administration, lost the respect they had gained from Harris's activities. Second, in order to better cash in on his success, and perhaps appropriate it, the Protestant churches appointed two emissaries: Rev. Benoît in September 1926 and John Ahui in 1928. Both had secured certified letters from the prophet, in which Harris expressed his wish to see his followers join a Protestant church, particularly the Methodist Church. Finally, the natives themselves were inspired by his example, and a number of leaders emerged who all claimed to be following in the wake of Harris. But they were loyal neither to the French colonial authorities nor to the mother churches.

A number of studies claim that Harris did not create a church, but collaborated with the established Protestant and Catholic churches. Still, the nationalist awareness he triggered eventually led to the founding of the Harrist Church.⁶⁹

Using race as a tool for the interpretation of the scriptures through the prism of African values, Harris's preaching addressed Blackness with a problem-solving approach. According to Harris, it was the animist background underlying ancestor worship, witchcraft, and fetishes that was to blame for the lack of development of Africans compared to Europeans. Witchcraft had already been shown to be a key cultural aspect of African cultures and societies; it is still embedded in their worldviews. In trying to find rational causes for the technological gap separating Africans from Europeans, Harris assumed that Africans had been conquered by Europeans because they had caused God's anger by choosing to put their trust in fetishes and by preying on each other through witchcraft.⁷⁰ Harris was effective in his preaching because he was convinced that if Africans would only renounce witchcraft and convert to Christianity, there would no longer be a "Black problem," and Africa would close the technological gap that plagued it. By appropriating the Bible as a form of therapy for the predicament of colonized Africans, he tied his own prophetic actions to his understanding of Blackness and Whiteness.

While the teachings of the prophet appropriated the Bible, he did not dissociate the scriptures from the figure of the White missionary who came to Christianize the Africans, contrary to what Kimpa Vita did in the kingdom of Kongo. Harris never urged his fellow Africans to leave European

churches or rebel against the colonists. The French ethnologist René Bureau emphasized this characteristic of Harris's activities in the following passage: "People asked him, 'When you are gone, who will show us the way?' 'The White man will—this is why I am handing the work over to the clerics. Wait for the man of the Bible; if a White man comes and does not show you the Bible, then you'll know he's a liar.'"71 Taking the White man as a model, Harris gave a reformulation of Christianity buttressed by three representations of Whites: as men of the Bible, as men of the school system, and as men of science.

Harris believed that Whites knew the secrets of the Bible because they had mastered the art of reading and writing—the White men's magic. Only by becoming initiated into the mysteries of scripture could Africans also share in these secrets; hence, the prophet insisted that his followers send their children to the White schools, so that they would learn how to read and eventually empower themselves to own the secrets of the Bible and of development. This prophetic logic was apparent in Harris's preaching and was conveyed in the words of an apostle from the Harrist Church whom I interviewed in 2002: "When Prophet Harris came, there wasn't much teaching done. The whole teaching revolved around his prophecy, which is known as the trilogy of prophecy and recommendation of Prophet William Wadé Harris. He told them, 'Send your children to school! When they are endowed with the White man's knowledge, they will read the contents of the Bible for you. You will not be misled. And you'll be seated at the same table as the Whites and share the same meal.'"72 School thus appeared in Harris's preaching as the place where Africans could learn how to read and write with the goal of understanding the holy scriptures, which he believed contain the key to development. Today, most Harrists follow this prophetic logic, and many are literate.⁷³

The third representation conveyed by Harris's message was Whites as prosperous men of science; he announced that a golden age had come with the arrival of White missionaries and schools. The racial equality he was envisioning was unthinkable in colonial times, however, since Blacks and Whites could not even be seated at the same table sharing either a conversation or a meal. This vision of Blackness and Whiteness could only exist in the future, but Whiteness appeared here as a mirror, which the prophet used to increase awareness of the gap between Blacks and Whites and find a solution to it.

As in the case of Simon Kimbangu, the prophetic movement that Harris initiated elicited two kinds of reception: from the colonial authorities and

from those Catholic and Protestant churches and those African independent churches that were spawned from his own.

Several types of officials reacted to the preaching of this Africanized Christian message by William Wadé Harris. First, the Catholic and Protestant missionaries gave him free rein to preach and baptize in their mainstream churches. Some missionaries actually considered him to be a messenger sent by God to achieve the conversion of his fellow Africans. The French colonial authorities initially also had a favorable view of his prophetic movement, because Harris was careful to preach an attitude of total submission to their power, the value of a strong work ethic, and morality.⁷⁴

Nationwide, among the native population, William Wadé Harris's mission was wildly successful, since his fellow Grebos and other Ivoirians massively embraced a message that promised protection from evil, immediate prosperity, and certain punishment to those who would not heed the prophet's words and acts of power.⁷⁵ This is why the people followed his sermons and applied his recommendations scrupulously. Fetishes were burned and the Sabbath respected, with shopkeepers closing their stores. The British governor of the Gold Coast eventually acknowledged that Harris had a powerful impact on the masses and had succeeded where White missionaries had failed. The deportation of Harris caused the rise of several new leaders who claimed to be his spiritual heirs, and his succession became a bone of contention. Several African-initiated churches claim to have their origins in Harris's mission.

Prophet William Wadé Harris's activities gradually spawned an independent church rooted in his teachings. In August 1955, the Harrist Church held its first congress, which ended in the appointment as its head of the Ivoirian John Ahui, who inherited the prophet's staff and Bible on the occasion. With the help of assistants, Ahui successfully spread Harris's prophetic message among villages near the Liberian border. The years leading up to Ivoirian independence offered a favorable context for the development of the Harrist Church, and it was quickly granted recognition by the Ivoirian state. On March 4, 1961, it was officially registered with the new state authorities under the name of *Église du Christ/Mission Harris*. It became a major African-initiated church, ranking fourth among the churches of Ivory Coast. In 1998, it joined the World Council of Churches, based in Geneva, Switzerland; it was then 2 million strong, according to the Harrist officials I interviewed in the greater Paris area.

In spite of the vicissitudes and splits entailed by the succession crisis,⁷⁶ the Harrist Church has survived to this day, drawing its tenets from the

Bible and the teachings of the prophet. It is interesting, from a comparative perspective, to investigate its formulation of the question of Blackness. Harrist theology offers three analyses of Blackness, distinguishing an African identity predating colonization, an Africanness linked to William Wadé Harris's prophetic activities, and a modern Black identity in the making.

Harris considered himself to be a messenger sent by God to convert and christen Africans in order to save them from the spiritual predicament that their attachment to fetishes and witchcraft had put them in. He described his mission in the following terms: "God has sent me to proclaim that the time has come when he wants to deliver you from the power of the devil who ruins you, makes you foolish and kills you. The time is fulfilled, the devil is conquered here also, therefore burn all your fetishes, all your gree-grees and your amulets, and I will baptize you in the name of this God who is your Father, of his son Jesus Christ who has died for your sins, and of the Holy Spirit who changes your hearts."⁷⁷

By baptizing Africans and separating them from the psychological hold of fetish worship and witchcraft, Harris believed that he would lead them to prosperity and happiness. The main goal of his mission was met, for he was successful in converting massive numbers of Ivoirians to Christianity, while before he came, many had asked for baptism and joined Christian churches only halfheartedly, out of fear rather than faith, with their belief in fetishes and witchcraft still intact. Harris's prophetic approach was revolutionary: he knew exactly how they felt, and he had an insider's familiarity with Ivoirian society and its cultural references, since he came from a family of conjure men and women. He succeeded where European missionaries had failed, because he, like the people he preached to, was African. Yet, though nationalistic and geared to Africans' needs, his message was not hostile to Europeans and Whites in general. On the contrary, Harris had a positive image of Whites and conveyed it in his preaching.

Harris recommended submission to colonial authorities for the time necessary for Africans to learn Western technology in order to carry out African projects of development. As Sheila Walker has explained, he encouraged Ivoirians to work hard while keeping them focused: if they learned White men's techniques and prayed for seven years, they would empower themselves and make possible their own liberation from colonialism.⁷⁸

His prophetic message created short-term millenarian hope, since, following the seven years of prayer, asceticism, schooling, and learning the Bible, the time would come when his prophecies would be put to the test. But after seven years, Harris's contemporaries did not witness the fulfillment

of his prophecies: Africans were still chafing under the various colonial yokes in the 1920s and would remain so in the following decades. But the Harrists I interviewed explained that the prophet's pronouncements were realized in the creation of the United Nations, where Blacks and Whites are seated at the same negotiation table, and in other organizations where African voices are heard. In the realm of politics, Harris's prophecies are also considered to have been fulfilled by the independence of Ivory Coast, including his statement that a "son of Africa" would lead.⁷⁹

Harris's activities led to the emergence of two forms of Ivorian nationalism. On the one hand, the new political awareness gave rise to political parties, including that of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who was to become the first president of Ivory Coast and who emulated Harris's talent in bringing together various ethnic groups. Hence, William Wadé Harris's prophecy about sons of Africa reaching the highest positions in Ivory Coast as a result of the recommendations seemed to be fulfilled, since Houphouët-Boigny had been educated in European schools prior to being elected.

But on the other hand, although the prophet himself never called for a rejection of Whites or even for the creation of an independent church, his followers' actions, particularly those of his Ivorian successor, John Ahui, showed a separatist tendency, which led to the launching of the Harrist Church in 1955, apparently with Harris's approval.⁸⁰ This shows that Harris, like other African prophets, may have been unable to entirely control the desire for political liberation that they had fostered among their compatriots. This was also the case with an earlier splinter of Harris's movement, a sect called Sons of God, which announced the "apocalyptic" end of the colonial order, promising that "the whites would leave the land before long and taxes would be reduced."⁸¹ This had caused concern in the French colonial government and eventually led to the prophet's deportation from the territory of Ivory Coast.

It seems clear that William Wadé Harris's prophetic activities gradually led his followers to consider his mission and identity from a different angle than the missionary perspective, so that they finally began to attribute to him some of the same importance that Jesus Christ had for White people. "God sent each of his sons to a different group of people to save them. Jesus went to Europe to save the whites, but he did not come to Africa. It was the prophet Harris, an African like us, whom God sent to bring us into the light."⁸²

It is striking to observe how the Harrist Church, like other African-initiated churches, offers a pattern of dissociation between the White

missionaries' "magic," as embodied in the scriptures, and the believers' explicit need to see a fellow African preach a message of salvation, holding out the promise of immediately palpable evidence of empowerment. This pattern can only be effective in these churches through a more or less deliberate process of appropriation and transformation of the Bible under the guidance of the prophetic leader and his successors. Perhaps the movement that best exemplifies such a process is the Kimbanguist Church, which was born in the early 1920s through the political and religious activities of another prophet in the Belgian Congo: Simon Kimbangu.

3

KIMBANGUISM AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The Kimbanguist movement was launched by Simon Kimbangu, a Baptist catechist. Belonging to the Cingombe ethnic group, part of the Kongo group, he was born in the village of Nkamba, near Matadi in the southwestern part of the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) around 1889, according to many researchers. The Kimbanguists believe he was born on Wednesday, September 12, 1887—a date that was discovered by the church by means of a revelation. The only child of his parents, Kuyela and Luezi, he was called Kimbangu, which means in Kikongo “the one who reveals the hidden meaning of things.”

Kimbangu was educated at the Baptist mission of Ngombe Lutete. After marrying Marie Muilu and fathering three sons—Charles Kisolokele (February 12, 1914), Paul Salomon Dialungana (May 25, 1916), and Joseph Diangienda (March 22, 1918)—he became a catechist there in 1918. Many historians contend that he failed the exams that would have given him pastoral status. But not all of them share the same analysis of this failure. Georges Balandier, for instance, tied it to Kimbangu’s prophetic vocation: for Balandier, this failure triggered the shock that made separation from the mission easier (or even caused it), by arousing the need to act in parallel with the official church and, to a certain extent, against it.¹

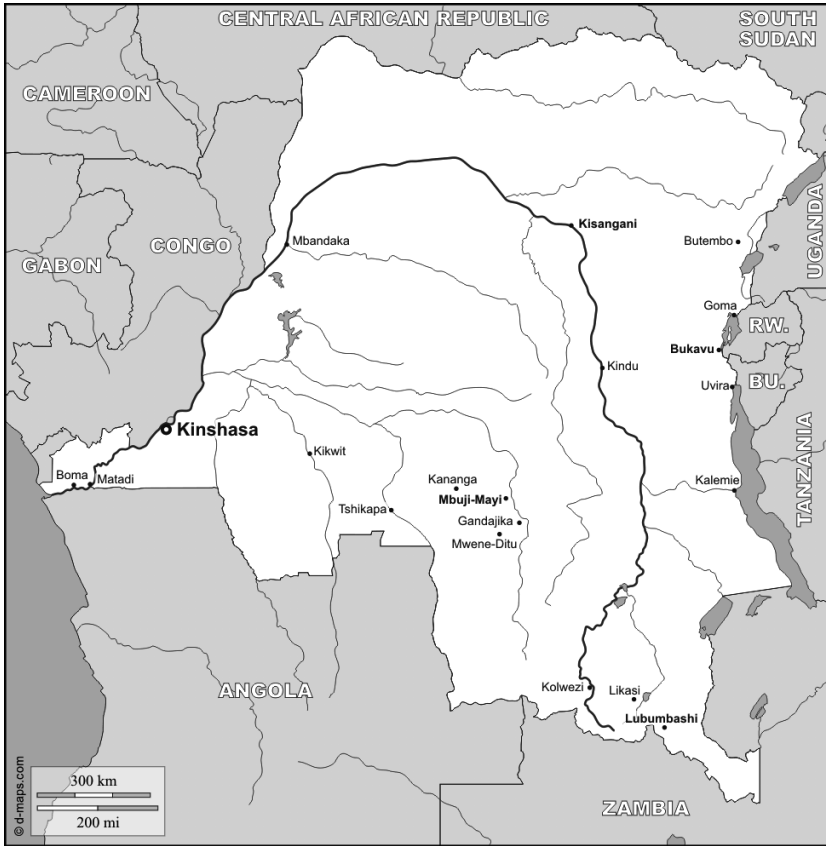
Father Van Wing, a contemporary of Kimbangu and a well-known anti-Kimbanguist, nevertheless pleaded in favor of Kimbangu by stressing his Protestant background: “Although he was very intelligent and endowed

with a remarkable oratory talent, he never accessed the rank of pastor. He evangelized several villages under the title of catechist.”²

In 1918, Kimbangu heard the voice of Christ ordering him to convert his compatriots, but he felt unequal to the task. He resisted the call, but everything he undertook to make a living systematically failed. He went to Léopoldville (now Kinshasa) to labor as a factory worker in the Belgian Congo’s oil works, but when payday came, the European man in charge of handing him his due (which never exceeded twenty francs) refused to give him anything, arguing that he had already been paid, as his signature on the payroll sheet proved. This occurred three times in a row, and then Kimbangu heard Christ’s voice again, explaining that what he was experiencing was linked to his resisting the call. Kimbangu made the decision to leave this job and go back to his family in Nkamba; his colleagues took pity on him and gave him financial help to compensate for his three months without salary. So he tried to stay a while longer in Léopoldville by selling *chikwangs* (loaves made of manioc), but again he failed, for no customer was interested in his merchandise. Eventually, a desperate Kimbangu went back to Nkamba on foot; with what little money he had left, he bought eels for his family’s supper on his way home, but an officer from the colonial police seized them before letting him resume his trip.

When he arrived in Thysville, a city located forty-six miles from Nkamba, Kimbangu was hired to work on the roads by the Office of Colonial Transportation, but that same evening, he was told he was not needed. He finally returned to Nkamba to farm his land, but the calling was persistent.

Kimbangu’s resistance to the calling lasted until 1921, when he initiated his spiritual revival movement among the Congolese people. According to Kimbanguist oral tradition, his wife, Marie Muilu—who was aware of what was going to occur on Wednesday, April 6, 1921—rang a bell at 6 A.M. at the request of her husband. After the morning worship, Kimbangu and many other villagers took the road to Naona, a village where a market was taking place. On the road to the market, facing Nkamba and on top of a hill, was the village of Ngombe-Kinsuka; there, a young woman called Nkiantondo had been dying for several days, her family expecting her to breathe her last any minute. The Kimbanguist oral tradition, as shaped by his son and successor, Diangienda, portrays Kimbangu as yielding to the urge of Christ as he stepped into the young woman’s cabin and ordered everyone save her husband and relatives to leave the room. On his knees, he made a short prayer and, taking the sick woman by the hand, said, “Nkiantondo, in the



Map 2. Democratic Republic of the Congo.

name of Jesus of Nazareth, be healed and rise.” It is said that Nkiantondo rose at once, completely recovered.³

As the news of the healing of Nkiantondo spread, villagers began consulting Kimbangu for all sorts of illnesses and handicaps. The blind recovered sight, the paralyzed could walk, the deaf heard, and the mutes spoke. The first successful resurrection, which is very famous in Kimbanguist historiography, was that of Dina, a fifteen-year-old girl whose corpse had already begun to decompose; she had been dead for three days. This was how long it had taken her funeral procession to march from her birthplace, the village of Ntumba, to Nkamba. When Kimbangu asked her parents what they wanted, the father answered: “If we didn’t want our daughter to be resurrected, we would not be here.” The Kimbanguist narrative relates the miracle in these terms: “Realizing that these people clearly possessed a high degree of faith,

[Kimbangu] begged the Lord to resurrect the young woman. Then, holding the hand of the dead woman, he cried out, 'Dina, in the name of Jesus Christ, resurrect.' Dina opened her eyes and rose at once. Then there was an outburst of joy.⁴ As I discuss below, an identity reconstruction process eventually associated the memory of this young woman with an African American woman called Dinah, who came to visit Nkamba in 2002.

After Dina's resurrection, crowds of people, not all of them Christian, came from the southern portion of the Belgian Congo, the northern parts of Angola, and the southern parts of the French Congo to Nkamba, both to get healed and to hear Kimbangu preach. But Kimbangu, who at the time had no intention of creating a new church, asked them not to leave their home churches. To help him in his new mission, Kimbangu chose priestly collaborators, among whom were two women; the more famous was Michaëlle (Mikala) Mandombe, who was only thirteen when she was first selected. Like him, these aides healed sick people and people with all kinds of handicaps in the name of Jesus.

For Pierre Bourdieu, revisiting Max Weber's theories on religion, a prophet is a figure who is characteristic of times of crisis and dissensus among the believers, the established clergy, and the official religion, and whose role is to offer the people an understanding of the world that meets their needs, giving new meaning to the present and future life.⁵ Simon Kimbangu, just like his predecessors Kimpa Vita/Dona Beatriz and William Wadé Harris, found all the conditions required to mobilize his compatriots into a prophetic movement. The Congolese were chafing under the colonial yokes of the Belgians, French, and Portuguese. Illiteracy made it impossible for them to read the Bible or fully access the Christian message.⁶ Finally, at the time, a flu epidemic was taking a heavy toll on the local population.

Kimbangu's prophetic activities kindled the faith of the Kongo people on both banks of the Congo River and in Angola, who flocked to Kimbangu. This drew the attention of the missionaries and colonial administrators in the Belgian Congo. Contemporary observers of Kimbangu insisted on denying the reality of what he was doing. For instance, although he was not on the premises, Father Jodogne, a Redemptorist, described the healings as fake miracles.⁷ However, these criticisms were contradicted by a medical report written by a Dr. Osstram, a missionary from the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, who indicated that "Nsona [a girl he knew] was a cripple, who could not straighten out her arms and hands or feet. She was taken to the prophet-healer and walked back home from the mountain of healing along with her mother."⁸

A member of the Baptist Church, Kimbangu rose to the position of catechist, teaching the Bible to his fellow Congolese. But he entered history through a more personal experience pertaining to Christian mysticism, which led Efraim Andersson to describe him as a “natural mystic.”⁹ His position gave him the opportunity to live permanently in contact with both his fellow Congolese and European colonists who belonged to the same church as he did. Contemporary Protestant observers of Kimbangu’s activities described him as “a decent, orderly man who read his Bible and did his work conscientiously.”¹⁰

His preaching focused on two major themes. First, at a moral level, he recommended that all people should read the Bible, abide by the Ten Commandments, and bestow love on their neighbors, and he preached against witchcraft. Based on his religious preaching, his moral recommendations have been memorized and kept by his followers, such as the commandments not to dance or watch people dancing, not to bathe or sleep naked, to destroy fetishes and drums, and not to be polygamous.¹¹ Second, he preached Christ as the source of his power to heal, stressing that Jesus should no longer be seen as an imported deity, but as the God of Black people also. “The Christ that missionaries revealed to us is the one from whom I receive my mission and my power,” he would say. “You must believe in Him and put His teachings into practice. You must no longer continue considering Him as the White man’s God, but really as the son of the Eternal.”¹²

In his apostolic circuits, Kimbangu did not just heal people, but he also preached against the colonial order. From his teachings against colonial domination, only one sentence has been retained and become famous, however—his prophecy that “the White man shall become black and the Black man shall become white.” The Bible was not only meant to be read, but served as a foundation for commitment to the cause of racial liberation. Passages from the book of Exodus narrating the liberation of the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt offered parallels with Africans’ own oppression, which made them popular among Congolese audiences.

Contemporary observers mentioned that the biblical story of David and Goliath was also a recurrent theme. The Belgian colonial administrator Léon Morel indicated in a report that when he went to control a Kimbanguist worship service, which had gathered a crowd of followers, Kimbangu did not so much as turn around to look at him. But the prophet’s youngest apostle, Mikala Mandombe, held up her Bible for all to see the image of David and Goliath, using the biblical episode as an analogy to celebrate Kimbangu as a new David and to challenge Morel as the representative

of Goliath—that is, colonial oppression. This analogy was recurrent in Kimbangu’s preaching. The Swiss theologian Marie-Louise Martin later observed that the Kimbanguist Church often compared its own history to that of the children of Israel, particularly in Exodus, so that “the Church’s own experience makes the notion of salvation history possible.”¹³

It did not take much time for the people’s hopes to be expressed in terms of the salvation of the Black race. Kimbangu focused his discourse on the deteriorated Black identity: he preached Black liberation from the colonial yoke and prophesied that a temple would be built in Nkamba as a sign of Black spiritual liberation. Unsurprisingly, although Simon Kimbangu refused to be labeled a savior, he was considered as such by his fellow Congolese. Among the Kimbanguist speeches of the time, the following was related by the administrative authorities of the Belgian Congo: “God has promised us to pour His Holy Spirit over our land. We have implored Him and He has sent us a savior for the Black race—Simon Kimbangu [*sic*]. He is the chief and savior of all the Blacks, just like the Saviors of the other races—Moses, Jesus Christ, Mohammad and Buddha. . . . God did not want us to hear His Word without giving us any proof. . . . So He gave us Simon Kimbangu, who is for us like the Moses of the Jews, the Christ of the foreigners, and the Mohammad of the Arabs.”¹⁴

In addition to his knowledge of the Bible, Kimbangu’s appeal was reinforced by his staff—a rod known as *mvuala* in the Kikongo language. The sacred staff among Kongo chiefs, as mentioned earlier, played an important role in the process of initiation and in the granting of temporal and spiritual powers to the chief. According to Kimbanguist tradition, this staff had supernatural powers; when ordered by Simon Kimbangu, it could spring out of its owner’s hands and float upright or horizontally. People even say that once, after Simon Kimbangu had pointed to the four cardinal directions with this rod, all the sick and dead people whom relatives were carrying to Nkamba in hopes of their healing or resurrection had been given satisfaction before they even arrived.

In analyzing the lyrics of Kimbanguist songs from the colonial period, Balandier wrote that Kimbangu’s rod was not only an allusion to Moses’s famous staff, but also a very significant object in Congolese tradition: “The staff, or walking-stick, usually carved, was one of the insignia of royalty, and was for a long time the symbol of authority of the ‘old-style chiefs.’ The ‘Kingdom of Christ,’ later to become that of the Black Messiah, is conceived of as being real, but adapted to a society in which an independent Congolese Church and State would coexist. In a more or less

complementary sense, the ‘staff’ indicates that Simon Kimbangu [*sic*] was both King and Prophet.”¹⁵

These descriptions show clearly that Kimbangu was seen as a savior and liberator of the Blacks, but not as an instrument of God’s wrath against the Whites for colonizing the Congolese. Despite this, one common point among all the movements that stemmed from Simon Kimbangu’s ministry is that they often cultivate a rejection of Whites, even though Kimbangu himself never preached anti-White sentiment. Contrary to the movement of the Antonians, which grew out of feelings of rejection and hatred of the White colonizers, Kimbangu’s initiative displayed a benevolent position toward Whites, which may be explained by his family history.

A motherless child, Simon was raised by his paternal aunt Kinzembo, who had recently converted to Christianity and joined the Baptist Missionary Society at Ngombe Lutete, headed by Rev. Thomas Comber. The story of her first encounter with Comber has been preserved in the Kimbanguist collective memory. The starting point was when Comber, while on his missionary circuit around the villages located within walking distance of the Ngombe Lutete Baptist mission, arrived in the village of Nkamba on a market day. Kinzembo was at the market when he appeared. On seeing Comber, all the Blacks fled, except Kinzembo. The Baptist pastor walked up to her and asked why all the others had fled since he had only come to preach the gospel and meant no harm to the Africans. Comber told her, “*You did not run away, so God shall bless you.*”¹⁶

Rev. Comber returned to Europe and was replaced by Pastor Ronald Cameron. The latter was probably informed by his predecessor, and he contacted Kinzembo. During their first meeting, he tried to take Kimbangu away with him to give him religious instruction, but since the boy was only seven, he could not be left with the missionaries. Still, Kinzembo developed a friendly relationship with Cameron, who gave her as tokens of his friendship a necklace for herself and a knife to be given to Kimbangu when he grew up. The most outstanding event in their friendship was the following: one day, while Pastor Cameron was being chased and running away from villagers who were threatening to kill him, he found refuge and a hiding place in Kinzembo’s house. Later, Cameron made a prayer, asking God to bless Kinzembo and the child Kimbangu. Below, I explain how the influence of Kinzembo has shaped to this day the Kimbanguist perception of Whites, but for now, I simply note that Kinzembo seems to have been one of the Congolese natives who were favorable to the implantation of Christian missions in the region of Nkamba.

It seems clear that these events, particularly the episode when he saw his aunt hiding the fugitive pastor, affected Simon Kimbangu's relation to Whites. This influence may explain why his movement, though protesting the colonial order, did not reject or condemn all Whites. Indeed, his daily prayer, as transcribed by his son Diangienda, exemplified his nonviolent stance and racial and gender inclusiveness: "I give Thee thanks, O God Almighty, who created the heaven and the earth. Heaven is Thy throne, and the earth is Thy footstool. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. May Thou bless all races on the earth—mighty ones and little ones, women and men, Whites and Blacks. May the blessings from above pour on the whole world, so that we may all enter Heaven. We ask all this in hopes of obtaining it in the name of Jesus Christ, our savior. Amen."¹⁷

Regardless of the persecutions and punishments, the movement initiated by Simon Kimbangu evolved into a church that developed outside of White control, but with a certain form of inclusiveness of Whites. Indeed, he did not call for a rejection of Whites, but he recommended in a prophecy that his followers never lose sight of Jesus's final promise that they would one day welcome people from all colors and nations.¹⁸ Of course, Kimbangu's preaching life did not last long enough to offer a complete revisiting of the Bible, or the White image in his mind. But his church, once established, built its own interpretation of scriptures, which helps us gain a better understanding of Kimbanguist beliefs and representations in space and time.

Kimbangu's prophetic activities rapidly took on new meanings and new directions. There were three groups that reacted to him: first, other Black people; second, the European missionaries and religious authorities; and finally, the Belgian colonial authorities. In the eyes of his compatriots, Kimbangu was a man who awakened moral consciences. His experience, which was first and foremost a personal one, aroused the faith of his people; they listened to him, renounced witchcraft, and discarded their fetishes. Although Father Van Wing opposed the movement, he acknowledged its success: "When Simon Kimbangu, who was recognized as the savior of his people, imposed the destruction of the *nkisi*, he was obeyed not only by his conscious followers, but by entire populations who had no direct contact with him or his group."¹⁹ This triggered an actual social movement in the Belgian Congo, which had a big impact on the social lives of the Black people there. The Belgian lawyer Jules Chomé observed that "had the administration or the missions wanted to impose [these reforms], they would have met with a lot of resistance. But Simon Kimbangu was

obeyed by his followers. In the villages he conquered, the wives of polygamous husbands—save one—were all sent back to their families. The feast drums—absolutely necessary for the forbidden feasts—were destroyed.”²⁰

At a more political level, Kimbangu’s teaching made the Congolese aware of the real problems and rekindled their dissatisfaction with their social situation, including oppression, dire poverty, and a lack of inventions by Black people in the White-dominated field of science. Kimbangu was regarded as a liberator whose mission was to bring peace, prosperity, and happiness, but also a new science that would be more powerful than that of the colonizers.

Kimbangu’s activities, being both political and religious, did cause a reaction from colonial authorities and religious leaders. The reaction from religious authorities was twofold. Simon Kimbangu’s work was initially received favorably by the Protestants from the Baptist mission of Ngombe Lutete, because he had been trained by them. At first, Father Chery (first name unknown) and Pastor Peter Frederickson raised their voices to suggest that Kimbangu’s ministry could indeed be God-given. The director of the regional mission, after seeing for himself the work of the Black prophet, made this remark: “It is the first time I have seen such plain evidence of the presence of Christ in Congo; but the sheep must not lead their shepherd. It is possible that you hold this power from God, but all the merit must go to our deacons.”²¹

But this positive reaction from the Protestants was short-lived, for Kimbangu, as a native, was not entitled to such freedom of speech and action. Pastor Robert Lanyon Jennings was one of the Protestants most opposed to Kimbangu, and as such, he holds a prominent place in the Kimbanguist narrative. Not only did he deny Kimbangu’s miracles, but he challenged him at a foundational moment for the nascent church. Having noticed that the choir surrounding Kimbangu exclusively sang Baptist hymns, Jennings went to Kimbangu to ask, “How is it that Jesus, who gave you the power to resurrect dead people, has so deprived you of hymns that you must resort to ours?”²² In response, Kimbangu left the crowd for a short moment and discreetly prayed. A little while later, he came back and taught the choir an entirely new song; it was the first Kimbanguist hymn. Since then, Kimbanguists have had a body of hymns exclusively their own, which are discussed in depth in chapter 4.

According to the Catholic Van Wing, both an observer and a participant, Kimbangu’s prophetic activities were received rather positively by Protestant missionaries, who considered him to be an envoy from above and a

fruit of their missionary work. In 1958, Van Wing noted, "To [Protestant missionaries] Kibangu [*sic*] was an inspired man who kindled and pointedly exalted their followers' faith in Protestant-style revivals."²³ The initial passivity of the colonial administration allowed Van Wing to take initiative according to his faith. By June 1921, he had set up a counterpropaganda scheme, which consisted in making Catholic natives understand that adhering to Kimbangu's doctrine meant renouncing the Catholic faith and therefore committing the sin of apostasy.²⁴

The Belgian authorities were the last to react, prompted by traders and news agencies that persuaded administrator Morel—who was in charge of the region of Nkamba—that the movement was dangerous. The Kimbanguist narrative written by Diangienda, the prophet's son and successor, relates that Morel went to Nkamba with his staff to see for himself what was going on. He selected five sick people, including two paralytics, who were brought to Simon Kimbangu. The prophet healed them without even touching them. The paralyzed people rose and walked away, leaving their crutches behind them. Morel, his soldiers, and his interpreter watched in utter dismay.²⁵ In his report of May 17, 1921, Morel commented on the "religious fanaticism" and "blind faith" that he saw, comparing the "mass spirituality" he witnessed in Nkamba to that of Lourdes, but complained that it was "marred with fetishism" due to the more "primitive character of the natives." He concluded that Kimbangu's "goal is to create a religion that fits the natives' mind-set. . . . Everybody can see that our European religions, fraught with abstract notions, do not answer the needs of the African, who demands protection and solid facts."²⁶

But as the zeal of Kimbangu's followers impelled them to leave the hospitals, the railways, construction sites in Matadi, and other workplaces, the colonial authorities felt compelled to take action. Catholic missionaries were not the only ones bringing their complaints to the administration: clerks and factory laborers were deserting their work, and boys serving in European homes were leaving the linen unwashed and sneaking away to go to Kimbangu's meetings. Jules Chomé ironically concluded, "As a result, from the officials of Trade and Industry in Matadi and Thysville to the European ladies who suddenly had to do the cooking themselves, everyone agreed with the missionaries that it was time to put an end to a movement which caused such trouble."²⁷ In June 1921, with permission from his superiors and the help of troops, Morel made a first attempt to arrest Simon Kimbangu, but he failed. Kimbangu had managed to escape. This failed arrest is still commemorated today by the Kimbanguists, who



Figure 1. Kimbangu in front of the Lubumbashi jail.

understand it as God's refusal to hand Kimbangu over at the onset of his mission. The narrative of Kimbangu's eventual arrest insists that he turned himself in to the Belgian authorities on the day he had chosen—September 12, 1921, after five months of preaching and healing—and called on his followers to remain nonviolent, saying, "It is now time for me to turn myself in to the authorities; let impatient men prone to anger be gone."²⁸

Simon Kimbangu was charged with, among other things, troublemaking and advertising false miracles. He first appeared before the War Council in Thysville on Thursday, September 29, 1921, and the trial continued into October. Commander De Rossi was the presiding judge.²⁹

- De Rossi. Kimbangu, do you confess to having organized an uprising against the colonial government and having dubbed the Whites, your benefactors, as abominable enemies?
- Kimbangu. I have not started any uprising, neither against the Whites nor against the Belgian colonial government. I have restricted myself to preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- De Rossi. Why have you encouraged the people to leave work and no longer pay taxes?
- Kimbangu. This is untrue. The people who came to Nkamba came of their own free will, either to hear the Word of God, or to seek healing or get a benediction. Never have I asked the people to stop paying taxes.
- De Rossi. Are you the *mvuluzi* ["savior" in Kikongo]?
- Kimbangu. No, Jesus Christ is the Savior. I have received from him the mission of proclaiming the news of eternal salvation to my people.
- De Rossi. Have you resurrected the dead?
- Kimbangu. Yes.

- De Rossi. How did you do [that]?
- Kimbangu. By the divine power Jesus gave me.
- De Rossi. During the incidents of June 6 in Nkamba, the crowd you had frenzied injured two soldiers. Why did you flee?
- Kimbangu. The soldiers of the Administrator [Morel] had manhandled me, and this had exasperated those who were on the spot. The soldiers started firing and pillaged the village. I do not know who injured the two soldiers, because of the chaos this had caused. I fled because I had to, since I had to pursue my mission to its end as Christ had ordered me to.
- De Rossi. You are denying that you encouraged the people to rebel against authority. But the printed songs sung by the people you have turned into fanatics, copies of which have been seized in Nkamba, call the people to arms. What is your response?
- Kimbangu. There is no song calling people to rebel against the government. The [Baptist] church also has hymns in which Christians are called “Christian soldiers,” but the government did not put under arrest the Whites who teach us these hymns.
- De Rossi. Where were you hiding during the period from June 6, 1921, until the day you were arrested?
- Kimbangu. I kept doing God’s work in several villages.
- De Rossi. You were aware that the authorities were actively searching for you, so why didn’t you give yourself up then?
- Kimbangu. I had to keep pursuing the work of Jesus Christ in several places, but I myself decided to give myself up to the White man who arrested me [Snoeck] when the time had come.
- De Rossi. Do you have any consciousness of the danger of epidemics you exposed the people to by having corpses brought to you in Nkamba?
- Kimbangu. There was not a single case of an epidemic, and I did bring back to life a great number of deceased persons by the power of Jesus Christ. I have not requested that the people bring me corpses, but I could not turn away those who came to me everywhere I went.
- De Rossi. The massive desertions of workplaces and encouragements to strike—were these not part of your strategy to disrupt law and order and eventually topple the government?

- Kimbangu. I did not order the people to leave work, nor did I call to strike.
- De Rossi. People heard you say that ‘the Whites shall become the Blacks and the Blacks shall become the Whites.’ Isn’t this proof of your intention of driving all Whites away from the colony?
- Kimbangu. This sentence is not meant to be understood in a literal sense.
- De Rossi. What does it mean, then?
- Kimbangu. God will reveal its meaning later, when the time has come.
- De Rossi. According to my information, during the time you spent at the oil works of the Belgian Congo, you were in contact with Black American subversive groups, including [Marcus] Garvey. What is your response to this?
- Kimbangu. This is untrue.
- De Rossi. We know that the contributions you collected yielded a great amount of money. What is the destination of those funds, if they are not meant to be spent on weapons you intend to use to topple the government and drive all Whites away from the Congo?
- Kimbangu. I have not organized any contributions. I have not accepted any payment from the people I have healed or resurrected. Funds were collected on a voluntary basis by some people with a view to meeting the needs of the masses of people who arrived in Nkamba every day, including the purchasing of food for these people. Christ’s teachings condemn violence. I do not condone violence.

When Simon Kimbangu was arrested, the time of persecution began; many of his followers were also arrested, and 37,000 families, that is, 150,000 people, were deported. The trial ended with very harsh sentences: because of his statement that “the White man shall become black and the Black man shall become white,” Kimbangu received the death penalty; his disciples received long jail terms. But not everyone agreed about the fairness of the trial of Kimbangu and his companions. While Father Van Wing—who attended the proceedings—described it as a “trial where his cause was inquired into with all due process of law,”³⁰ the Belgian lawyer Chomé was disgusted with what he deemed to be a hasty trial (it lasted eighteen days), with no official or unofficial lawyers or other defenders for the accused.³¹

Kimbangu was sent to Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi), where he remained in jail for thirty years, until he died. However, the growth of his movement was not stymied. As Balandier explained, the leader's imprisonment made him the icon of opposition to colonial authority: "Removed from direct contact with his followers, there was nothing to hinder the process of idealization, and his example served to encourage intense devotion."³² As in other decolonization and civil rights struggles, the authorities unwittingly turned the rebel into a martyr.

What must be noted concerning this early phase of development is that Kimbangu seemed to be physically present in several places, even while being in jail in Elisabethville. The Kimbanguist narrative contends that the prisoner Kimbangu actually enjoyed great freedom of action thanks to his gift of ubiquity. Diangienda testified that in October 1921, his jailed father miraculously came to cure Marie Muilu (Kimbangu's wife and Diangienda's mother), who was suffering from a very high fever due to a huge boil. A White physician had allegedly refused to give her any treatment and scoffed, "Simon Kimbangu's own wife can't be healed by the prophet!" As soon as the doctor had left, Muilu started praying, and Kimbangu appeared. He touched the boil with his hand, and his wife's armpit went back to normal. The boil instantly disappeared, and the fever dropped. The doctor was subsequently informed; on seeing the mysterious disappearance of Muilu's boil, he is said to have wondered aloud, "Can we possibly be mistaken about Kimbangu?"³³ In addition to this episode narrated by Diangienda, there are many others evoking Kimbangu's gift of ubiquity and reinforcing his spiritual dimension.

Another well-known and often-preached story among Kimbanguists is that Kimbangu, while in jail, was simultaneously arrested in several different places. For example, on April 24, 1942, Kimbangu, while imprisoned in Lubumbashi, was arrested and jailed in Boma. He left the latter place on the following morning by breaking open the metal door, leaving behind three men's shirts. These were given to the Kimbanguist Church forty years later, in 1982, by the Zairian government, which handed them over to the spiritual leader Diangienda.

Nowadays, still, Kimbangu is said to make appearances. One of the most recent was reported by a seventeen-year-old Roman Catholic Congolese man, Abali Matuni (aka Mbuta), who testified on the Kimbanguist TV show *Émission ya bazoba* (The Idiots' Show) broadcast in April 2009. Mbuta began seeing Kimbangu when he was but three months old, his mother said on the show. She explained that she had found him more than

once covered with blood and had it analyzed. As the lab analyses gave no insights, she had to wait for the boy to be old enough to describe what he was seeing, and his descriptions helped her identify Kimbangu.³⁴ Such apparitions have been understood as being intrinsically part of Simon Kimbangu's prophetic activities, and as such, they inevitably triggered reactions among both the Congolese people and colonial authorities. Studying the teachings of Simon Kimbangu's successors sheds new light on this point, as I discuss below.

Kimbangu did not live to see his movement officially recognized: he died in October 1951 after thirty years in jail. Yet his passing itself was controversial, for Father Van Wing, who visited him in jail shortly before his death, claimed that Kimbangu repented and eventually asked for a Roman Catholic baptism.³⁵ Whether or not this testimony is trustworthy, the very contention of Kimbangu's conversion to Catholicism bears witness to his persistent influence as a public person, even if only as a troublemaker in the competition between missionaries. Van Wing's insistence on having the last word is also somewhat pathetic, as Chomé expressed: "And even if, impossible though it may seem, the . . . hypothesis were confirmed, how much would weigh such a renouncing, wrung out of an old man broken down by thirty years in jail?"³⁶

Deportations and banishments (or "relegations," as they were called by Belgian colonial authorities) increased dramatically after Kimbangu's arrest. Still, the movement kept expanding underground from 1921, under the aegis of Marie Muilu, until 1959, when Kimbanguism became an African independent church, officially recognized by the Belgian government and admitted into the fold of the World Council of Churches.

In spite of his imprisonment, then, Kimbangu's movement rapidly gained momentum. This is because his discourse was that of a nationalist, but also a Black man aware of the differences and the gap between Blacks and Whites in terms of progress. His message suited the expectations of his compatriots, reassuring them that at the time chosen by the Lord, "the White man will become black and the Black man will become white," the prophecy that cost him lifelong imprisonment and that has been interpreted by Diangienda as announcing the coming of independence for African nations.³⁷ Awareness of the colonial situation thus aroused a nationalist and anticolonial sentiment among the people from the Belgian Congo, the French Congo, and Angola. Many an observer, including Balandier and a man identified only as Jaffré, saw in Kimbangu's movement the first expression of twentieth-century Congolese nationalism, framed in terms of both



Figure 2. Photograph of Marie Muilu superimposed on the temple of Nkamba.

race and nation. Balandier asserted, "There can be no question but that this new religious movement was the starting point of a 'national' awareness, of a conscious striving to transcend the restricted limits of the clan or tribe."³⁸ Jaffré's analysis betrayed more anxiety about the racial tension he believed was underlying this new nationalist consciousness in the French Congo: "The idea that blacks and whites are opposed and that Africa should belong

to the Africans has taken root so deeply in the natives' souls that it seems to be here to stay forever."³⁹

Simon Kimbangu's prophetic and political activities effectively triggered national awareness among the Congolese and served as a blueprint for many movements, which took him as a reference point. Among the best known are Mpadism (the Blacks' Mission), led by Simon Mpadi in the Belgian Congo; Matsouanism, led by André Grenard Matsoua in Congo-Brazzaville; and Tokoism, led by Simaõ Toko in Angola. These three groups still exist, and each claims to have stemmed from Kimbangu's mission. Mpadi considers himself, and is considered by his followers, to be Kimbangu's legitimate successor, while André Matsoua—although his organization, Amicalism, was a political rather than a religious movement—was given by his followers a place in the Holy Trinity along with Simon Kimbangu and God the Father. Toko is viewed by the members of his church as the incarnation of Jesus Christ, while Kimbangu is identified by them as a sort of John the Baptist, who only came to prophesy Toko's advent.

Simon Kimbangu's prophetic vision was pursued covertly thanks to the leadership of his wife, Marie Muilu, until, like William Wadé Harris's movement, it gave birth to an officially recognized African independent church. Unity (*kintwadi* in Kikongo) among Kimbanguists was built on the experience of colonization; Kimbanguists adopted the term, and *kintwadi* is used as another name for the church itself. During the early years of the church, its members were persecuted, mistreated, arrested, and often deported. Among the strategies they adopted, *kintwadi* was particularly significant. In 1957, acting on the firm belief that "united we stand," a number of Kimbanguists signed a petition addressed to the Belgian Crown, in which they challenged the colonial authorities by declaring they would all gather in the Baudouin Stadium in Léopoldville (Kinshasa) to become martyrs there. Diangienda Kuntima stated that a Kimbanguist delegation of about six hundred signatories took it to the governor-general.⁴⁰ This strategy is clearly reminiscent of Gandhi's nonviolent resistance to British colonial rule in 1940s India and of Martin Luther King Jr.'s civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s. But Kimbanguists only attribute it to their leader, Simon Kimbangu, who opted for nonviolence as early as 1921 in his protest against the Belgian colonial rule; in spite of his fervent following, he never called for civil disobedience.⁴¹ The outcome of the demonstration at the Baudouin Stadium was not long in coming: the governor decreed the end of the persecutions the same year. First, the church was tolerated, and then, two years later, in 1959, it was granted official recognition.

The doctrines of the fledgling church were rooted both in the scriptures and in the teachings of Simon Kimbangu, while his three sons became his successors and the heirs of the sacred staff known as mvuala. In 1963, the catechism of the Kimbanguist Church was articulated by the founder's youngest son, who was the church's first spiritual leader.⁴² But at this juncture, the key problem of the relation between Africans and the written word resurfaced. Indeed, although stemming from oral tradition, the Kimbanguist religion has to conform to the expectations of the modern era and hence refers to written texts, founding principles, and a catechism. Yet the way in which the Kimbanguist faith is experienced in daily life displays a very different reality from what may be inferred from the reading of this catechism. Some crucial theological issues, such as the role of Simon Kimbangu in the Kimbanguist faith, Christology, and the Holy Trinity, are only addressed in the oral tradition, particularly in the three sources of Kimbanguist theology (see chapter 4). This split between written texts and the oral tradition gives the Kimbanguist Church its dual face.

PART II

KIMBANGUISM AND THE BIBLE

4

THE THREE SOURCES OF KIMBANGUIST THEOLOGY

The post-Simon Kimbangu brand of Kimbanguism bases its doctrines on three theological sources: the Bible; the prophetic speeches of its spiritual leader, Diangienda (the founder's youngest son); and the church's inspired hymns. In this chapter I discuss each of these sources in an effort to identify the elements that may be traced to Congolese spiritual traditions and those pertaining to Christian theology as appropriated by the Kimbanguist Church.

The conflicts that historically pitted Protestants and Catholics against one another in Europe were also present in the process of the Christianization of Africans. Among the theological principles elaborated by Martin Luther, the Bible was redefined as the sole authority in matters of faith, so that its propagation entailed the free interpretation of the scriptures by believers. This principle, which antagonized Catholics in Europe, irritated them even more when applied to Africans, as is shown by the reaction of Father Alexandre Brou, who was scandalized to witness in Protestant congregations in the late nineteenth century an emerging African prophethism resulting from an exaltation of individual judgment, which he found unrestrained. Since the converts could access the Bible freely to interpret it under the Holy Spirit's guidance, "the books of the Prophets, the Revelations, and even the Gospels become guides for anarchy. Worse, the corrupt form of Christianity which has been preached to them, devoid of any sacramental life, is finally powerless to destroy the seeds of paganism which all blacks carry, as it were, in their blood."¹

Biased as it is, this analysis nevertheless raises the question of the level of understanding of the Bible by the Congolese people to whom it was preached. Father Brou saw the Protestant dogma of the free interpretation of the scriptures as a source of heresy. Kimbanguism is entirely in keeping with this Protestant tradition, all the more so because the Bible was placed quite early in the hands of Congolese converts. Father Van Wing stated that the Kongo people were Christianized from 1881 to 1921 exclusively by Protestant missions belonging to the “evangelical” category, which recognizes no final magisterium in matters of doctrine, for the Bible is the ultimate authority, which every believer interprets by the light received directly from the Holy Spirit.² Such was the basis for the training of the pastors and catechists, who were sent by these missions into the villages to spread the gospel and preside over the worship services there.

In keeping with this Protestant tradition, in which Kimbangu was educated, the Bible is freely interpreted by believers and studied more or less in depth. Van Wing, noting that Kimbangu “constantly had a copy [of the Bible] in his hand,” asked rhetorical questions about Protestant missionaries’ reactions to Kimbangu’s preaching: “From what moral standpoint could they have blamed him for explaining the Word of God in his own way, since for them, personal interpretation is the only rule and basis of a person’s faith?”³ Likewise, Father Brou pointed out that Kimbangu distributed Bibles.⁴

Significantly, Kimbangu recommended the daily reading of the Bible shortly before he was arrested: “The Spirit has revealed to me that the time has come now for me to surrender myself to the authorities. I will leave you nothing but the Bible. Read it at all times and in all places, and put God’s Commandments into practice unfailingly.”⁵ A legend about Kimbangu’s childhood mentions an undefined being, neither Black nor White, who appeared to him with a Bible in his hand and said, “This is a good book. You must read it and proclaim its contents.”⁶ This episode suggests that Kimbangu received the Bible not from White missionaries, but directly from a supernatural being removed from any situation of racial oppression. Consequently, in the Kimbanguist Church, the Bible is the essential holy book. Kimbanguists refer to it as *mokanda ya bomoyi*, a Lingala phrase that means “the book of life.” They recognize it as the product of divine revelation and as the definitive source of fundamental truths from the beginning to the end of time. The Bible is also the inspiration behind the church’s liturgy—for the blessing of infants, baptisms, weddings, and the Holy Supper. It is perceived as a sacred text, the expression of God’s word, and as the

history of God's relation with the children of Israel, on the one hand, and with Black people, on the other.

Yet it may be observed that in the Kimbanguist religion, the Bible has been voided of its Middle Eastern and Western content and adjusted to the believers' identity reconstruction process. As Balandier explained, "resorting to the Bible allows utopian constructions and the belief in the salvation of the Black race under the guidance of prophets who are also the founders of the churches."⁷ Educated pastors and church members, however, see it as an imported text; in an exhortation, the spiritual leader Diangienda said: "We aren't the ones who wrote the Bible. It was in response to Jesus' recommendation 'Go and turn all the pagan nations into Christian ones' that Westerners came and brought us the Bible. But now, let us no longer perceive it as something imported, but embrace it as something which belongs to us."⁸ It is clear that while he was aware of the significance of the Bible, that is not necessarily the case for a majority of his followers.

Kimbanguists do not simply consider the Bible to be a source of sermons. It involves them in a critical process of ethnic self-identification by redeeming them from the never-ending present in which Africans have been trapped by those who believe them to be outside of history. Instead, Kimbanguists carve a place for themselves in all the time periods and spaces of the Bible, from the garden of Eden to the desert of Sodom and Gomorrah to Mount Sinai. The Kimbanguist psyche is thus shaped within the spatial-temporal framework of the Bible insofar as biblical stories are perceived as actual rather than mythical. Kimbanguists are metaphorically immersed in the Bible, which ensures the continuity of their present and affects the interpretation of their future. This also leads Kimbanguist believers to consciously or unconsciously distort the history of Israel.

Since the Bible is the book where a single origin is given to humankind and since readers are encouraged to decipher signs and symbols, Kimbanguists feel called to give meaning to the words of the text and, in so doing, justify their social or religious activities and buttress their sense of ethnicity. Maurice Dorès pointed out that "Africans reading the Bible recognize in it a familiar world where each past generation is entitled to being named at length,"⁹ and Kimbanguists find in the Bible a space for dialogue, conducive to an exchange or a discussion whose subject is within reach of all believers, encouraging them to individually examine and interpret the word. This opens up a space for participation,¹⁰ which shapes the relation between preacher and audience as well as conferences and moral lectures. MacGaffey noted that the basic tenets of Kimbanguism are often taken for

granted: “Kimbanguists appear to have no idea that any other interpretation of the Bible is possible than the one they put upon it.”¹¹

For Kimbanguists, the Bible offers a comparative opportunity, linking past events with present-day facts and informing their faith. It is used as a reference book or dictionary, which gives the interpretation and justification of particular beliefs or practices of the Kimbanguist Church. For instance, Exodus is read as a harbinger of Simon Kimbangu’s liberating the Congolese from the Belgian colonial yoke, while the episode of David and Goliath is noted by several authors as having been Kimbangu’s favorite biblical passage, for his community saw him as David and the colonial authorities as Goliath. In this way, the Bible as perceived by the Kimbanguists provides Black people with a history and a collective memory, and gives believers the ideological wherewithal for the reconstruction of their identity. Their individual and collective existences take place in the space and time of the Bible, as if Kimbanguism were part and parcel of biblical episodes as they happened in the past and—in believers’ eyes—as they continue happening.

Contrary to the colonizers’ opinion that Africans are inherently heathen, Kimbanguist believers do not acknowledge their background as pagan. They do not identify the God of the Bible as being solely the God of Israel, but their own as well—the one they have always called Nzambi a Mpungu (God Almighty). He is not simply the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but is the God of Simon Kimbangu’s three sons. Hence, the mission of the chosen people becomes Kimbanguists’ own, and reading the Bible helps them connect biblical passages to the events informing Kimbanguist religious life and activities; believers use the scriptures while situating the teachings in their own cultural context and history.

The way Kimbanguists read the biblical message helps them construct their own racial identity, in keeping with the doctrine of Blackness as an affirmation of the self against White domination. They do not understand the Bible as a text from the past, but see it also from the present and the future. The historical and geographical landmarks of the Bible are symbolically erased, removing it from its Middle Eastern locales and temporalities and injecting its message into Kimbanguists’ history and daily life. It is assumed that the Bible always has something to tell them, or it has something that they should tell others. For instance, 1992 was a year of grief for all Kimbanguists: in the span of four months, they lost two of the sons of Simon Kimbangu. First, Kisolokele, the eldest, who had acted as the first deputy of the spiritual leader, passed away on March 17, and

then Diangienda, the youngest and the main spiritual leader, died on July 8. These deaths were interpreted through the lens of the passages from the book of Revelation (11:3–4 and 7–10) that mention two “witnesses” whose corpses lay exposed for three days and a half while the crowds rejoiced.

In 1990, before these actual deaths, a rumor had spread around Kinshasa announcing the death of Diangienda; the news had caused much rejoicing among the inhabitants of the capital. It is difficult to document the social climate of the times, since the civil war and pillaging destroyed many archives. Yet a press conference given by Diangienda in 1990 gives insight into the context. A Zairian journalist asked, “Eminence—for us Africans, death is synonymous with sadness and mourning. Why have people celebrated and danced on hearing you had passed away?”¹² This question reveals the atmosphere of the times. When Diangienda actually died two years later, the people of Kinshasa celebrated again. One of Diangienda’s nephews later described it in the following terms: “I met a crowd of excited people, dancing, drinking, and yelling, ‘We did it!’ I asked a young man what was going on, and he told me, ‘Elder brother, rejoice! We are relieved, this man has died.’ . . . He was talking about Papa Diangienda. This is how I learned of my father’s death.”¹³

The church’s press service covered the two spiritual leaders’ funerals; the film indeed shows the inhabitants of Kinshasa rejoicing, verbally abusing Diangienda’s memory, and throwing stones at his funeral procession. For some Kimbanguists, this was the fulfillment of the biblical prophecy. I heard sermons that stressed the passage from Revelation mentioned above. Indeed, the dead bodies of Kisolokele and Diangienda were actually exposed to the public in Kinshasa for three and a half days each before their burials in Nkamba. Were the funerals shaped by the biblical passage so that they would coincide with the prophecy? Undeniably, Revelation is often read through the prism of Kimbanguist reality. For example, one informant said that Dialungana, the last surviving son of Kimbangu and the successor of his dead brothers, had verse 14 of the same passage read aloud shortly after he took over leadership of the church: “The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.” This “third woe” occurred nine years after the first two, in August 2001, when Dialungana’s death ended the era of the three sons of Kimbangu and ushered in that of the twenty-six grandchildren.

Because two of the grandchildren were absent on the day of Dialungana’s funeral, there were twenty-four of them gathered to designate the next spiritual leader of the church. Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, Dialungana’s eldest

son, was chosen while the other grandchildren proclaimed themselves deputy spiritual leaders. In the believers' theological analysis, this event was blended with that of Revelation 4:4: "And round about the throne were four and twenty seats; and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting." Below, I show how, through the Bible, the Kimbanguist Church searches its own memory—mythical though it may be—and finds the elements needed for its identity reconstruction. The Kimbanguist method of interpretation of the Bible was defined by Diangienda, whose preaching constitutes one of the sources—if not the essential source—of Kimbanguist theology.

In the Kimbanguist faith, scriptures must be supplemented by the spiritual messages delivered by Kimbangu's three sons, particularly Diangienda, who was the supreme authority while he was alive. As Marie-Louise Martin explained, "Kimbangu's sons have the highest rank in the hierarchy of the church, and all important decisions must be approved by them. The three are united and have been called *princes héritiers* (hereditary princes), or in Kikongo *zimvwala*, i.e., bearers of the prophetic and royal staff or scepter. The term can mean that prophetic and royal functions are theirs within the church. The highest position is accorded to Joseph Diangienda."¹⁴ Likewise, the French Africanist Jean-Claude Froelich observed: "Joseph Diangienda alone is responsible for the movement's shift from an initially highly revolutionary and anti-white organization to a clearly and deeply religious one. He kept the basis of Baptist teachings and mingled them with his father's revelations: it is thus a highly Africanized Protestant church, but with a modernist and even Western streak."¹⁵

Born on March 22, 1918, Diangienda was relegated after his father's arrest in 1921 to the Catholic colony of Boma with his elder brother, Kisolokele (then seven years old), to be reeducated in the Catholic faith. There, he was baptized in the Catholic Church and became an altar boy. In 1937, he was hired as a civil servant in the office of the governor of the province of Kasai. Diangienda resigned in 1957 to help his mother, Marie Muilu, continue Kimbangu's work. He succeeded her as the leader of the movement upon her death on April 27, 1959.

It is considered blasphemous in the Kimbanguist Church to speak of Kimbangu's three sons as separate entities, for they are believed to represent the Holy Trinity. Yet Diangienda was undeniably the most charismatic and the dearest to the hearts of the church members. The three are collectively designated as "the papas," though each has a specific title—Papa Kulutu ("elder father") for Kisolokele; Papa Mfumu a Mbanza ("the father at the head of the city of Nkamba") for Dialungana; and Papa Mfumu a Longo

(“the father who is the spiritual leader”) for Diangienda. People also use just “Papa” to refer to Diangienda,¹⁶ who called Simon Kimbangu “Papa.”

Since Diangienda was the custodian of the Kimbanguist faith and community order, his words delineate the symbolic boundaries whose maintenance and reproduction imply the power to forbid and curse, but also elucidate the master-disciple, teacher-student, and deity-believer relations. His preaching is not only listened to but also interpreted and analyzed through the prism of the congregants’ expectations and beliefs. This exchange may, depending on the circumstances, take place as a unilateral or dialogical transmission of knowledge within the space of a participative ritual or in a face-to-face meeting, but nonverbal communication is also taken into account because charisma is everywhere present in this movement of total interaction.

Fully aware of his own image in the eyes of the community, Diangienda tried to include himself in the Kimbanguist “we” in spite of his special status as Kimbangu’s son and his own spiritual power, including the miracles he worked. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear people say, “Papa told me,” “I saw Papa making this miracle,” “I heard people say that Papa had done or said this in this place,” “I dreamed that Papa told me,” “I had a vision in which Papa showed me,” and so on. While the relation between scripture and tradition is considered to be one of the major points separating Catholics and Protestants—the former ranking scripture second to the tradition of the fathers of the church, while the latter consider scripture second to none—the Kimbanguist Church, although seen as a branch of Protestantism, subordinates scripture to the tradition embodied by the preaching of Diangienda. One often sees biblical passages attributed to him in the following way: “in chapter x, line y, Papa says.”

Although Kimbanguists hold the Bible to be sacred, it may be criticized; inspired hymns—the third source of Kimbanguist theology—may be doubted or even rejected; but Papa is deemed infallible by everyone in the Kimbanguist Church. Anyone who dares criticize him or doubt his words, or his brothers’, runs the risk of being labeled an anti-Kimbanguist sorcerer. Even the notion of a “third testament” is not ruled out. When asked whether the Kimbanguist Church was in the process of writing another testament, the pastor Lulendo Lua Nzambi, the national secretary of the church in Congo-Brazzaville, answered: “That’s exactly it. It is the third testament, that of the Holy Spirit, which doesn’t exist yet, whose entire story is still unknown to us and which is still being written, just as the testament of the Son was long combated and was only accepted after Jesus had to die for it.”¹⁷

Diangienda's prophetic preaching still is the most important source of Kimbanguist theology. This vast body of oral sermons is considered to be a sacred legacy and is integrated with the interpretation of both the Bible and the inspired hymns, so that it has become the recognizable voice and collective memory of the community. These sermons, delivered in French, Kikongo, Kituba, or, most frequently, Lingala and taped during services help to reveal the past, interpret the present, and announce the future. Diangienda never relied on any written text, except when quoting from the Bible, and he spoke as a prophet. He would often stare at the sky as if deciphering messages, which led the audience to listen in awe and rapt silence. His joy would trigger the audience's exultation, his laughter their own, his weeping theirs, and his anger the atonement of congregants, who often threw themselves at his feet, flat on their bellies. His preaching, which addressed both visible and invisible dimensions, reflected an identity that was itself a mystery to his community. His main source of inspiration was the Bible, but jointly, with an invisible person—his own father, Kimbangu—mirroring the way Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit in John 16:13–14: “when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”

Hence, when Diangienda said, “Papa told me,” “I’ll ask permission from my father,” or “Papa showed me,” people inevitably inferred he was still in contact with his father, even after Kimbangu had been dead for several decades. In one prayer addressed to his father, Diangienda spoke the following words: “Concerning our country, you showed me something tonight which puzzled me. I don’t know what its meaning can be. Regarding the sovereign national conference [which was held in the DRC], you showed me the numbers 3, 5, and 15, and I was puzzled. I can’t see what they mean. So I beg you to reveal it to us—not just to me, but to all of your children here, you need to show them what lies behind these numbers 3, 5, and 15, for we are nothing but blind people.”¹⁸ As in this example, Diangienda's preaching often tended to emphasize his mystical relation to his father. He proved capable of revealing the hidden meanings of facts, so that his words brought to light the essence of things and persons while deliberately concealing what did not need disclosure. In such cases, he usually resorted to enigmatic language: “These are secret things,” “It is not time yet for me to reveal these things to you,” “The son of man is instructed by means of parables,” or “Today I won’t speak, just follow my gestures.”

Several narratives also allude to extraterrestrial interventions by supernatural beings—identified as the soldiers of apocalypse, mentioned in the

book of Revelation, chapters 9 and 19. Kimbanguists believe them to have black faces and a small size, and they serve as Diangienda's army. When the Kimbanguist theologian and DRC army colonel Rev. Adama Iyefa asked Diangienda about the "myth" of "little soldiers," the spiritual leader gave him a late-night appointment at his house in the church's welcome center in Kinshasa, at an hour when he was certain everyone else was asleep. Diangienda instructed Iyefa to kneel in prayer, and when they were finished a "little soldier" appeared. Iyefa testified, "While I was on my knees, the *soldat ya mokusse* was not as high as my shoulder, and his eyes were throwing flames and his body radiated cold like a cold room. When I shook hands with him after His Eminence, at the moment our hands came in contact, I felt something like the mass of electric power."¹⁹

Another eyewitness to such an encounter was one of Diangienda's sons, Martorel, who spoke to me about it in an interview. In his teenage years, he often napped alongside his father. One day, he opened his eyes and saw a little man in a soldier's uniform, who was barely taller than the bed. "I grabbed my father, saying, 'Papa, wake up, I saw a little man,' but he simply laughed it off and told me, 'No worries, he's on a mission.'"²⁰ Both of these testimonies tend to corroborate the beliefs of most Kimbanguists, some of whom contend that these soldiers of Armageddon are serving Kimbangu and Diangienda. This further enhances the supernatural aura of Diangienda, who also claimed to have the power to perceive and disrupt occult gatherings that simple mortals cannot see with the eyes of the flesh. Diangienda described in a sermon what happened in such "markets" and "restaurants":²¹

Papa told me, "Look at the big 'restaurants' they have opened; they have no way to do that . . . where you are, so they came here to hide their restaurant." . . . Well, one of our pastors was participating in this market. I didn't want to denounce him, but it made me ashamed, for these men said, "But this man is with you!" I saw people morphing into lions, tigers, panthers, leopards, and all sorts of dangerous animals. . . . I was moved to pity, so I went and rescued the pastor and asked him, "Why are you here?" He answered, "Because I have a debt to pay off. . . . I know you don't like people doing this kind of thing." . . . I don't know what happened after I left, for Papa threw gas on them and burned them to the ground, and the place became a pond. On the following morning, I saw the same pastor, who had become sick. I called him and he was terrified, for he thought I was going to denounce him. . . . But no, God is merciful."²²



Figure 3. One of the “small soldiers” of Armageddon (aka “soldats ya mokusse”).

The representations of witchcraft are discussed in depth below, but this acknowledgment of the sorcerers’ power to metamorphose is not restricted to the Kimbanguist worldview. It is commonly found in Congolese culture as a whole and in Kongo culture in particular. Father Van Wing observed: “Just as the *ndoki* [witches] metamorphose into tiny animals, so one can find, according to Kongo beliefs, people who can morph into big animals, preferably leopards and crocodiles. These two beasts play a part in all the authentic tragedies that each village has witnessed and still witnesses.”²³

The obsession with witchcraft clearly has been superseded by the believers’ veneration for their spiritual leader. Diangienda’s words and acts, as

well as those of his two brothers and all of their children, are constantly commented on by church members and preachers. They are recorded and copied on audiotapes, videotapes, DVDs, and photographs, and they constitute the foundation for the identity reconstruction proclaimed and accomplished by the church. Well aware of the importance of his messages, Diangienda exhorted his congregants shortly before he passed away: "In the days to come, if we are no longer with you—for we are only sojourners—you will sometimes wonder, 'What did Papa say before he passed away?' Why don't you just take what I tell you one day at a time? Yesterday I spoke, the day before I spoke too, on Sunday also I spoke; every day I speak to you. What I tell you is our common basis."²⁴

Diangienda delivered his sermons on a variety of occasions, addressing religious, political, or economic themes, but above all the meaning of Blackness. While not university-educated, he used scholarly language in his analyses. He had an extraordinary gift for commanding the attention of his audience through parables or storytelling or proverbs. Even after his death, he still manifests through the dreams and visions of believers and through the hymns, so that he ultimately appears more like a deity than a man, promising his followers a bright future.

Hence, Diangienda's words are extremely significant for the Kimbanguist community, especially since his successors (his brother and his nephew) said on taking the leadership of the church that they had nothing else to tell the church members, for Diangienda had already told them all they needed to hear. His insistence on the *bolingo*, *mibeko*, *misala* triad (love, commandments, and good works), as well as on Blackness, has given his preaching an importance that reaches beyond the Christian message. He was the embodiment of moral authority and spiritual power, which also sustained his healing power.

Some healing sessions were observed by the American sociologist Susan Asch in Kinshasa in the early 1980s: "Sick people are first given a blessing, and then a sip of the sacred water of Nkamba, which is renowned for its healing power. I have taken pictures of such a healing session in Matete, where a woman who was visibly in the throes of death got up after drinking some of the sacred water offered by the spiritual leader."²⁵ I can second her testimony. I have witnessed several similar instances of people who seemed dead who then rose to their feet after his intervention.

All these elements have contributed to the aura of a leader whom Kimbanguist believers expect to fulfill his promises concerning the improvement of Black people's living conditions. These promises are



Figure 4. *The Rise to Jerusalem* shows the spiritual leader Diangienda identified with God. This painting is the work of a Kimbanguist artist called Muze, who presented it to Diangienda on July 2, 1989.

continuously repeated in the inspired hymns, which their church defines as a mystery.

In the Kimbanguist Church, sacred songs hold considerable importance, on a par with the Bible and the prophetic messages of the spiritual leader, which illuminate the meaning of the lyrics. As a body of oral tradition, these hymns are not just sung—they participate in a divine plan. Indeed, Kimbanguist hymns have a unique history, which began in 1921 when Simon Kimbangu was challenged by the Protestant reverend Jennings, who had observed that all his preaching, speeches, and healing

sessions were accompanied by Protestant hymns. Kimbangu withdrew for a moment to pray, and then returned with a new song in Kikongo. Subsequently, Kimbangu's disciples began receiving songs by means of dreams or visions. One of the first Kimbanguist hymns includes this stanza in Kikongo:

Nuisa tambula makanda ma nza	You shall welcome all nations:
O Yesu kunu wonza kesa	This is Jesus's ultimate promise,
E nkunga mia mbasi mubonga	Sing the songs of the angels!
Kenu vila kana ko	Never forget this.

This hymn, which sounds like a commandment, began a seemingly endless series of sacred songs owned by the church; there are several thousand of them today. In African traditions, songs are usually rhythmic poems informed by conventional wisdom. They may be composed by griots or popular singers, and they always reflect society's values and tensions. In both Congolese republics, songs meet various needs—for entertainment, comforting, education, dance—and address a variety of themes, such as self-development, love, women's issues, beauty, money, or even political awareness. Following the aesthetic rules of rumba or soukous, the composers of the lyrics are typically the singers themselves; otherwise, they remain anonymous.

It is also important to point out that in both republics of Congo, songs lie at the juncture between the profane and sacred worlds—the “profane” world being defined in the national psyche as the realm of mundane entertainment and sexual impurity, while the “sacred” world is the realm of piety, spirituality, and truth. Sacred singers and profane music singers are in competition for an audience of both believers and unbelievers, but it remains difficult to establish a clear separation between the two, since both are rooted in the same musical and rhythmic genre—usually, the rumba.

Within this context, though, Kimbanguist songs are unique. While rejected by other Christian churches that are also members of the World Council of Churches, though parodied by some people, and though occasionally plagiarized by bands from the Christian business sector, these hymns are defined by Kimbanguists as “inspired hymns” or “songs of the angels.” Due to their mystical character, they are distinguished from “profane” songs and even from the Christian music made by other Congolese churches. Because they are not the work of any composer, being attributed

to God, these songs are seen as revealing what escapes the awareness of social actors. Unlike profane songs, they develop the three tenets of the Kimbanguist Church in keeping with Diangienda's preaching (the love of God and one's neighbor, obedience to God's commandments, and encouragement to work) and also insist on the theme of Blackness. Martin gave the following analysis of their role: "Kimbanguist songs became one of the main characteristics of the movement, and it is still the case today: people express their faith through art and music rather than theological formulations. . . . We [Westerners] must try to define the trends of their doctrine, which is impossible unless we spend a certain amount of time with them, talk with them at length after earning their trust, worship and go on retreats with them, and above all get to know their songs and images."²⁶

Balandier, writing about the Kimbanguist "songs of heaven," observed that these hymns, "despite their 'Christian' approach, constitute a literature of 'resistance.' The political authorities were quite right when they pointed out that the Christmas hymns to Gounza in 1923 were mainly allusions to the struggle against white domination, and are concerned with little else than the trials and suffering endured, and the struggles against the enemy."²⁷

Yet, however accurate the above analyses may be, these early observers of Kimbanguism seem to have failed to grasp the mechanism at work behind this phenomenon, which is essential to the life of the church. Singing, here, is another way of understanding life, the world, the dominant Other, Blackness, and Kimbanguist identity, since hymns are not only sung but interpreted. The themes broached in the lyrics address notions in the Bible—atonement and God's forgiveness, social or inner peace, the glory of God, the hereafter—and the identities of the spiritual leaders.

Kimbanguist hymns may be categorized on the basis of their inscription in one of the three time dimensions—past, present, and future. Hymns set in the past are especially focused on Genesis, the identity of Adam and Eve, the garden of Eden, and the origins of Black people. The present is sung in the mode of a commentary or interpretation of topical issues and stakes. Finally, the future is expressed along two lines—a renewed humankind exalts the triumph of Blacks and their inventions or, a more pessimistic message, wars and conflicts are prophesied. Hymns seem to have three objectives: informing the people, glorifying and praising God, and lamenting and praying. Here is a song of prayer, originally in the Ngangulu language, as sung by the GTKI (Groupe théâtral kimbanguiste) Talangai church choir:

Oh, my God,
 My suffering is such! Have mercy!
 I violated the taboo imposed upon me
 From my childhood; where shall I go?
 Who will save me?
 Whose is this world?
 I don't know where to go; come and save me!

Soprano: I have grown tired of running;
 Where shall I end up?
 I have grown tired
 Of weeping every day.

Chorus: I had hoped to be saved
 Thanks to my doings;
 I was filled with love,
 I would pray on my knees.

Soprano: My sins are tied
 To my own body;
 I have tainted the faith
 Of no other soul.

Chorus: Oh, my God (repeated several times)
 My God, come and save me! (4 times)

Bass: "But you had rejected My advice,
 And you had rejected Me!"

This hymn of prayer, received by Julienne Bialonga, a female pastor and member of the church, stages a dialogue between the believer and an anonymous character identified by believers as God. The former complains of suffering from transgressing divine commandments, but repents by confessing the individual nature of his or her sins. The God character, who intervenes in the final solo part, stresses that the believer rejected his recommendations and disowned God. As I develop further below, in the Kimbanguist understanding, faith is essentially a question of love or rejection.

Hymns also serve the goal of preaching a new worldview. Contrary to the religious repertoire of other churches' songs, which remains restricted to

biblical history and ends where the scriptures end, the source of Kimbanguist hymns is defined as endless. These songs are not authored by anyone, but transmitted to the inspired people by beings acting as intermediaries between God and humans. These intermediaries may be angels, people who have passed away, an anthropomorphic Nature, or the enigmatic forefathers of the church—Simon Kimbangu and his three sons (the Holy Trinity). Kimbanguist hymns seem to convey the biblical message with the aim of putting within intellectual reach what seems inaccessible, and shedding light on what was said in a symbolic way in the scriptures. For instance, the following stanza reformulates Genesis:

You have created everything
 Without touching any of them;
 You created man another day
 But You really shaped him,
 You gave him the power to rule
 Over everything in this world.
 He is the really precious thing
 Above anything else.
 Why, Lord,
 Did you let Satan ruin
 Your precious thing?
 You let Satan ruin it!

Listening to this hymn allows church members to learn biblical history without having to read the scriptures. Certain hymns transport the listeners back into biblical times and even fill in some of the ellipses left in the Bible by its authors, as the following shows:

Believers, obey the Law
 That I gave you
 So as not to weep
 As in the days of Noah!

Believers, keep the Love
 That I recommend you to have,
 So as not to weep
 As in the days of Noah!

Believers, accomplish the Works
That I prescribe you to do,
So as not to weep
As in the days of Noah!

At the time when Noah
Was building the ark,
People were laughing at him:
They thought that
The rain could not fall
All over the world.

When the tempest
was raging all over the world,
People begged him,
“Noah, open the ark,
Our children are drowning!”

Chorus: Noah, Noah, Noah,
Noah, Father Noah,
Noah, open the ark,
The children are drowning!

Alto: “Impossible, impossible
My children, that’s impossible.
Impossible, impossible
Children, that’s impossible.
Look for another refuge.”

Mezzo: “In the world we used to live in,
I was the one who prophesied.
When I was building the ark,
You refused to listen to me!”

Tenor: Look at these herds, Noah!
Look at these works, Noah!
Open the ark,
Our children are drowning!

Tenor: Your wife, Noah,
 Calls me "Father."
 What has gone so wrong today, Noah,
 That you won't listen to me anymore?

Tenor: You and I, Noah,
 Would go on a walk together.
 What has gone so wrong today,
 That you won't listen to me anymore?

Tenor: You and I, Noah,
 Used to drink some wine together.
 What has gone so wrong today,
 That you won't listen to me anymore?

This hymn is typical in its depiction of the characters of the episode of the flood, casting Noah as a real person in dialogue with his friends and the members of his community. Regardless of whether science validates or invalidates such episodes from the Bible, for the church members these songs, which come straight from heaven, work as confirmations of the holy scriptures, although in a different literary style.

Not all hymns repeat biblical episodes. The songs function in many different ways. For example, the purpose of certain hymns is to convey spiritual messages from the birds and other living beings (which are seen as part of creation and as messengers of God), or even messages from what is, presumably, the unspoken disarray of the "pagans," or unbelievers:

We, pagans, are watching you;
 We, pagans, will eventually follow you.
 We have seen all the places prepared by God:
 His Word and His Victory are in you,
 You are our leaders,
 You will show us the way.
 Convert us!
 You will enjoy heavenly bliss.
 We, pagans—
 Our souls are crying for you.
 Where are you? We are waiting for you
 To fight this battle,

Waiting for the bell to toll.
Who shall claim ownership of sin?
Who shall claim ownership of death?
Who shall claim ownership of tears?
All of this belongs to us—
To us, pagans.

This hymn gives a clear indication of the Kimbanguist definition of pagans. On the basis of the self-description offered here, pagans are people living in sin, who find themselves doomed to eternal mourning, helplessness, and death. Pagans seem to be aware of their fate and ask for help from the people who are supposed to be God's elect.

Given the diversity of the entities speaking through these songs, it is of interest to ask whether the phenomenon of receiving inspired hymns should be defined as sacred inspiration or spirit possession. The notion of possession is quite difficult to define, due to the confusion it generates. The French ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget's work is helpful in explaining the perspective of Kimbanguists on inspiration and possession. Rouget focused first on three examples: Mother Superior Jeanne des Anges (one of the famous demonic nuns of Loudun), who identified herself and was considered by all as possessed by demons; Jean Cavalier (the most famous military and prophetic leader of the seventeenth-century French Calvinists known as *camisards*), who said he was inspired by the Holy Spirit and was recognized as such due to his military genius; and an ecstatic Sufi, for whom it can only be said that he is in the state of "having found (*wajd*) God," since the term "possessed" would "mean he is possessed either by God or by the devil, which would be absurd," while the word "inspired" would "mean that his state is due to the presence of the Holy Spirit—a religious concept foreign to Islam."²⁸ Hence the question revolves around the exact relation between the ecstatic person and the supernatural entity responsible for the person's state.

Within the category he called "mystical trance," Rouget distinguished three subcategories. In the first, the person appears "to have undergone a change of personality during the trance, as a result of a god, genius, or ancestor—for which the term 'deity' may be used—having taken possession of his or her body, substituted itself for him or her, and acted in his or her place."²⁹ The second subcategory depicts the entranced person as hosting the deity or a force emanating from it, which coexists with him or her but dominates the person's will while letting him or her speak in the

deity's name. The most frequent example of this relation is observed in trances attributed to the Holy Spirit. In this case, Rouget concluded, it is a case of inspiration, not possession. In the third subcategory, the relation between the deity and the entranced person is understood as an encounter, which may be experienced by the person as a communion, a revelation, or an epiphany. Contrary to the other two, this kind of trance does not involve any form of embodiment.

The explanations given by the inspired people I interviewed help determine which of the two concepts—inspiration or possession—is the more appropriate in order to grasp how Kimbanguist hymns are defined in their church. The term “inspired person,” which designates someone moved to act by divine or creative inspiration, is used here to refer, as Kimbanguists do, to people receiving hymns or supernatural messages. These people may be men or women, young or elderly, educated or illiterate, or children, and they seem to have been chosen regardless of their ethnic, national, or denominational identity. They have received hymns in a wide variety of African languages—Lingala, Kikongo, Swahili, Ngangulu, Mboshi, and others—and in other languages, such as French, English, Italian, Chinese, Korean, and Hebrew. Hymns have also been received in languages so far unknown, much like the phenomenon of glossolalia. The translations of the lyrics have depended either on foreign guests, who recognize their mother tongue at the moment when the hymn is sung, or on the degree of inspiration of the person receiving the song, who may also simultaneously receive its translation or its overall meaning.

While the inspired are assumed to be used by God as instruments to convey his message to the Kimbanguist Church and to humanity, there are several types of inspired people. Some have received this ministry as a sort of spiritual crutch, for they consider themselves too sinful to have deserved it. The mission is imposed on them so that they may on their own renounce their vices, convert, and get back on the right track, as is explained by an interviewee: “I used to be quite a sinner and a very skeptical man until I began receiving the hymns. I believe God has chosen me on purpose, to force me to calm down. Since then, as a result of the things I see, those who have known me before I began receiving the hymns can say that I have really changed” (D. N. P., 36, male, GTKI Nkamba).

These people have been forced by God to grow up, while others have been chosen in spite of their unbelief. Being given by God, the songs cannot be refused, and another interviewee complained: “I am sick and tired of receiving these hymns. I have done everything I could for this thing to

go, but it doesn't! I did lots of stuff on purpose—fornication, taking my showers naked—but it's just sticking to me. And sometimes, during the night, Papa comes and tells me, 'See what you have done, my son? Don't do that again in the future,' and gives me yet another song" (B., 28, male, choir member, Chorale des enfants kimbanguistes Brazzaville).

Some inspired people began receiving songs before they became Kimbanguist. Unsurprisingly, they point to this gift as the reason for their conversion: "I used to be a Protestant. I kept receiving songs and giving them to the choir I was a member of, but people often told me that these weren't Protestant hymns, so I couldn't figure out what was going on. It's only when I told my uncle about it—he's a Kimbanguist—and he asked to see these texts, and he told me, 'you have a suitcase full of clothes here, why go elsewhere to borrow something to wear?' meaning these were Kimbanguist hymns. So I went and showed them to the church, and they were accepted as Kimbanguist hymns by decision of the spiritual leader" (J., 27, female, choir member, Brazzaville).

The anthropologist Mircea Eliade, when analyzing the case of the shaman, wrote that "one may become a medicine man or a shaman as a result of a personal decision to appropriate religious powers (a process called 'quest') but also as a result of a vocation (or 'calling') because one is forced to do so by supernatural beings."³⁰ From the Kimbanguist perspective, an inspired person is not just someone who thinks or declares they are, but someone who has been called by God to become the receptor of messages or songs. In this sense, Kimbanguist hymns may be said to result from divine inspiration. Still, some of the hymns sung with the authorization of the spiritual leaders suggest the possibility of possession. The following hymn is sung by the GTKI choir:

I, Satan, thought myself so powerful
 That I had dominated this world
 But the world belongs to God.
 Ooh, my time has come!
 I'm asking you, Mfumu a Longo,³¹
 To gather all your followers—
 And if there is one who doesn't accept you,
 Leave that one to me—(s)he's mine
 (S)he'll go with me
 To hell over there.
 Among themselves, they dance,

Among themselves, they love fetishes,
Among themselves, they commit adultery
And do all the things that you,
God, do not like.
Ooh, my time has come!

To understand this hymn, one needs to know that besides obeying the Mosaic Ten Commandments, members of the Kimbanguist Church are expected to abide by the moral prescriptions bequeathed by Kimbangu, which include abstaining from sleeping naked or in a state of anger; bathing or showering naked; using tobacco, drugs, or alcohol; eating pork; dancing or attending dance sessions; interfering with conflicts, lawsuits, or feuds; and resorting to witchcraft, fetishes, talismans, magic, or divination. Additionally, all Kimbanguists must take off their shoes in any holy place, and women must keep their heads covered and wear clothes that are not close fitting.

In the hymn above, Satan calls out the spiritual leader about the transgressive behavior of church members. In my investigation of this particular hymn, I spoke to Pastor Philippe Assumbe, who was in charge of the missions of the spiritual leader. He asserted, "It's Satan's angel who took the mission of confirming the existence of Satan. The Kimbanguist Church's mission being one of revelation, it reveals all that is hidden. Through this type of hymn—for there are several others, similar to this one—Satan confirms his existence, for there are people who deny it. . . . The same inspired person may have two voices—that of God and that of the devil. When receiving a message from the devil, the inspired person may be said to have indeed been filled with the devil."³² Thus, according to Rev. Assumbe, this type of hymn is authorized by the spiritual leader. But the inspired person runs the risk of being Satan's spokesperson, so it is necessary to arrange an appointment with the spiritual leader, who is the only one with the power to discern what comes from the devil or from God, so that he may silence the devil.

Can one therefore consider this type of hymn to be a case of possession? Rouget pointed out that possessed people are "afterward in a state of more or less complete amnesia, so that in general, most possessed people are absolutely unable to depict their condition."³³ Yet the receptor of the song above, as well as others of the same type, kept the memory of what was experienced during the trance, since this person was able to explain how the hymn was transmitted. It is also important to stress, as Froelich did, that possession in African cultures "is neither play-acting nor a fit of

hysterics, but a mystical experience which is both sought for and triggered, and shows itself in a ritualized context.”³⁴ Hence, it is worth asking how inspiration takes place in the lived experience of the people concerned. Does it come as the result of a ritualized context or an initiation?

While Kimbanguist hymns seem to have originated with Simon Kimbangu, they retain certain aspects reminiscent of initiation processes: “Initiation is self-reflexive, it is an action of the self on the self—there is no possibility of proxy, for one is the only one taking on something new, and transforming, or converting, oneself. But it is an action which is imposed by others—it is impossible to initiate oneself. Initiation is not given, but acquired.”³⁵ Yet, among the Kimbanguists, inspiration is not acquired but given, since inspired people are allegedly chosen by God himself. All of my interviewees clearly asserted that they never chose to become inspired but, on the contrary, have been obliged to receive these songs and messages.

Kimbanguist collective memory is crystallized around Christian spiritual retreat—a practice whose inner mechanisms distinguish it from the pattern of initiation. The spiritual retreats began on Diangienda’s recommendation and took place on a seasonal basis from 1972 to 1989. Retreat usually occurred in the bush or on the hills, at a distance from people’s houses. During a retreat, which typically lasted for five or six days, women and men, from infancy to old age, were isolated in gendered groups and guided by pastors selected by the spiritual leader. The retreats usually would begin on a Tuesday evening after a sermon by the pastor, and the participants would set the number of days they would fast to atone for their sins—one to three days without eating or drinking (or even, in certain cases, swallowing their own saliva), spent in prayer and singing, and sleeping on the bare ground. These aspects of retreat may be compared with the three fundamental elements of kimpassi initiation mentioned above: the break from the circle of relatives, the ordeals, and the rebirth. The break is supposed to be accomplished between the “old man” and the “new man,” in the scriptural meaning of these phrases. Renouncing comfort was usually the main topic of several sermons; it was preached as a means of spiritual rebirth and a reminder of the aim the participants had set for themselves.

After washing early on Saturday morning, the participants attended a closing service and shared a meal together to end the retreat. These ordeals were meant to give birth to new men and women, with new daily habits as codified by Kimbanguist Christian morals. However, contrary to initiation rituals, at retreat all age categories were represented, and even mothers with babes in arms were allowed to participate; the genders, however,

remained strictly segregated. There was no secrecy, either, while secrecy is an essential component of initiation rituals. As a matter of fact, non-Kimbanguists and observers were welcomed at these retreats, and no doors were closed. In this way, these gatherings may not have been analogous to initiation processes.

However, as in the *kimpassi* initiation, during the spiritual retreats the participants were expected to have exceptional spiritual experiences, such as having visions or dreams and, especially, receiving songs. In a way, this was the period par excellence when inspired people discovered their gifts, as the two following testimonies show. One interviewee was skeptical about his friends' and relatives' excitement around the retreat of 1972: "I doubted all this. Since Papa Simon doesn't exist anymore, how could people see him? So I'd tease them." He decided to attend the next retreat, held in 1974 in Gamboma, Congo-Brazzaville, to see for himself, but he experienced nothing save a lack of hunger after the fast. However, three days later,

I had a dream. . . . In my sleep, I found myself back in Gamboma, the place was filled with sunshine. I heard a lot of cheering. . . . So I looked up towards the bush where we had spent the retreat, and I saw angels coming from there. From there, too, Adam came out, and the angels surrounded him; Eve came out, and the angels surrounded her; and Abraham came out, and the angels surrounded him. It was as if they were showing a genealogical tree: from Adam, who was black, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jesus, whose features were like a Palestinian's or an Arab's. And here also stood the person I had mocked when I had said, "You have been on a retreat, and you haven't seen a thing." And that person was introducing them, "This is Adam, this is Eve, and over there is Isaac," appearing and disappearing after each introduction, as in a movie. I woke up in the middle of the night, sweating all over.

[Three days later] I received my first song, in a dream. I was standing on a sandy place, and I saw an angel coming up to me—a beautiful woman, light-skinned like an Arab. She . . . spoke to me in *Munukutuba*,³⁶ telling me, "I will teach you a hymn. Can you memorize it?" I said I could. . . . Then she said, "Sing the soprano part, and I'll sing the alto." . . . Then she sang the tenor part, and so on. She told me to review, so we did, and I woke up right afterwards. I had been at a summer camp with other kids who spoke *Munukutuba*, so I was able to understand the song, but normally I don't speak that

language. It meant, “The path to Heaven is good, Mama, / The path to Heaven is good, Papa, / The path to Heaven is good. / Look for the path to Heaven and you shall find.” (M. A., 48, high school head supervisor, GTKI Talangai)

This testimony displays the mystique behind the receiving of the gift. This interviewee participated in the retreat because it had caused unusual excitement and speculation around Kimbanguist mystical experiences, particularly about the people receiving hymns. He attended with both a critical mind and open-mindedness: he expected to witness something, but nothing happened until after he returned home. A second interviewee described how she received her first hymn in 1972:

When I arrived at the venue of the retreat, on the first [two] day[s] nothing happened. . . . But on the third day . . . in the afternoon, our group of nine was praying, and we began hearing the grass rustling as if someone were walking up to us. We were scared, especially when we heard a noise right in the middle of our circle. We were wondering if we should stop the prayers, but we went on all the same. . . . At the end of our prayers, we looked up, and we saw a sheet of paper on the ground. One lady, who was the eldest of our group, tried to pick it up three times, but she couldn't because she had cramps; her fingers had become stuck on top of one another. So we asked ourselves who was going to take it. We were all scared. Since I was the youngest of the group and the only one who was literate, the adults suggested that maybe that sheet had been given for someone who could write; it was a blank sheet of paper. So in spite of my very elementary level, I picked up the sheet and I gave it to the pastor, who gave it back to me, so that our group could report what we had experienced.

Now when the night came, I dreamed that I saw Arabs with cloths all around their heads, and they were singing a hymn in Kikongo. I thought it was just a dream, for I had no idea what it meant to receive a hymn. I woke up having memorized two hymns, and I described my dream to the pastor. . . . I don't belong to the Kongo ethnic group, but I knew that the literal meaning of the song was “The Lord our Savior is coming into the world, coming to rescue us in all things down below. You are the one we are sending our tearful prayers to, for forgiveness of all the evil ingrained in our hearts.” (B. J., 44, female, pastor, GTKI Talangai)

These two examples illustrate how, in the Kimbanguist Church, spiritual retreats worked as a litmus test, which allowed inspired people to become aware of their chosenness. Out of eight such people I was able to interview, five emphasized that the catalyst for their inspiration had been a spiritual retreat. They all gave equally detailed accounts of the circumstances in which they began receiving songs—in their sleep by having a dream, or in a state of wakefulness by experiencing a vision or hearing voices singing. The spiritual retreats were reminiscent of ritualized events, which makes them comparable to possession rituals practiced in traditional Congolese religions. The Belgian priest Paul Raymaekers observed in the 1950s that the doctrinal and liturgical frameworks that could be traced back to former, purely African customs—such as the nighttime dances and the “shaking” at the sound of the *ngoma* (the drum used for dances)—had all but disappeared.³⁷

Today, spontaneous individual trances may still be observed among Kimbanguist believers, but they are discouraged and repressed. Is it thus acceptable to speak of spirit possession? In spirit possession, Rouget noted certain variables. First, possession cults are forms of religion characterized by a certain type of relation between the deity and devotees, whereby the latter are possessed by the former. Second, possession itself is a socialized individual behavior, whereby under certain circumstances the person undergoes a change resulting in his or her usual personality (which rules everyday behavior) being replaced by that of the deity, which dictates different behaviors; this substitution is accompanied by an alteration of the psyche, commonly designated as a trance. Finally, the identification thus accomplished constitutes an alliance (sometimes reduced to what may be described as a pact of coexistence) whose major function is to bring the deity either to use its power in favor of the person possessed or his or her group—for example, by increasing their strength, keeping them out of harm’s way, healing them from illnesses, or revealing the future—or to renounce the use of its power against them.³⁸

Unlike those aspects of spirit possession, when an inspired person from the Kimbanguist Church describes his or her experiences, the line is always clearly drawn between the supernatural entity inspiring the person and the latter’s own personality. There is a dialogue between the two, rather than an invasion of one by the other. Besides, very specific memories of the encounter are retained, as opposed to the state of amnesia that typically follows trances, as described by Rouget. While the Kimbanguist spiritual retreats triggered the song-receiving ability of many, for others the receiving of hymns was initiated by a dream or a vision entirely disconnected

from the retreats. When I asked in what context they had become inspired, I received the following testimonies:

I was playing football with three young boys around 3:00 P.M. . . . I was running after the ball when I saw something like an image. I didn't understand. Suddenly I saw a pigeon flying toward me. When it was in front of me, it landed and turned into an actual person, dressed like the Catholic nuns, wearing gloves and a white headscarf covering all her hair, and wings in the back. She was standing about a meter above the ground. I knelt down, and then I saw Papa Simon Kimbangu looking at me with a smile on his face. But I just kept kneeling; I was scared. . . . He spoke to me, singing these words, "Don't be afraid, for you have your God! Even if Satan is persecuting you, he is not strong enough to defeat you." Then he showed me the temple. I hadn't been to Nkamba yet. . . . He sang a song saying that Papa Simon has triumphed and is going to rule over the whole world. Then he blessed me three times, laying his hand on my head, and a few days later, I began to receive songs. For five months, I couldn't find any sleep. I lost weight. I could not bear to hear any noise and didn't leave home. Everything I tried to set up failed. So I decided to go to Nkamba. I walked all the way from Mbanza Ngungu [forty-six miles], and there I met Papa [Diangienda] and explained it all to him. After receiving permission from him, I began teaching songs to the GTKI choir members. (D. N. P., 36, male, GTKI Nkamba)

When I was seven, Papa [Diangienda] showed me how he had made the world, how the Black man is, how things are happening in the world, whether good or evil. In just one second, he showed me how the five continents took shape, one for each ethnic group. After he had shown me all this, Papa asked me to come with him to show me what will happen in the future. . . . The songs started at that time. (O. R., 26, male, GTKI Talangai)

When I started high school is when I began receiving songs. The first song I received came during my sleep. I heard angels singing—it was as if I were inside the temple and people were singing. When I woke up in the morning, I was imitating a fragment of this song. Constantly, even in school while the rest were focused on their

lessons, that fragment of song kept recurring in my mind, so that I could no longer pay attention to what the teacher was saying. I told the deacon of my congregation about it, so they decided to take me to Papa Mfumu a Longo. That was back in 1991, so there was the rampage going on in Kinshasa, and I wasn't able to get there. So they had to take my picture and my hymns to the spiritual leader, and then Papa gave his permission. (N. B. C., 29, teacher, GTKI Talangai)

By now I have received my 1,452nd hymn. I received my first song on November 8, 1979, during a *beko* [prayer vigil] that had been organized at the temple of the Plateaux des quinze ans in the presence of Papa Simon the grandson [now the spiritual leader of the church]. Around 1:00 A.M., I had a dream. I saw an old woman who caught my arm. There were nine of us in the group, and in my dream also there were nine of us. The old lady drew me aside, and she put me into a room where there was a white board, on which [the lyrics of] a song had been written. She taught me that song, but while singing, I was still dreaming my dream. The others told me when I woke up that I had been singing. During the same day, I was overwhelmed with hymns—thirty-five in that one day. (B., 38, male, choir member, GTKI Brazzaville)

Diangienda's role is clearly dominant in these testimonies. As explained above, no important decision can be made unless the spiritual leader has given his approval; only he can, just by looking at a picture of someone, identify the person as well as their past, their mission, or their evolution in the church and the world. One cannot be recognized as an inspired person unless identified and confirmed as such by the spiritual leader after describing one's dreams, visions, and hymns to him.

The messengers behind the hundreds of hymns I have analyzed have many different identities. They may be the God of the Old Testament, Jesus of Nazareth, or God the Holy Spirit. They may be the founders of the Kimbanguist Church—Simon Kimbangu; his wife, Marie Muilu; and their three sons, Kisolokele, Dialungana, and Diangienda—or Kimbangu's grandson, the current spiritual leader, Simon Kimbangu Kiangani. They may also be angels, human beings who passed away, living beings belonging to the vegetable or animal kingdoms—trees, birds, water—or concepts,

such as death. Here is a hymn (received in Lingala) that presents death as a metaphysical character:

Death, Death, Death:
 Nobody can know me
 You, worldly people,
 None of you can
 Have a clear idea of me.
 I am present all over the world,
 Even in the water.
 I walk with a whip,
 I destroy men one by one,
 Then I send them away
 Where the Judgment takes place.
 There,
 You will experience the dread I cause!

Chorus: Death, Death, Death:
 You, rich men,
 You cannot bribe me;
 You, intelligent men,
 You cannot know me,
 For I do the work
 As it has to be done.

Death, Death, Death:
 God the Father, our Lord Jesus,
 And our father the Holy Spirit
 Sent me down below
 To send people
 Every now and then
 Every day to their world.

God left Heaven
 And came to you down below;
 You are not rejoicing,
 But I am rejoicing,
 For I do the work
 As it has to be done.
 Death, Death, Death!

Tenor: Be aware that if you have not obeyed
 The commandments that were given,
 In the place where you shall go
 You shall see me,
 Death, Death, Death.

Tenor: Be aware that if you have disobeyed
 The three principles that were given you,
 In the place where you'll go
 I will eat you.

Tenor: Whether you were endowed with beauty
 Or a tall size,
 Where you shall go,
 you are nothing.
 Death, Death, Death!
 Whether you have money
 Or you are intelligent,
 When your time has come,
 I will stop you in your tracks.
 Death, Death, Death!

Solo: To those who obey,
 I cannot hide the fact
 That where they go,
 I am not present,
 Death, Death, Death.

This hymn was received by Julienne Bialonga (known as B. J.). Its contents cast a complex, ambiguous light on the identity of the sender of the message, placing any observer on the boundary between natural and supernatural phenomena. In this hymn, death appears to be a good servant, or a tool, of God. The song clearly shows how Kimbanguist believers imagine death through the image the latter gives of itself—a phenomenon that nobody can grasp or comprehend, an incorruptible agent of God's will, which reaps every living soul in due time without concern for their wealth, intelligence, beauty, or social status. Death may be found everywhere, standing in the way of sinners even beyond their physical passing away, except for those who, being faithful servants of God, will not see death but will reap

eternal life instead. When I asked whether a vision had accompanied her receiving this hymn, Bialonga answered: “It was a big storm, through which I could make out a shape that looked irate. Arms were sticking out from that shape, and it was singing” (B. J., 44, female, pastor, GTKI Talangai).

Once a hymn has been made public, the knowledge of the context of its receiving gives an advantage to inspired people over the rest of the community, as the following testimonies show:

At times, I see people singing. At other times, we are the ones singing. For instance, one day in the *beko* [prayer vigil] I had just knelt down to pray when I saw Papa Dialungana in a vision, sitting in an armchair. Next to him was a kneeling woman who was giving him this message, and behind the woman people were singing in Kikongo a hymn that literally means, “Listen to us, God of Mercy, / You are our savior, and our salvation is in You; / You are our savior, You are Lord Jesus, / Don’t turn Your back on us, / For peace in the world will come from You / And the races of the world shall be saved through You.” Then, when we said “Amen,” the hymn also came to an end.

Sometimes, I see angels. They [songs] come in different forms—sometimes men, snippets, or images. The day before yesterday, I heard a bird singing about the war; it was saying that human beings have become like the beasts in the bush. Those who know me well are aware that, when they see me in a certain position, they mustn’t come close to me or touch me. For sometimes, when people touch me as I am receiving a hymn, the Spirit vanishes. Sometimes, I hear the voice [of the sender]; sometimes it happens through a vision. (D. K. P., male, 36, mechanic, GTKI Nkamba)

The angel is the one sending the hymns; but at times, it’s Papa himself who comes and gives it. Sometimes, it has to do with evil: Papa comes and shows me how evil things occur and then gives me the hymn. When an event is going to happen, he comes and shows in the hymn how he wants Africa to be or become. He shows the future first and then accompanies that with hymns. Sometimes, it’s the angel who sends the hymn; at other times, it’s Papa himself who speaks through the angels’ voices. (O. R., 26, male, GTKI Talangai Brazzaville)

I receive songs in visions, dreams, or while I’m awake. They come unexpectedly. Whatever the length of the song, I receive it in a couple

of seconds. (P. Ma., 47, male deputy intern at Brazzaville hospital, GTKI Plateaux des quinze ans)

Although my respondents did not seem particularly attracted to poetry, the hymns they convey have a distinctly poetic character, or they sometimes sound like scenes from a play, with a call-and-response structure involving both the sender(s) of the message and the Kimbanguist believers, or the Black person as embodied by the Kimbanguists, who then act as the receptors, singers, and interpreters of the messages. Because hymns hold a unique place in Kimbanguist thought, inspired people are considered to be uncommon personalities within the church. My interviews showed, however, that they share a number of characteristics. Many of them first went through a phase of what their relatives and friends saw as mental illness: “When it began, people thought it was a case of madness. They even took me to the *cabano* [a derisive term for the Brazzaville mental hospital], but I wasn’t crazy. At some point, it began to have more importance, so they took me to Papa Diangienda. Then he held my face close to his belly and spoke out, saying, ‘We want to hear these songs, go ahead and sing them’” (O. R., 26, male, GTKI Talangai Brazzaville).

In addition, all of them share the same discreet attitude. Although their existence is known to the community because each of them belongs to a choir, they prefer to go unnoticed; they are difficult to identify at first. It was challenging to find them and then to convince them to give interviews. Hence, I always contacted first the choirmasters to ask for the contact information of the people concerned; every choir includes at least one inspired member.

A third characteristic is their secretiveness. When asked certain questions, many refused to answer, saying they had an obligation to keep that information secret or were forbidden to speak. Others tried to respond cautiously, as the following examples indicate:

If we call someone “inspired,” then that person has necessarily met angels. These things really are secrets, but since this is about showing Kimbanguism to people who know nothing about it, I’ll try to speak. (O. R., 26, male, GTKI Talangai)

This point is a great secret for me, but I will speak to you about it because this secret is a heavy load to bear. This way, there will be two of us bearing it. (B. J., 44, female, pastor, GTKI Talangai)

A fourth criterion distinguishing these people appears in the words of Diangienda, who called them *mbinkundi*, which means “seers” or “visionaries.” As the interviews show, prophecy is part of the messages or hymns received.

I’ll give you an example. In May 1992, two months before the death of Papa Mfumu a Longo [Diangienda], I received a hymn which announced Papa’s death. But I was blamed by the community. People told me, “How can you wish for Papa’s death?” they said reproachfully. I was ashamed and miserable. I felt frustrated. This is the hymn I had received:

Papa, we are asking you
 To bring your peace down on us,
 For we, your children,
 Are left as orphans now
 In the world where we are,
 Satan has gotten ready!
 Papa we are beseeching you
 To give us solace.

Chorus: Papa, we are beseeching you
 To give us solace!

Now you have gone to Heaven,
 You have left us behind,
 We are left to cry,
 With our eyes brimming with tears!
 Look, how scattered we have become,
 See how scattered we have become!

This hymn, received by N. B. (male), clearly shows to what extent inspired people may be said to be privileged over the rest of the community in knowing about the context of each song. They seem to all experience premonitory dreams, which sometimes translate into prophetic songs—messages about the future sung in the present tense. This makes their task a tricky one, possibly putting them at odds with the rest of the community. Indeed, while premonitory songs tend to encourage believers to have a mystical wait-and-see attitude, these songs may also run counter to community

expectations. In this case, the division announced in the hymn was not evident when it was received; the rift only occurred ten years later.

When Diangienda did pass away, this hymn—which is now very popular with all the choirs of the church and has been recorded on several CDs—earned a positive reputation and the right to be performed. This was ironic because the choir members knew nothing of the circumstances under which it was received, and believed instead that it had only recently been received, because it so accurately pictures the critical condition the church is currently in.

I have been amazed to see the fulfillment of some of the prophecies entrusted to me concerning the succession crisis. For example, Julienne Bialonga told me in confidence in November 2000, “Darkness will fall among the descendants of Simon Kimbangu concerning his succession.” Such a pronouncement, at that time, was unsettling enough to shake the faith of a number of believers in the lineage of Simon Kimbangu. But, thankfully for the believers, sacred hymns keep being received: even after passing away, Diangienda continues to make his voice heard. The following hymn, received in the Kikongo language at the time of Diangienda’s funeral, depicts his departure and his ongoing influence:

Listen, listen, listen!
 I have left,
 But you’ll stay in peace.
 I am going unto the Father
 I am going to muster
 New forces,
 For the time
 Of my labor is accomplished (bis)

Chorus: All of you are
 The flock that belongs to me
 I am leaving you in my sacred fold
 Stay in peace and keep
 My recommendations
 I have left no one in perdition

Listen, listen listen:
 Love, commandments, labor,
 Without tiring,
 Listen, listen, listen!

Whoever won't win
can only blame his own stupidity.

This hymn fits perfectly with the timing of its reception: it conveys Diangienda's last wishes in keeping with the contents of his preaching.

Visions are a fifth feature of the experiences of the inspired respondents, since every single one of them declared they had seen angels. Statements were extraordinarily consistent among the people I interviewed, whether they lived in Kinshasa, Brazzaville, or France. Here are some examples:

Each time angels come to me, they seem reluctant to touch me and often stay about one meter above the ground. (D. N. P., 36, male, GTKI Nkamba)

These beings can't really taint themselves with the filth of our world; they can come and meet you without having to touch the ground. They stand in space. They appear as persons who avoid any stain or impurity. (O. R., 26, male, GTKI Talangai)

A sixth characteristic of inspired people leads to a questioning of the role of intellectuals in the Kimbanguist Church. Strikingly, the inspired respondents all insisted that their mission had proved incompatible with the pursuit of an education:

I attended school up to seventh grade. I had to go to a boarding school from 1973 onward. But each time I had to go back, I had fits of madness and had to stay at the *cabano* [mental institution] until the exam period was over. . . . I kept insisting, because I loved school so much. . . . This went on for three years, until I was delivered a certificate of suspension of studies. Back then—it was 1975—Papa Mfumumu Longo [Diangienda] was staying in Brazzaville. So my parents and I made an appointment with him to show him my certificate, but he answered, "A person cannot follow two paths at a time. I am the one who decided things would happen in this way. You have already reached a certain level, so just stop where you are." (B. J., 44, female, pastor, GTKI Talangai)

Each time I turned in my paper at the end of a written exam, I got yelled at by the teacher. . . . I was amazed to see that on my paper there were lyrics, instead of the lessons I had learned! . . . I reached grade

eleven. Several times, I saw Papa Simon Kimbangu [in a vision] telling me that school wasn't for me. But I kept insisting. . . . Once, when I was in school, I was walking in a corridor when I saw a man storming toward me. He threw me down on the ground, saying, "When will you understand that school is not for you?" Yet, when falling down, I wasn't hurt. . . . Ever since, I haven't set foot in a school. (O. R., 26, male, GTKI Talangai)

I was kept at the temple of the Plateaux des quinze ans, and I had no time to go to school and review for my [math] exam. On the day of the exam, I went to school. We had an hour and a half, . . . and the good Lord took up one hour of that. I was sitting in the back, copying my songs. After an hour, I was aware again of what was going on in the room. I told myself, "Oh my God, I still have my math to do!" I automatically looked at the blackboard, but there seemed to be a second one right next to it, . . . where the math was solved. . . . It was the first term in eighth grade, and my average grade was A+. In the second term, I had an average grade of A+. Can you believe it, just these two terms gave me enough points to reach the next stage and enter ninth grade. But when the third term came, the good Lord—well, my sender [the supernatural being that sent the hymns]—didn't even let me go to school! I just kept working for him and dropped out. (B., 38, male, GTKI Plateaux des quinze ans)

The status of an inspired person seems to preclude the acquisition of knowledge in the conventional framework of school, even though Simon Kimbangu never preached against school. This metaphysical parameter seems to conceal spiritual secrets that the spiritual leaders are the only ones able to reveal. Even when the inspired people escape the calling and do get a higher education, their mission hounds them and often resurfaces in the form of a challenge that must be met. For instance, Pastor Iyefa, who earned two doctoral degrees—in divinity and in history of religions—at the Sorbonne in Paris and who is now the Kimbanguist chaplain in Kinshasa, discovered his calling as an inspired person during a spiritual retreat in France in 1989. He passed away in 2009, but in 1994 he had described his experience as a spiritual comeuppance:

As a result of the academic level I had attained, I had become Cartesian-minded with regard to Kimbanguism [his religion from

birth] and particularly vis-à-vis Mama Kaku [the pastor supervising the retreat]. . . . On the third day, while I lay on the ground, I saw two of my friends from Zaire who had already passed away. They were beckoning me to follow them. Because I did not remember immediately that these were dead people, I followed them. They showed me a picture of myself where I found myself really handsome. I couldn't even remember when that picture had been taken, but they pointed to it, saying, "See how handsome you were back in those days? Now you are too tainted. Go and confess your sins in order to recover your handsomeness." At some point, I recovered my spirits and remembered they were actually dead, and I got so scared that I went ahead and confessed my sins. When I came out of confession, I was on my way to joining my group of nine people when I heard a choir singing. Their voices were very beautiful, so I asked myself if it was my group that sang so well! But no—when I had joined them, the singing was still going on, but it wasn't my group. I asked them, "Can't you hear these beautiful voices singing?" But apparently I was the only one who could hear them. So [my group] told me to imitate what I heard. It was a song in Kikongo . . . [Listen to us, listen to us, listen to us, our God]. So they told me it was a hymn that I was receiving. Ever since that time, I have been receiving hymns. (Dr. Iyefa, public testimony delivered at the temple of the Plateaux des quinze ans, Brazzaville)

The last feature of inspired people pertains to moral codes. It seems that the church's moral precepts apply to them with particular insistence, whether they are married or single.

These are the same commandments, except that if an inspired person wants to commit a sin, God or Papa Mfumumu a Longo will appear to tell them, "What you want to do is not right" or to thwart what might have happened. That's the privilege of an inspired person. The purpose of all this is to safeguard God's word. . . . Conversely, a non-inspired person has no means of being warned by Papa. I, personally, often feel like playing soccer, but there's an impediment. Other young people dance, but there's no way for me to dance, because for me that's a ban which is, so to speak, written in red letters. (O. R., 26, male, GTKI Talangai)

While their status as inspired people compels the elect to abide by stringent moral precepts, it seems that noncompliance with certain rules of the game

leads to a breakup or a loss of the gift of receiving hymns. Among the inspired respondents, one had already lost his gift, and another had nearly done so:

One day I committed fornication, and I felt threads coming undone within me. Then, for a month, I did not receive any hymns. It cost me three days of sacrifice—fasting and praying—for it to come back. (A. N., 24, male, *Chorale des dirigeants*, Kinshasa)

In the span of two years, I received twenty-four hymns. At a certain point, I fell madly in love with a beautiful young woman, and it cost me a spiritual breakup. Since then, I haven't received any more hymns. But right now it seems to be coming back. (M., 48, male, *GTKI Talangai*)³⁹

Kimbanguist hymns shape the beliefs of church members, while conforming with the criteria of Christian faith. The songs are the backbone of the Kimbanguist faith, containing the church's entire theology and moral code; the hymns work as the production of knowledge that offers believers another worldview than the one provided by the scriptures. Considered by the faithful as a mystery, the hymns reflect inspiration rather than possession, even if there may exist some cases of possession among Kimbanguists.

Finally, the mystical phenomenon of hymn receiving in the Kimbanguist Church seems to depend on adherence to a moral code; believers who are determined to be, act, and reflect as Kimbanguists find their justification in a spirituality and a way of life that make them unique. Situated between the other two sources of Kimbanguist theology—the scriptures and *Diangienda's* sermons—inspired hymns remain a dynamic source of doctrine, evolving with time and continuously offering believers new perspectives, reasons to keep faith, and the means to strengthen it within the framework of the church's moral code.

This phenomenon of God-given inspired songs, which seems specific to the Kimbanguist faith, is worthy of comparison with the Shembe hymns in South Africa, analyzed by Gerhardus Cornelis Oosthuizen.⁴⁰ The hymns of the Nazareth Baptist Church were composed by the founder himself (Isaiah Shembe) and by his son and successor, Johannes Galilee Shembe, between 1910 and 1940. These hymns address oppression, the suffering of Blacks, and Isaiah Shembe's identity, and they include Zulu nationalistic elements and dance songs. But, unlike Kimbanguist hymns, Shembe

hymns seem to be devoid of any paranormal or mystical experiences, even if the composers sometimes mentioned dreams. Rather, they were written or composed by the founder and his son—and nobody else—a difference from the Kimbanguist case.

Other hymns that may be compared with Kimbanguist hymns are those of the Harrist Church. Analyzed in the work of James Krabill, these resulted from the prophet Harris's recommendation to transform *dógblóo* music and *avikam yeje* music, two genres traditionally composed and performed primarily by women. Thus, in the Harrist Church, hymns were first an activity for women, who were called *compositrices*; then, men gave the hymns a new style altogether. Even though some of the composers interviewed by Krabill sometimes received songs in dreams, "hymn composition for Dida Harrists has always contained a strong element of conscious reflection, of drawing on personal experience, on events from 'Holy History,' on the crises and circumstances of everyday life, and then discovering a way of putting it all into a form which could be shared in song by the church community as a whole."⁴¹ This type of conscious reflection would entirely discredit inspired hymns in the context of Kimbanguist theology.

The unique combination of metaphysical inspiration, biblical exegesis, and prophetic tradition in the Kimbanguist Church results in an ever-growing body of hymns. In this church, hymns operate as a "mode of expression of Blackness" par excellence, which helps believers to understand the identity and mission of Simon Kimbangu.⁴²

5

THE IDENTITY OF SIMON KIMBANGU IN THE CONTEMPORARY KIMBANGUIST FAITH

The most specific teaching about the Holy Spirit in the Gospels is provided in the words of farewell Jesus said to his disciples: “If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:15–17).

For many Christians, Jesus’s promise concerning the sending of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when his apostles began speaking in tongues. Effectively, the doctrine on the Holy Spirit is the theological cornerstone of the Kimbanguist faith. The Kimbanguists’ practice of the free interpretation of the Bible enables them to identify Simon Kimbangu as the accomplishment of the promise made by Jesus and recorded in John 14:15–17. For Kimbanguist believers, Kimbangu is none other than the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Several testimonies on his personal life have been put forward to buttress this belief and demonstrate that he is the Holy Spirit. For instance, at the age of five, he allegedly said to his father, “Before you were born, I am.” In 1910, “he transformed a rotten palm nut into a fresh one.” Another legend relates that one day, as Kimbangu walked with his foster parents to a village, he fell into a wide ditch. His foster mother rushed to fetch some help, but when the rescuers arrived, they were astonished to discover the boy Kimbangu out of the ditch, surrounded

by angels.¹ I will not try to parse out myth from truth in these stories about Kimbangu's childhood, but it is worth pointing out how they serve as an ideological bedrock for the doctrine of the incarnation of the Holy Spirit in the person of Simon Kimbangu.

The promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, designated in the Gospel according to John as "the Paraclete" (from the Greek *paraklêtos*, which means "defender" or "comforter"), triggered several interpretations that are similar to the Kimbanguists'. For Muslims, for example, "Jesus' words concerning a Spirit of truth who would help the believers meant that after Christ another prophet would come, in the person of Muhammad himself."² This is indeed the interpretation given to the words of Jesus as transcribed in the Qur'an: "O children of Israel! I am the Apostle of Allah sent to you confirming the Torah, which came before me, and giving glad tidings of an Apostle to come after me whose name shall be 'Ahmad'" (As-Saff 61:6).

The French press has shown interest in the rise of Black messianisms. On July 27, 1999, the conservative daily newspaper *Le Figaro* introduced Ben Ammi (aka Israel Carter), who claimed to be the incarnation of the Holy Spirit and ruled (until his death in December 2014) over a community of 1,600 followers hailing from the United States who settled in the Israeli colony of Dimona in the Negev Desert: "He claims to be a 'divine connector,' the present-day incarnation of a 'superior degree of consciousness.' Several books develop his theology—God is black, and so were Adam and Eve and the ancient Hebrews; the end of Western civilization is near, and everything which came after the Old Testament is null and void."³

Still, while aware of the existence of several religious leaders claiming to be the "Comforter" or an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, the Kimbanguists keep insisting on the specificity of Simon Kimbangu, based on his acts of power from April 1921, particularly the resurrections he accomplished. When asked for evidence that Kimbangu is the Holy Spirit (other than John 14:15–17), they typically name the case of Dina, the young woman mentioned above who had been dead for three days when she was brought back to life by Simon Kimbangu; and they emphasize that besides Jesus himself, who resurrected Lazarus, no one else in the history of humankind ever resurrected a person who had been dead for three days. There are scores of Kimbanguist hymns that testify to the identity of Kimbangu as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Here is one example (received in Lingala) sung by the GTKI choir:

Kimbangu was born
 Kimbangu grew up
 Kimbangu was raised
 Following God's true principles
 But he was a Spirit indeed
 He was clothed in a black skin, in order
 To liberate us in this world

This stanza shows how much the belief in Kimbangu as a spirit who became human is established beyond all doubt among Kimbanguist believers. His identity as the Holy Spirit in a Black body is highlighted, as is his mission as the liberator of African(a) peoples. Yet the three sources of Kimbanguist theology prove that this theology is not frozen nor seen as given once and for all, but varies in response to the intentions of the supernatural beings sending the hymns. Today, it is clear that Kimbanguists hold Simon Kimbangu to be the incarnation of the Holy Spirit, which makes him a key in their understanding of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Indeed, the Kimbanguist faith considers God to be on earth and no longer in heaven, as shown by the lyrics of the following inspired hymn, received in Lingala:

The first year, God came
 In the person of His son,

Tenor: The Lord Jesus;
 Heaven remained empty to the day
 When he was crucified on the Cross (bis)

Bass: He had promised he
 Would ask his father
 To send us a savior

In the year 1921
 In this world
 God came down
 In the person of the Holy Spirit
 And this was Papa Kimbangu in Africa
 Heaven remained empty
 On dying, he resurrected
 In the persons of the mvualas

Up to this day
Heaven has remained empty
For the Lord God is here in this world.

Since Kimbanguists identify Simon Kimbangu as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit, he reveals the meaning of the Holy Trinity through his three sons, particularly the charismatic figure of Diangienda, who represents the reincarnation of his father. Diangienda contributed to the building of this representation each time he repeated a popular anecdote about his father's comforting and miraculous appearances to him and his older brother Diangungana during times of need as children. He exclaimed, "We'd be so overjoyed to see him that we'd run up to him to hug and kiss him. My mother and my brother would be hugging him, but I was just hugging the air. I mean that Simon Kimbangu, while he could be embraced by my mother and brother, became impossible to embrace and immaterial to me. This was so hard to bear that I would start crying again. At that point he would tell me, 'You and I can't hug, because we are one.'"⁴

Kimbanguist lore also contends that in 1910, Kimbangu had announced that he would be reborn in 1918, which coincides with Diangienda's birth. Diangienda reinforced the belief in a second incarnation of the Holy Spirit in himself, explaining how the Comforter promised by Jesus could "abide with you forever" (John 14:16). This type of belief is akin to the ancestor figure as defined in many African traditional religions, who may very well be reborn in a new person while being honored at his or her grave. The difference here is that the father was reembodied in his son while the father was still alive.

It is likely that Marie-Louise Martin, who was still active in Kimbanguist spheres in the 1990s, witnessed the expression of this novel element. This is because Kimbanguist theology is expressed in hymns that are not only sung but commented upon, and they shape the beliefs and update the doctrines as they buttress them. Even if some reform-minded leaders express resistance to such beliefs, they are stifled and silenced by the overwhelming mass of believers, who often display their faith in a very vocal manner. My interviews of church members show that Diangienda himself often discussed the matter, sometimes in cryptic ways and sometimes in the form of life stories. Especially when expressing outrage, he would openly claim either that he was none other than Simon Kimbangu or that he was the only possible way. Black men and women, after passing away, would necessarily face him in the hereafter—as he had warned the inhabitants of

Kinshasa who had celebrated the premature news of his death and as he told members of the church:

Don't you defy me! For if I hit you and you come whining to complain about me to my father, you won't see my father, but you'll see Diangienda.⁵

Here you are, rejoicing because Diangienda is dead; but don't you ever forget that you and I will meet on our way—for there is but one way.⁶

These statements clearly show how Diangienda projected an image of himself as both mortal and immortal, which leads to the issue of the representations of the godliness of the other two sons of Simon Kimbangu within the frame of Kimbanguist theology. For the Kimbanguist community, Christ was reincarnated in the person of Dialungana. He remained the second spiritual leader of the church from 1992 until his death in 2001. Residing in Nkamba–New Jerusalem, Dialungana had received no formal education. Although the inspired hymns attributed to him come in many languages, he spoke only his mother tongue, Kikongo, and had the reputation of being a man of extremely few words. I had the opportunity to meet him several times. His silent demeanor only confirmed his reputation. He almost never gave an individual answer to the church members who came up to him on their knees, begging for healing or advice, but he uttered short prayers while sprinkling them with holy water (known as “Nkamba water” among the Kimbanguists). The believers craving advice or comforting words could only try to decipher his every move. For instance, people often said: “Papa did not answer me, but he looked at me, so I know I'll be fine,” “He smiled at me, which means he's pleased with me!” or “I spoke to him, so my problem is already solved.”

I personally witnessed an incident with Dialungana during my stay in Nkamba in 1994. A woman who was considered to be dead by those carrying her body was brought from her hometown to Nkamba. Dialungana made a short prayer, asked for the woman's name, and then took her hand while saying three times her name and the Kikongo word *telama*, which means “get up.” The woman opened her eyes, looked surprised at seeing the people around her, and got to her feet with her hand still in his. He took three steps forward with her and then let her hand go, telling her relatives and friends, “Don't touch her, let her go,” while the woman was walking. Approximately two hours later, I saw the woman spontaneously return to Dialungana, kneel before him, and talk with him for a few minutes. I was

not able to overhear their conversation or even learn anything about her illness, since discretion is a significant feature in this environment, where even photographers are not allowed.

Hence, the customary silence of this spiritual leader—whose sermons rarely lasted for more than five minutes, unlike his brothers, who typically preached for more than an hour each—was compensated by miraculous healing sessions and by believers' testimonies about dreams, visions, and inspired hymns through which he appeared or communicated. His secretary and attendant, Simon Kayobo, gave a personal testimony on Kimbanguist television. Diagnosed with severe appendicitis, Kayobo had been unable to have surgery in Kinshasa due to social unrest. Sent back to Nkamba by Diangienda, he thought he would die there, but one night he saw the three sons of Kimbangu (Diangienda had remained in Kinshasa and Kisolokele was in Brussels) dressed like doctors; they operated on him in his room. Then, he said, "I woke up, and it felt like a dream. . . . But what impressed me was that when I put my hand on that place [on his body], there was blood and a wound [at this point in the interview, he showed to the camera the surgery scar on his right side]. . . . The next day I thanked Papa for what they had done for me, and he answered, 'Whoever puts their trust in God shall not die in shame. Your hope has saved you.'"⁷ This testimony seems reliable because the man who gave it is well known to all church members. Being Dialungana's helper, he was more likely to have had a mystical experience with the leader considered by the community to be the reincarnation of Jesus Christ.

Although Dialungana never officially said that he was Christ who had returned to earth, he nonetheless expressed himself openly in hymns, where he revealed his identity. For instance, the following hymn was received in Lingala by a young Kimbanguist man on March 30, 2000:

Let them be puzzled!
The Lord Jesus, the King of all nations,
Is called Dialungana.

Solo: The truth has been revealed, it's an outburst of joy
The Lord Jesus, the King of the world,
Is called Dialungana

Chorus: You'll recognize him by his conduct
You'll recognize him by his godliness

You'll recognize him by his works
 The Savior, Lord Dialungana (bis)
 The Savior, the Savior, the Savior
 Of the entire world
 Joy is coming (bis)
 Children, go into the whole world
 And have no fear!
 Tell them this:
 "I have already returned:
 Whoever is looking for me,
 Let them ask, 'Where is Jerusalem [Nkamba]?' (bis)
 Joy is coming (4 times)
 It's an outburst of joy
 In the world of the Father.

This hymn was released through the choirs just two months before Dialungana proclaimed "Christmas, Christmas, Christmas!" (Noele, Noele, Noele) while celebrating his eighty-third birthday in Nkamba in 1999. In response, the Kimbanguist Church experienced an awakening of sorts. The church even changed the date of Christmas, which is now celebrated on May 25 (Dialungana's birthday), drawing the media's attention as well as the wrath of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Congo (see chapter 6).

The third member of the Trinity, God the Father, is represented by the eldest of Simon Kimbangu's sons, Kisolokele. Traditional Kimbanguists swear that they never saw him pray—which they claim is a sign that he had no one to pray to, being at the top of the Trinitarian hierarchy. According to a popular anecdote in Kimbanguist circles, an official once asked Kisolokele to say a prayer to close the service, but Diangienda immediately took the microphone from his brother's hands. He warned the church members that asking Kisolokele to pray amounted to asking him to "solve the problem"—that is, trigger the end of the world—for God the Father is the one to whom prayers are said. In the very few archived speeches Kisolokele gave to the Kimbanguists, he did not say explicitly that he is God the Father, but he implicitly allowed the church members to hold this belief. He revealed himself more often in inspired hymns, particularly those that were received in the wake of his death.

Speaking in the names of his two absent brothers during a New Year ceremony held in their honor in 1992, Diangienda took the opportunity to send the community a farewell message:

We are going to leave you someday, because, as I have just said, we are sojourners. One day Papa Kulutu will go, or Papa Mfumu a Longo, or Papa Mfumu a Mbanza [the order in which they are named here corresponds to the chronological order of their deaths, not of their births]. We will leave you because we were sojourners on earth. We have stayed a long time with you. You saw us, spoke to us, and because of your love for us, you fed us and clothed us and gave us everything we needed, you did all this for our sake. Today, on January 2nd, 1992, you came to wish us a Happy New Year. My brothers are not here, but the three of us are present because we three are but one person.⁸

In the Kimbanguist's mind, the one God, Simon Kimbangu, is trinitarian through his sons, who are the three persons of the Holy Trinity. The words he spoke have a unique significance in the Kimbanguist religious worldview and offer answers to the existential questions that both Kimbanguists and African(-descended) people grapple with on a daily basis. Because it provides a consistent discourse on Blackness, Kimbanguism has become a racially defined frame of reference or identification. While Diangienda did not explicitly say that God is Black, much of his preaching contained elements that are conducive to such a belief. In one sermon, he shared with a congregation the testimony of a White European woman about a dream she had asked him to decipher. The woman knew about Simon Kimbangu but despised all Blacks. One night, she saw her dead body being laid in a coffin, and her soul embarked on a quest for Jesus. She met a Black man who instructed her to choose among three paths. But every path she took invariably led her to either one or three Black men. Utterly frustrated, she finally begged the first Black man she had seen:

“Since I can't see Jesus Christ, show me Papa Simon Kimbangu.” The man laughed at her, saying, “How come you're asking this, even as you doubt Simon Kimbangu because he is black? . . . Come on and I'll show you Jesus.” They arrived there, but what happened next I won't talk about. This lady suffered and eventually begged for forgiveness. The man told her, “Don't worry, you shall not die right now, but go back to where you came from and spread the news.”⁹

Diangienda's account remained silent about the color of God but implied that the three persons of the Christian Trinity are Black. He suggested that

through a dream, the color of God was revealed to a prejudiced White person who doubted the godliness of a Black man, Simon Kimbangu.

Even though Kimbangu and his three sons have passed away, the belief in the incarnation of the Holy Spirit is still being transmitted from one generation to the next, currently through the identification of the present spiritual leader, Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, as the Holy Spirit. Yet, for any spiritual leader of the Kimbanguist Church to be identified with its founder, a number of signs must be perceived and recognized by the mass of Kimbanguist believers. That certainly was the case for Diangienda, which accounts for the unanimous reverence still shown to him.

Presently, Simon Kimbangu Kiangani has a greater measure of personal prestige (due to his name and date of birth) compared to the other twenty-five grandchildren of Simon Kimbangu. Born in 1951, he says he does not know the exact day of his birth, because he was born in Nkamba, a country town without a hospital or any record of births. It is true that during 1951, three grandchildren of Simon Kimbangu were born, and Simon Kimbangu Kiangani is today the eldest grandson alive. But although the exact date of his birth is unknown, most Kimbanguist believers claim that he was born on October 12, which was the day of Simon Kimbangu's death, and they conclude that the bad news of Kimbangu's death in Lubumbashi was compensated by the good news of his grandson's birth in Nkamba. By



Figure 5. “3 = 1.” Simon Kimbangu’s image hovers over those of Diangienda Kuntima (*left*) and Simon Kimbangu Kiangani.



Figure 6. Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, the present spiritual leader.

facilitating the identification process, this unverified assertion buttresses the belief that this particular grandchild is Simon Kimbangu's reincarnation. Hence Simon Kimbangu Kiangani is now recognizable as a distinct voice in the more recent inspired hymns, in which he self-identifies as the returned Simon Kimbangu:

I, Kimbangu, am the one and only,
 With one temple
 One mausoleum
 One spring of holy water!
 I have a problem
 I want to tell you about:
 From the beginning,
 There are not two Kingdoms of God;
 The Kingdom of God is one,
 Any second kingdom
 Has to belong to Satan.

Chorus: From the beginning,
 I have been Kimbangu
 I begat Kisolokele

I begat Dialungana
I am Diangienda;

I created Heaven and the whole world,
Now that I have passed away,
I have come back among you
In the body of Kimbangu,
The son of Kiangani
Who is also the father of Kiangani.
Why are you criticizing? (bis)
This is me, Kimbangu!
I have already returned among you,
So listen to me.

Chorus: Why are you criticizing?

Tenor: I am Kimbangu
I have already returned among you,
So listen to me, Kimbangu.

This hymn, received in Lingala, mentions criticism because Simon Kimbangu Kiangani is in conflict with the rest of his family, which has thrown the church into an unprecedented crisis.

In the 1980s, Marie-Louise Martin had the foresight to raise the issue of the succession of Kimbangu's sons at a time when it was not an urgent matter. She had perceived the danger of a personality and dynastic cult with simple believers.¹⁰ The succession problem began with the passing away of Kisolokele and Diangienda in 1992, and intensified following the death of Dialungana in 2001. In October 2002, Kimbanguist clergy members from all nations hosting a Kimbanguist community were summoned by the spiritual leader, Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, to an extraordinary general assembly in Nkamba, whose purpose was "the restoration of the Kimbanguist fundamental order, namely, strict abiding by texts such as statutes, principles and methods, unalienable fundamental principles, the commandments, the essence of Kimbanguist theology, and measures of application."¹¹ After two weeks of debates, sixty-three resolutions were passed that redefined the leadership of the church.¹² Simon Kimbangu Kiangani was confirmed as the spiritual leader, while the rest of the grandchildren were downgraded to advisers, instead of deputy spiritual



Figure 7. The sons of Simon Kimbangu (*left to right*): Dialungana, Kisolokele, and Diangienda.

leaders—the title they had chosen for themselves. From this moment, the storm that had been silently brewing since shortly before Dialungana's death broke out in the open for both church members and outsiders to see. Deeply mortified by these measures, all of Kimbangu's grandchildren—except Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, his siblings, and Diangienda's eldest daughter, Marie Muilu Diangienda—came together to protest the resolutions. They accused Kiangani of acting in violation of their fathers' will, which was that all decisions be made by the assembly of all of Kimbangu's grandchildren.

In such a critical context, it is worth analyzing the evolution of the tenets of Kimbanguist ideology. Regarding Kimbanguist beliefs about the continuity of Simon Kimbangu's legacy, a major change has occurred since the implementation of the Nkamba resolutions. Simon Kimbangu Kiangani has placed himself on a higher spiritual ground, putting himself on an equal footing with the founder and his three sons. Yet the belief that he embodies the founder's spirit is countered by a parallel ideology within the church: family consensus. His twenty cousins harp on the claim that all of Simon Kimbangu's grandchildren are one, in an effort to stop the power from crystallizing around Simon Kimbangu Kiangani. But the latter's followers overtly consider him to be the reincarnation of his grandfather and

of his uncle Diangienda. This further buttresses their belief in an endless process of incarnation of the Holy Spirit, stemming from their interpretation of John 14:16. From a Kimbanguist perspective, forever abiding with the faithful means that the Holy Spirit remains on earth by being embodied in a succession of interchangeable physical envelopes—but always within the lineage of Simon Kimbangu, so as to stay among Kimbanguists, who identify with the audience Jesus was addressing.

However, one of Diangienda's sons, Armand Wabasolele Diangienda, is granted a particular status by other believers. He is allegedly the real successor chosen by Diangienda, as indicated by the meaning of his middle name; in Kikongo, Wabasolele means “the chosen one.” In the current disunity plaguing the Kimbanguist Church, the inspired hymns addressing this question are more cryptic than ever, apparently letting believers choose while reminding them of the rules:

Meditate about these times:
 Satan is testing [the believers].
 Keep your faith,
 To win this battle.
 Child, listen to the two voices,
 Pray and meditate about the voice of salvation,

Tenor: Leave the darkness behind and meditate, believer!
 Kimbangu, the spirit of truth,
 Has called you.

While this inspired hymn (received in Lingala) sketchily delineates the right behavior, the church is tightening its enforcement of the Nkamba resolutions: the members objecting to them are disciplined, or even excommunicated.

The shockwave that Diangienda had so often announced is under way and having a deep impact on the church members, who all make individual choices. A great number of Kimbanguists do not go to church anymore. Others have left the church to join new, typically Pentecostal, churches, while still others persevere but take sides in the conflict—either they remain within the official church led by Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, or they are part of the parallel church led by other members of the founder's lineage.

This succession crisis in the Kimbanguist Church offers striking parallels with the split in the Nazareth Baptist Church founded by Isaiah Shembe in South Africa. When he died in 1935, his son Johannes Galilee succeeded him. He kept the church united under his leadership, since he was considered to be the continuation of his father: "The old Shembe had always declared that although the old flesh might die one day, the essence of Shembe remains in the new flesh."¹³ But when Johannes Galilee died in 1975, the church split between his brother Amos and his son Londa. To this day, succession conflicts are still rife in the Shembe church.¹⁴ The pattern is the same as in the Kimbanguist Church, where successors come solely from the founder's descendants, but there is a lack of unanimity.

Among Kimbanguist Church members, the succession crisis has caused such discouragement that many are now hoping for a miracle to salvage the church and are expecting a sign from the three Papas. Indeed, the latter seem exasperated with the situation of the church, if the inspired hymns are accurately conveying their reactions from the other world. In the following hymn received in Lingala, one of Kimbangu's three sons indignantly calls the church members back into the pews:

Believers, come back into your Father's house,
 Seats have been left vacant.
 We [the three Papas] departed first,
 And some already concluded
 That we are gone.
 Where is joy, this joy? (bis)

Chorus: God never lies, my children!
 Return quickly!

This is a shame, my children,
 It would be terrible in that day,
 It is a shame, a shame, such a shame!
 What joy? Whom shall I rejoice with?
 Don't follow the crowd, my children!
 Believer, look only to what is yours.

One of the three spiritual leaders is indicting the behavior of the church members since their passing away. He stresses that some no longer believe

in the Papas' eschatological promises and have strayed away, and he calls them back into the "Father's house," that is, the church.

The conflict the church is now going through is not just about a handful of ambitious members of the Kimbanguist clergy; above all, it is about the descendants of Simon Kimbangu, who have vested interests. Indeed, the stability of the church is based on traditions of which they are the only gatekeepers. Their unity is the prerequisite for the church's welfare. To make matters even worse, the inner crisis is aggravated by an outer crisis, since the Kimbanguist Church is being rejected by its sister churches in the World Council of Churches.

In an earlier chapter I discussed how Africans had been given an ambiguous place within Christendom, being perceived as a cursed race whose only hope for redemption lay in submission to a racialized social order designed by the imperial powers. African-initiated religions such as Harism or Kimbanguism offered new understandings of Christian doctrines and sacred scriptures. What impelled these particular churches to join the World Council of Churches (WCC)?

In gathering together Christian churches, ecumenism recognizes only two criteria: faith in Jesus as God and savior on the grounds of the scriptures, and belief in the Holy Trinity. The WCC was born from the will of Protestant churches to gather Christian churches from many different countries, pursue high-quality theological research, and take positions on major social and international issues. For instance, the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism was set up in 1969 to support Christian and non-Christian movements fighting for "equality among races and the liberation of oppressed peoples." It is certainly not by accident that the Kimbanguist Church joined the WCC the same year.

Before joining, the Kimbanguist Church was assessed by experts like the Swiss theologian Marie-Louise Martin, who had a rich experience of combating apartheid in South Africa. The WCC had taken a position against the apartheid policy of South Africa by granting financial help every year to organizations combating racism. In so doing, the WCC was trying to avoid losing South African Blacks. But the Kimbanguist Church's application for membership in the WCC was perceived as a less-than-candid way to ask for financial help. Diangienda, the spiritual leader, answered these suspicions by revealing the tension prevailing during discussions at the time in Geneva and by stressing that the Kimbanguist Church was one of very few churches with a nonmissionary origin that had been able to grow without any outside financial backing.¹⁵

The Kimbanguist Church's application for membership received the support of a number of prominent figures. Rev. Jacques Maury, the former president of the Protestant Federation of France, explained in a private interview that William Hank Crane, the American secretary of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC for the African continent, had been the person who ushered the Kimbanguist Church into the WCC.¹⁶ I retrieved the report written by Crane on his visit to the Kimbanguist Church in Zaire, which included a unique testimony on his personal experience of Kimbanguist spirituality:

One last, unforgettable experience took place just before we left. In a last-minute gesture I do not think he had planned to make until he was certain of my reaction, Mr. Diangienda opened the mausoleum where his father is buried [his body has remained intact], and we went in for a couple of minutes to pray in silence. It was a shock for both of us. Until then, I had perfectly contained my emotions, but all of a sudden my conscience was overwhelmed by the immense cohort of prophets and martyrs who had to "leave the camp" to meet with Jesus Christ and proclaim the power of his Spirit at work in the world. The figures I could recognize in this procession were Jan Hus, Martin Luther, John Knox, Roger Williams, Michel Servet, the Wesley brothers—and glowing in the first row, the images of Martin Luther King and his aides. The figure of Simon Kimbangu, in his prison uniform as in the only known picture of him, was part of this group, so that I could not help but blurt out an almost incoherent prayer: "Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do!" It is impossible to grasp the power of this man—dead though he may be—over his followers, unless he is considered to be one of those who had to "leave the camp" to assert at the same time a faith integrating all the elements of human life in a comprehensive vision of Jesus Christ and his present work in the world—and their freedom as normal human beings. If the traditional churches of Africa are ready to make this step, they will be headed toward a liberation from their own history, [they will] found their own identities, and create a theology that will respond to the actual needs of African Christians.¹⁷

This report shows striking similarities with the core of Kimbanguist spirituality, which is filled with dreams, visions, inspired hymns, miracles, and personal testifying. It is significant that this same mystique should have

played a part in facilitating an attitude of acceptance toward the Kimbanguist Church among the decision makers of the WCC. Rev. Crane also raised the question of the creation of a theology geared to the actual needs of African Christians, because theological issues were also on the list of priorities for the WCC. Indeed, in their home countries, the members of various churches still gather once a year to pray and reflect on the evolution of their societies. Yet, while these Christians are united in ecumenism thanks to their faith in Jesus Christ, the Kimbanguists differ from them in terms of both methods and forms of action. It is worth trying to understand why the Kimbanguist Church sought membership in the WCC even though the expression of its faith is so distinct from that of the other member churches.

Diangienda claimed that by applying to the WCC, the Kimbanguist Church was trying to broaden the circle of its friends and to contribute to the unity of Christians across denominational lines. He stressed that the Kimbanguist Church could have withdrawn its application to the WCC if it were uncomfortable with others' suspicion. The WCC admitted the Kimbanguists into its fold even though they were considered to be fake Christians by some member churches. But, Diangienda concluded, this did not matter, for "we [Kimbanguists] are accountable to Jesus Christ alone."¹⁸ This is the point most noteworthy here. It was precisely this state of mind that led to tension with the WCC thirty years later.

In 2000, relations between the Kimbanguist Church and the other member churches of the WCC began souring as a consequence of Kimbanguist theology. The starting point was the decision to change the date of Christmas to May 25, which, as already mentioned, is the birthday of Dialungana, the church's spiritual leader at the time. Yet it was not Dialungana himself who made this decision, but the mass of believers who, reacting to inspired hymns with a very demonstrative kind of faith, pushed for the change. Although Dialungana never officially claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus, nor did he order the church to change the day it celebrated Christmas, he did not stop the movement either. A hymn in Kikongo attributed to him congratulated his followers instead:

I am filled with joy, oh children,
For everything you did!
I thank you
I am delighted that you
Chose the day
Of Jesus' birth (in this world)!

The news has spread
 All over the world.
 Children, what joy!
 You say that only Whites
 Are intelligent (in this world);
 But you too have intelligence!
 You are only lacking the spirit of research.
 The worthless (Black) race
 Was also clothed by God.
 How do you know
 That the day when Jesus came
 In this world is May 25?
 My children,
 Discard silly thoughts,
 And rejoice my children!
 I approve what you did:
 Jesus was born
 In the worthless race!

Kimbanguists who believe in Jesus Christ as their God and savior and in the Holy Trinity still perceive themselves as being on the same wavelength as the other Christians who belong to member churches of the WCC. But they read the scriptures on a different basis and interpret the Second Coming of Christ as having already happened through Dialungana, and they see the Holy Trinity in the persons of Kimbangu's three sons.

Of course, this interpretation of the Holy Trinity triggered negative reactions from the Ecumenical Council of Churches of Congo-Brazzaville, which excluded the Kimbanguist Church in December 2000. Its president, Rev. Albert Pougui Sambou, explained, "The statements of the Kimbanguist Church are not derived from the Holy Scriptures, where they are nowhere to be found or introduced. The Kimbanguist Church is engaged in the process of developing, teaching and proclaiming heresy. From the moment when it became heretical, it excluded itself from the Ecumenical Council of Christian Churches of Congo."¹⁹

In March 2002, the Church of Christ of the DRC published an open letter to announce its break with the Kimbanguist Church. In July 2004, the cardinals and bishops of the DRC publicly stated their position in a declaration of the National Episcopal Conference on the relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Kimbanguist Church:



Figure 8. The three sons of Simon Kimbangu are represented (*left to right*) molding Adam out of clay (Kisolokele), holding a chalice with the blood of Christ (Dialungana), and preparing to breathe life into the first man's body (Diangienda). This painting is the work of Muze, whose choir, the GTKI Brazzaville choir, presented it posthumously to Dialungana in 1994.

Considerations:

I. We, Cardinal, Archbishops and Bishops of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo, gathered into a plenary assembly in Kinshasa from June 28 to July 3, 2004:

- conscious of our role as Pastors of the people of God in the DRC;
- anxious to overcome divisions and cultivate ecumenical dialog[ue] in a spirit of truth with the other Churches and ecclesial Communities, and promote by all means unity among all Christians, in conformity with the Catholic principles of ecumenism which are founded on faith, hope and charity, to build the people of the New Covenant, which is the Church;

- respectful of the dignity of human personhood and of the freedom enjoyed by any man to search for truth and embrace it according to his own beliefs or convictions and his desire to relate to God;

—concerned with the recent evolution of the doctrinal situation within the Kimbanguist Community:

—have resolved, in the aim of enlightening our Catholic brethren, to issue a public statement on the nature of the relations we should have with the Kimbanguists.

Observations:

2. The official title of the Kimbanguist Community is “Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by His Special Envoy, Prophet Simon Kimbangu.” From its birth, this community has been recognized as a dissident daughter of the Protestant Church. As such, it benefited from the recommendation of the Church of Christ in Congo when applying for membership in the All Africa Conference of Churches within the World Council of Churches (WCC).

3. While, at first, the spirit and *modus operandi* of this Community of faith were in conformity with the universally recognized Christian principles based on the recognition of Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures, and on the faith in only one God in Three Persons, this is no longer the case today, as the recent evolution of the Kimbanguist doctrine has led to serious aberrations and drifts away from the Christian doctrine.

4. Indeed, today a number of statements evidence a clear identification of the three sons of Prophet Simon Kimbangu, namely, Kisolokele, Dialungana and Diangienda, with the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. Now the latter is the truth in which the faith of all Christians is rooted; it is the fundamental teaching in the “hierarchy of the truths about faith.” This mystery of faith may in no way be understood in human dimensions.

5. Such statements, which demonstrate idol worship and a divinization of men, prove that the Kimbanguist Community is no longer a Christian church. In divinizing the three children of Prophet Simon Kimbangu, it has renounced the Holy Trinity. Kimbanguism is from then on a non-Christian religion, and must be treated as such.

Conclusion:

6. Consequently, the relations of the Catholic Church with Kimbanguism must be the same as with the other non-Christian religions. This entails the following:

—Kimbanguist baptism is invalid for the Catholic Christians, since it is not given in the name of the Holy Trinity (see [Matthew] 28:19).

—Catholic Christians may no longer practice spiritual ecumenism (ecumenical prayers) with the Kimbanguists.

Resolved in Kinshasa, July 3, 2004²⁰

It is important to note that this solemn procedure is exceptional in the relations between mother churches and African-initiated churches. Indeed, it seems that the WCC had never recorded any previous case of appropriation of the Bible with such far-reaching consequences.

This declaration caused a variety of reactions from Kimbanguists. On the one hand, the reform-minded class, particularly the theologians of the church, tended to understand the feeling of indignation expressed in the statement. For example, a Kimbanguist theologian interviewed by the Swiss scholar Jean-François Mayer argued that the Kimbanguists had excluded themselves by not worshiping the same Christ as the other Christians, thus voiding ecumenical services of all meaning.²¹ On the other hand, most Kimbanguist believers remained completely indifferent to the crisis—which is unsurprising, given that their faith rests largely on oral tradition and beliefs.

However, even if Simon Kimbangu is identified by Kimbanguists as the Holy Spirit, this belief appears nowhere in the written texts of official Kimbanguism—neither in its catechism, published in 1963, nor in its declaration of membership in the WCC, nor in the Kimbanguist book of reference *L'histoire du Kimbanguisme*, written by Diangienda in 1984.²² The latter work was reviewed by the Africanist and Protestant missionary to Gabon and Cameroon Rev. Jean Keller in a letter he sent to Rev. Olivier Dubuis. This letter emphasized the role and authority of the Bible and the clarity and importance of the Holy Spirit in Kimbanguist doctrine, negating that the official doctrine held Simon Kimbangu to be the third person in the Trinity.²³

The specific form of control exerted by the WCC over the Kimbanguist Church seems to have been complicated by the way Kimbanguist believers combine oral and written traditions. Indeed, although the official texts presenting the Kimbanguist Church to the WCC were unanimous about the identity of Simon Kimbangu as a saint or as Jesus's envoy,²⁴ the Kimbanguist catechism reads: "Question: What does Simon Kimbangu represent for us Kimbanguists? Answer: Simon Kimbangu is the witness of Jesus Christ with whom he is our support. Thanks to him we know that Jesus Christ by his death and resurrection has saved mankind without distinction of races."²⁵

The issue now is to understand how Simon Kimbangu is perceived today by Kimbanguists. The status of the spiritual leader of the Kimbanguist

Church is an essential point that distinguishes the EJCSK from other churches, particularly within the WCC. Indeed, the resolutions of 2002 emphasized that the spiritual leader can only be a descendant of Kimbangu; this entails that he is an incarnation of God in the eyes of most believers. This aspect appears explicitly in the following stanza from a hymn sung in Lingala:

God's messenger has come
 To show men God's love for the race which broke the Law.
 Keep the Law, do exactly as you are told, Black person, wake up!
 Cultivate love, do exactly as you are told, Black person, wake up!
 Keep working, do exactly as you are told, Black person, wake up!
 The church of the Envoy comes from Heaven!
 The revelation, listen to the revelation!
 Worldly people don't know it.
 The revelation, listen to the revelation!
 He Himself is the Head
 And the members are angels
 The revelation, listen to the revelation!

Here, Kimbanguists perceive themselves as an assembly of angels on earth, with the incarnation of God as their head. This self-image of the church necessarily has implications in its relations to other Christian churches. Given this belief among most Kimbanguists, what is the official position of the church on Simon Kimbangu?

The spiritual role of Simon Kimbangu is revealing of what Asch called "the two faces of Kimbanguism." Distinguishing "official Kimbanguism" from "the Kimbanguism of Kimbanguists," she highlighted "the actual gap between the Christ-centered orientations of the pro-reform leading circles, on the one hand, and the Kimbangu-centered traditions of the overwhelming majority of members of the church, on the other hand." She explained that the church's joining the WCC had led it to distance itself from its traditional tenets and build a double discourse to bridge these contradictory trends.²⁶

Asch's observation, made in 1983, is not at odds with the present situation of Kimbanguism; the only difference is that the transformation process has tilted the balance in favor of the single creed held by most believers, which has stifled the theologians' Christ-centered discourse. Kimbangu's role, when he is identified as the Holy Spirit, does not contradict but rather supplements his role as the aide of Africans with Christ.

Yet the latter aspect is only valid within the understanding of Blackness offered by the Kimbanguist Church, a point I develop below. The belief in Kimbangu as the Holy Spirit helps the believers grasp part of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, which is allegedly reenacted within the founder's family.

Marie-Louise Martin was one of the scholars who observed the Kimbanguist Church and commented on its specificities. She wrote her doctoral thesis on the biblical concept of messianism compared to messianism in South Africa and taught at the National University of Lesotho in Roma; she was then driven out of South Africa for criticizing apartheid. In 1968, she put herself in the service of the Kimbanguist Church in Congo-Kinshasa, where she created the Kimbanguist divinity school and became the first dean, with the sole intention of training ministers. Among the works she has published on this church, her most important book is *Kimbangu: An African Prophet and His Church*, first published in German in 1971. Her resolve to train ministers bore fruit; since the creation of the divinity school, the Kimbanguist Church has boasted African ministers who are also theologians.²⁷

Consequently, inside the Kimbanguist Church there are two categories of pastors. The first consists of people from the community, who have distinguished themselves by their calling and their regular participation in church activities. They are appointed (or nominated for an appointment) by the spiritual leader. The second category includes theologians educated at the Kimbanguist divinity school, who are trained by Congolese as well as Western elites. The areas of research chosen by these students are often focused on African reality and cultures and on the Kimbanguist faith. Having dedicated their lives to their calling, they are completely dependent on the church for financial support.

The issue of the training of clergy has often been raised by Martin.²⁸ But what authority can pastors—well trained though they may be—have over a mass of church members devoted to the worship of Kimbangu and his descendants? The leaders and representatives of the official, reform-oriented Kimbanguism are held hostage by this base, which embodies traditional Kimbanguism and is deeply rooted in oral tradition. The founding fathers of the Kimbanguist Church deftly preserved both facets of their church without jeopardizing its relations with the WCC. But when they had all passed away, traditional Kimbanguism entirely prevailed over official Kimbanguism, until the WCC became aware of the dissonance. From this perspective, the tensions with the WCC are understandable.²⁹

Kimbanguists have been often reproached with resorting to doublespeak and misleading the WCC, but the reality is probably quite different. When



Figure 9. Marie-Louise Martin (*woman on right*) is greeted by Elizabeth Mvete (*left*), the wife of Diangienda, on her arrival in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the late 1960s.

analyzing the two aspects and the real position of the church, it seems more relevant, from a sociological standpoint, to wonder what leads the Kimbanguists to desire and believe that the sons of Kimbangu are the three persons of the Holy Trinity. The answer to this question depends on the sources of the Kimbanguist faith, particularly the hymns, since these shape the beliefs of the church members, keep their faith alive, and maintain them in the wait-and-see attitude they are known for today. For instance, when the split took place over the Trinitarian doctrine, a hymn in Lingala offered the following commentary:

Many, many people
 Are beginning to wonder
 If Kisolokele really is God,
 If Dialungana really is Lord Jesus,
 If Diangienda really is the Holy Spirit.

Tenor: So many questions!

Chorus: I have nothing to say.
Whoever wants to follow us,
Let him not look back!

Tenor: It's a pity, such a pity!

You haven't known us;
Because of your doubts and lack
Of faith, you shall weep.
The name of Jesus is sweet
In every mouth,
But ask them if they know

The Lord Jesus for real!
Ask them if they
Have grasped the meaning of the Bible
Whoever wants to follow us,
Let him do so till the end (listen)
If someone wants to leave the church,
We are not forcing anyone to stay (listen)
Let everyone choose their path!
The end [of time] shall solve this problem

Soprano: On that day

Tenor: The real God shall be revealed.

Bass: It's a pity, such a pity,
Such a pity for the slanderers!

This hymn, sung by the GTKI choir, expresses the reaction of one of the late sons of Simon Kimbangu to the present challenge of the Kimbanguist Trinitarian dogma. It invites believers to adjust their behaviors to their conscience and faith: if they want to follow the leaders, they must persevere, and if they prefer leaving the church, they are free to do so. Since the Trinitarian doctrine is being rejected not just by the Kimbanguists but also by other Christians, the hymn challenges the faith of these Christians,

pointing out their unbelief and their lack of understanding of the real identity of Jesus and the actual meaning of the Bible.

When Kimbanguists are asked why they believe that Kimbangu is the Holy Spirit and his sons are the three persons of the Holy Trinity, in addition to the testimonies about miracles and the rereading of biblical passages, the answer is almost always, "because it is said in our hymns, which are not works of art, but inspiration from above." Indeed, analyzing the songs allows one to grasp the Kimbanguist identity, since core beliefs, such as faith in Simon Kimbangu and his three sons, are rooted in them, as are the views that Kimbanguists have of themselves and their church. Inspired hymns must never be underestimated, for they entirely inform the spiritual and mystical worldview of this church. Unless they are analyzed and understood by expert theologians, tension with the WCC will persist. Meanwhile, the rejection or exclusion of the Kimbanguist Church from the WCC has left Kimbanguists' traditional beliefs unchanged so far.

Here again, it is useful to compare the case of the Kimbanguist Church with that of the Harrist Church, which joined the WCC in 2000. It is surprising that one of the oldest African-initiated churches was so late in joining the organization.

In the eyes of Harrist believers, their prophet was the African equivalent of Jesus.³⁰ This formulation, conflating the historical savior figure with the founder of a religion of redemption for a specific people, paved the way to a possible deification of William Wadé Harris. To assess the evolution of this perception among present-day Harrist believers, I did fieldwork among leaders of the Harrist Church in the greater Paris area. One of the apostles in charge of the community quickly answered before anyone else could speak: "It is out of the question to deify him."³¹ This attitude implicitly pointed to an unspoken form of competition between the missions and identities of Harris and Jesus. It seems clear that the place given to Jesus within the Harrist movement is blurred, even though Jesus was identified by Harris as the universal savior worshiped by Christians around the world. The American anthropologist Sheila Walker acknowledged these questions and concluded that the still-ongoing evolution of Harrist doctrines may need to be interpreted by an African theologian.³²

Another comparison may be made with the Shembe church, the Church of the Nazarites. Bengt Sundkler's research, building on his analyses of Isaiah Shembe's hymns and interviews with Johannes Galilee Shembe and other members of this church, showed that Isaiah Shembe has several identities in the eyes of his followers: on the one hand, he is identified as a

Moses for the Zulu people, and, on the other hand, he is called the Christ of Zulu, a co-creator with God and a mediator in heaven.³³ In Oosthuizen's analyses of the hymns of this church, Isaiah Shembe appears as the mediator and the messiah, but also as the manifestation of God and the personification of supreme power.³⁴ The parallel with Kimbanguist dogma is obvious enough, especially since these aspects of the Nazarite faith are not explicitly acknowledged outside of the community, as in the Kimbanguist case. Sundkler noted that Nazarites are sometimes careful not to call Isaiah Shembe "God" out of awareness of other Christians' reactions to their beliefs. In such cases, he is only designated as a prophet in front of outsiders, while worshiped as God within the church.³⁵

Apparently, the Church of the Nazarites never applied to the WCC; otherwise it would have triggered a similar institutional reaction to that which met the evolution of Kimbanguist belief. Indeed, as Magnus Echter noted about researchers' assessment of the Shembe church's theology, "the treatment of the Nazareth Baptist Church within the academic discourse has centered on the theological evaluation of the status of Isaiah Shembe. Early theologians emphasized his messianic character and excluded the church from Christianity."³⁶ This alone would explain the absence of any move from the Shembe church leaders toward recognition by the WCC.

It thus appears that the tension caused by the Kimbanguist Church was unprecedented in the history of the WCC. Indeed, the only other conflicts occurred with churches that chose to withdraw over diverging viewpoints on apartheid or in reaction to the financial help sent to organizations combating racism.³⁷ This is because the WCC had until then been accustomed to commonly accepted doctrines and religious discourses, whereas the Kimbanguists, by defining their faith along other religious norms than those universally recognized, have drawn a line between themselves and all other Christians. As a result, there is still no answer to the recurrent question of the Kimbanguist Church's identity: Christian or non-Christian? This issue, which constantly resurfaces in the analyses of scholars studying modern Kimbanguism, is vexing to observers because Kimbanguism's recognition as a Christian church allowed for the emergence of independent Kimbanguist movements not under the church's control.³⁸

"What Identity for the Kimbanguist Church?" The Swiss scholar Jean-François Mayer gave this title to his interview of the Kimbanguist theologian Nduku-Fessau Badze. According to Badze, the chair of the Kimbanguist divinity school, Léon Nguapitshi Kayongo (who succeeded Marie-Louise Martin), had been required to give an analysis of the crisis between

the Kimbanguist Church and the WCC. He was suspended for declaring, “From the moment the Church insists on asserting that the sons of Simon Kimbangu are God the Father and the Holy Spirit, we [Kimbanguists] must admit that we are not Christians anymore.” The theologian concluded as follows: “Within the Kimbanguist Church, the crisis is here; unfortunately, the intellectual elite, and theologians in particular, are not doing their duty of calling out the hierarchy of the Church, for fear of being punished or excluded.”³⁹ Given this, a number of points still remain unclear. Who excludes and punishes whom in the church? Do Kimbanguist theologians believe that Kimbangu is the Holy Spirit or not? Do they believe in the Kimbanguist Trinity or not?

Most Kimbanguist theologians, who have many opportunities to preach to crowds, regularly express their faith in the Kimbanguist Trinitarian dogma by means of slogans or sermons, thus mirroring the Kimbanguist psyche and its evolution in an atmosphere of religious excitement. It is important to stress that pastors from the Kimbanguist divinity school are less well perceived by the base, because of the White influence assumed in their background. For the educated Kimbanguists, Martin was sent by the WCC to train anti-Kimbanguist pastors, because some theologians from the Kimbanguist divinity school did not believe, or had difficulty believing, that Simon Kimbangu was the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. As for the uneducated church members, they did not even know of her.

A 2005 report of the EJCSK’s Commission théologique kimbanguiste (COTHEKI), signed by Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, clarified the church’s Trinitarian doctrine, asserting that it had remained unchanged since the publication of *The Essence of Kimbanguist Theology* in May 1963 and that of the 1969 document sent to the WCC. The report acknowledged that “the popular spirituality which seems to prevail at present” needed to evolve, but admitted that the education of “the people of God” would be a gradual one, “for fear of destroying the faith of the believers.” It unambiguously asserted, “The three sons of Kimbangu have not replaced the classical Holy Trinity, nor has Simon Kimbangu replaced Christ.”⁴⁰ COTHEKI’s stance was embraced by a well-known member of the Kimbanguist clergy, Lucien Luntadila, the president of the national board of the EJCSK in the DRC, who was dismissed from this position as a result.⁴¹

On one occasion, Diangienda directly addressed this issue in an effort to educate the masses: “Whatever the enemy does, we [Kimbanguists] shall prevail no matter what, for we stand behind God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. . . . These three beings are not like us—Diangienda,

Kisolokele, or Kiangani [Dialungana]—for their nature is entirely different.”⁴² The reformists’ attitude echoes Rev. Keller’s comments on the EJCSK’s official position as expressed in Diangienda’s book. Keller emphasized the church’s need to be part of world Christianity and surmised that if the church is adequately helped to train its pastors, “it will correct itself thanks to contacts with the outer world, which it evidently lacks.”⁴³

Can theologians equipped with this form of training be effective in the face of the Kimbangucentrism shown by the popular base? The theologians’ real position remains ambiguous and difficult to identify. Indeed, when some theologians have the chance to express their views outside of the context of the Kimbanguist community, they display more than reluctance as regards the Trinitarian dogma. Yet in 2008, Pastor Sidia Kisonga, the executive secretary of the Kimbanguist Church in France, made a statement in front of the congregation of Saint-Ouen (greater Paris area) explaining that the spiritual leader had reasserted that Simon Kimbangu was the Holy Spirit. This proves the extent of the split between the two forms of Kimbanguism—that of the elites and theologians, which is trying to remain within universally recognized theological norms, and popular Kimbanguism, which is the expression of the oral tradition and, especially, the inspired hymns. The inspired hymns continue to shape the Kimbanguists’ relations with sister churches, as shown by the hymn below, sung in Lingala and entitled “Bilanda Landa” (Herd Instinct):

The world feels the need
 To pray the Lord Jesus:
 Follow Kimbangu the Comforter
 And you will see Jesus, Christians!
 At the time of Jews, Jesus had said,
 “Whoever wants to see my Father
 Has to go through me first.”
 In this fourth generation,
 Kimbangu is saying,
 “Whoever wants to see the Lord Jesus,
 Let him follow Simon Kimbangu.”
 But leave the herd instinct behind,

Bass: Children, leave the herd instinct behind,
 Leave the herd instinct behind.

Chorus: Follow Kimbangu, follow him,
 And you will see Jesus.
 If a man has his own magic
 And performs miracles,
 He creates his own church
 And you say he's guided by Jesus.
 If a man has his own witchcraft
 And performs miracles,
 He creates his own church
 And you say he's guided by Jesus.
 If a man has his own money
 He buys himself a radio station,
 He creates his own church
 And you say he's guided by Jesus.

Bass: Even if he's also filled with pride,

Chorus: You say he's guided by Jesus.

Bass: Even if he's also an adulterer,

Chorus: You say he's guided by Jesus.

Bass: Even if he's also a thief,

Chorus: You say he's guided by Jesus.
 Children, leave the herd instinct behind,
 Leave the herd instinct behind!
 Follow Simon Kimbangu

Tenor: Father Holy Spirit,

Chorus: He and Jesus are One.

This hymn both reveals and shapes Kimbanguist perceptions of the churches that have increasingly penetrated the Congolese religious market. Here, an anonymous figure is calling out all Christians, reminding them of the words of Jesus in John 14:6—“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”—and

asserting that the only way to find Jesus now is through Kimbangu. The hymn describes the social context of the emergence of the new preachers, featuring them as they style themselves—as performers of miracles and the rich owners of TV channels or radio stations.⁴⁴ Yet these wonders are critiqued as scams performed by false prophets claiming to be sent by Jesus. Finally, the speaker in the hymn warns the Christians (whom he calls “children”) about the lack of purity of these pastors, who are branded as arrogant men, adulterers, and thieves. Only Kimbangu is understood to embody universal salvation in Jesus Christ.

Because inspired hymns remain one of the essential sources of Kimbanguist faith and theology, it is regrettable that scholars studying Kimbanguism have not spent more time analyzing them when examining the question of the church’s identity. One exception is Léon Nguapitshi Kayongo, who cited hymns as one of the causes of the novelty in Kimbanguist theology. But he simply dismissed them altogether; without any in-depth study of inspired people, he called them fake and self-proclaimed, denouncing the “very pronounced misuse of the gift of inspiration of hymns in the Kimbanguist Church.” Although the biblical and Christian themes of the first hymns could “giv[e] the impression of some sort of second word of God, conforming orally to the written biblical word,” he surmised that the quest for personal recognition within the church had led many to call themselves recipients and compose heterodox messages.⁴⁵ Yet this theologian failed to understand that the same person may have received hymns on both biblical themes and syncretic ones, leading to a rereading of Christian notions.

Undeniably, specific honors are bestowed on inspired people within the Kimbanguist Church, due to the importance of these hymns in giving Kimbanguism a unique identity among Christian churches. It is also true that Kimbanguism is rooted in an African understanding of the Christian faith and religion and a determination to live following an African value system. The church is also different in that it subjects the authority of the scriptures to Kimbanguist traditions born from Simon Kimbangu’s prophetic activities.

It is useful here to refer to the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who offered a presentist approach to collective memory and also analyzed the shaping of traditions as social facts catering to present needs through the history of the localization of New Testament events.⁴⁶ He demonstrated the importance of present-day power relations in the religious appropriation of “historic” geographical locations in the Holy Land, such as the competition among Jews, Muslims, and Christians that led each group to actually have its own “King

David's grave." This struggle is not a matter of scientific rigor with DNA or carbon 14 tests as evidence; it is a question of the power relations underlying the beliefs and discourses of religious institutions all claiming to have exclusive access to the truth.

The same can be said of the representations of Jesus as blond and blue-eyed—certainly very far from what a Palestinian from his time would have looked like. It is useful, however, to distinguish between the historical Jesus and the Christ as an open figure for all kinds of imaginings and appropriation, as the French historian Émile Poulat pointed out by quoting a Christmas carol from Normandy: "If the good Lord had given it a thought, surely He'd have been born among us."⁴⁷ Based on this tendency for each nation to shape Christ in its own image and for its own purposes, Poulat pleaded for the study of the post-European, post-Christian Jesus, asking, "Why not have black Christs, and a black God? If Jesus the Savior became a man like unto all men, a pauper unto all paupers, why wouldn't he be black like so many oppressed people on earth, and be a black man among other blacks—one of them?"⁴⁸ The French theologian Bruno Chenu gave a similar analysis of Negro spirituals as transforming Christianity into "a space for self-assertion, recognition, and identification" where collective identity and personal dignity come from "a loving God, who can be nothing but close and active."⁴⁹

These analyses are crucial to understanding the insistence of Afro-Christian churches, and particularly the Kimbanguist Church, on giving Christ familiar physical features. From the ideal representation of Christ that Dialungana embodied for his church, it is possible to grasp the processes of religious reconstruction stemming from the power relations between colonial missionaries and the formerly colonized people. It is an ontological framework that takes its significance from the appropriation—albeit symbolic—of the Trinity or Jesus Christ to further an African understanding of the Christian message. Beyond the question of religious truths, the crux of the matter here is the status granted to tradition, since the sons of Simon Kimbangu embody the authority of tradition. This ultimately raises the question of the definition of "religion." The French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger, positing that "any belief may be shaped into a religion, provided it gains its legitimacy by invoking the authority of a tradition,"⁵⁰ helps one better understand the case of the Kimbanguist Church.

Such complexity demonstrates the need for in-depth analyses of Kimbanguist theology; but as matters now stand, rather than trying to determine

whether the Kimbanguist Church is or is not Christian, it is more useful to determine with what concepts one may analyze contemporary Kimbanguism (see chapter 7). Because healing practices hold a crucial place in the Kimbanguist Church, justifying and reinforcing the believers' faith in the godly nature of Simon Kimbangu and his descendants, the experience of miraculous healing is discussed next.

6

MIRACULOUS HEALING AND WORSHIP

What part do sacred scriptures play in Kimbanguist healing practices? The question is worth asking because the founding act of the movement was an act of healing, performed by Kimbangu on a young woman, Nkiantondo, in 1921. From the outset, Kimbangu's prophetic activity was enhanced by his healing powers, and contemporary witnesses certified that he resurrected dead people. Martin mentioned that she met some of these eyewitnesses and one of the people resurrected by Kimbangu, who passed away in the 1980s.¹

To help him handle the massive influx of followers asking him to cure their loved ones, Kimbangu chose collaborators (both men and women) whom he had previously selected in a session aimed at sorting the good prophets from the bad ones. Diangienda Kuntima wrote that Simon Kimbangu had been shown by the Holy Spirit how to identify those who were filled with the spirit of the devil. He had to publicly subject them to the test known as *binsukulu*—the local word for eggplant—which consisted of presenting with an eggplant each person on whom the Holy Spirit had descended.² Whoever refused to eat it had not received their spirit from God and hence had to be cast out. This is how Kimbangu evicted all the false prophets from Nkamba.

The Kimbanguist collective psyche contains many significant similarities with the Gospels. For instance, the eggplant test to separate true and false prophets is often compared with John 13:21–27, where Jesus gave Judas a piece of bread dipped in sauce in order to identify him as the

betrayer—except that in the Kimbanguist narrative it was the refusal rather than the acceptance of food that revealed possession by the devil. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the chosen helpers and Kimbangu preached, spoke in tongues, and worked miraculous healing acts and resurrections: this came to be known as the Pentecost of Nkamba.

The proliferation of such events had so great an impact that Western missionaries attempted to defuse it. Diangienda's account related an episode in which Rev. Jennings challenged Simon Kimbangu, asking the crowd to be silent and for sick people to be brought to him so that he too might show that he could work miracles in the name of Jesus. After praying for some time, he ordered a paralytic to walk in Jesus's name, but his three attempts were unsuccessful, and the crowd jeered at him. Eventually, Kimbangu approached the same man and said, "For the unbelievers to witness the power Jesus gave me, I command you to rise and walk." The paralyzed man dropped his crutches at once and began to walk amid the cheering of the crowd. Also according to the official history of Kimbanguism, the administrator Léon Morel had a tent set up in Nkamba so that he could see for himself whether healing was actually taking place. He personally chose five patients, including three paralytics, and asked Kimbangu to heal them. Kimbangu did so without touching them, and the three paralyzed people walked away, dropping their crutches in the enclosed plot of land where the healing sessions were held.³

These two accounts, related by Diangienda, emphasize the power relations between the colonizers and the colonized people that surrounded Kimbangu's prophetic activity, showing how it entailed a historical and social critique of the structures of domination. Indeed, beyond the personalities of the protagonists—Jennings, Morel, and Kimbangu—these interactions reveal the deep social changes then under way in Congo and the stakes at play within the existing Christian structures. It may seem paradoxical that Catholic and Protestant missionaries attacked Kimbangu's ministry instead of rejoicing about the genuine cures performed in the name of Jesus among the Congolese people or even suggesting, as did Rev. Frederickson, that "it was quite possible that God may have given this Negro some form of power, for Kimbangu was known to have accomplished miracles, and it was said nowhere in the Bible that God or His envoy must be white."⁴ Instead, it seemed more vital to discredit this healing as pertaining to fetish worship rather than consider it to be part of the Christian structure they were elaborating, because Kimbangu was enjoying a form of liberty that was normally precluded by his status as a member of the colonized

group. This is corroborated by the report Morel wrote on Kimbangu after witnessing the events: “In reality, I think the man’s goal is to create a religion that fits the natives’ mind-set. . . . Everybody can see that our European religions, fraught with abstract notions, do not answer the needs of the African, who demands protection and solid facts.”⁵

In the early twentieth century, there was no questioning the idea that only Whites could liberate African people. Indeed, African societies back then typified a system of domination in which the social structure was characterized by what Pierre Bourdieu called the principle of distinction or differentiation—in other words, the balance of power between the dominant and the subordinate.⁶ For Bourdieu, individuals holding various positions are competing with one another for better positions on the social ladder, which he described as a “field of forces” and a “field of struggles” where conflicts between dominant and subordinate occur. The field of miraculous healing here may be analyzed as a locus of power that compelled Western agents to work for the preservation of their monopoly of the religious field—always connected with the political and economic fields—in order to maintain their dominant position over African natives. Yet the forces at work here, while engaged in antagonistic relations, eventually resulted in a new reality. The fact that Kimbangu was having visions and a mystical exchange of his own with Christ set him apart from this frame of White control, whether he liked it or not. Kimbangu pioneered Christian awakening in Central Africa because he successfully disrupted the existing balance of power to transform it, paving the way for the emergence of the future Kimbanguist Church and other independent religious groups claiming his legacy.

The field of healing practices logically took on a territorial dimension as Kimbangu’s hometown, subsequently renamed Nkamba–New Jerusalem, became the holy place for physical and spiritual healing, the Kimbanguist Mecca. At the foot of the hill where the town lies, there is a spring called in Lingala *mayi ya Sima* or *mayi ya Nkamba* (Nkamba water). Kimbangu would ask the patients who had just been cured, and his healthy or ailing followers, to immerse themselves in the pool for purification.⁷ This water is seen as sacred and is still believed to have curative properties. When they go on pilgrimage to Nkamba, church members bring jerry cans to collect the water to take back home. The clay-like dust is also collected for personal consumption or massaging, since it is also believed to have therapeutic virtues. Any observer can witness such scenes, as MacGaffey did: “The water is drunk, for vaguely defined health-giving purposes, and water, or a mixture of earth and water, is rubbed on the body as a therapy.”⁸

References to the Gospels, sometimes in the shape of actual comparisons, often serve as evidence of miraculous healing. The Nkamba spring and pool are thus constructed by Kimbanguist subjectivity as completing and furthering the series of miraculous healing actions narrated in the Gospels. Typically, John 9:1–7, where Jesus healed a blind man by first anointing his eyes with the clay he made out of his spittle and then sending him to the pool of Siloam, is quoted to explain the existence of a sacred pool in Nkamba. Additionally, a secret document of the Kimbanguist Church stated that a blind man called Ngoma had been healed by Kimbangu in exactly the same fashion.⁹ To what extent is there a mimesis of the Gospels in this account? This is hard to determine, yet the spring of Nkamba does exist, and its sacredness and healing virtues in the Kimbanguist faith are extremely significant.¹⁰

Another important element in Kimbangu's healing practices was the mvuala, as already mentioned. This rod, which Kimbangu used to hold in his hand, is said to have healed and resurrected people without even touching them; it is often compared by Kimbanguist believers with Moses's rod from Exodus 4:2–4 and 17. The following story is found in a book written by a Kimbanguist entitled *Éphémérides kimbanguistes*. Kimbangu was said to have been aware that his time was up, and he had realized that he could not heal all the sick people who were coming to him. Before he left Mbanza Nsanda, the village that had secretly hosted him for three months, "he said a prayer for all the sick people, all the departed, for Congo, for Africa, and the whole world. He held out his right hand, which held the sacred scepter, ostensibly pointing from East to West and from North to South."¹¹ Many witnesses, who had come from Angola, the French Congo, and remote parts of the Belgian Congo, testified that many of the sick people were healed and many of the dead people who had been carried to Nkamba were resurrected before arriving there. Although this sacred staff is part of Kimbangu's legacy, it is neither exhibited nor held in public by the church leaders, which reinforces its mysterious character. According to certain Kimbanguist sources, it is kept in Kimbangu's mausoleum in Nkamba.

This mausoleum, called *kilongo* in Kikongo—where the allegedly uncorrupted body of Kimbangu is exposed on top of those of his three sons—is the sanctuary par excellence. Church members go there to meditate, pray, ask for blessings, and unburden their souls. It is possible for anyone, not just Kimbanguists, to visit or stay in Nkamba, as the following stanza from an inspired hymn (received in French) exhorts:



Figure 10. Kimbangu's mausoleum in Nkamba.

Come to Jerusalem (3 times)
 There you will find
 God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit
 Have no qualms, come to Jerusalem
 The promise our God made is now fulfilled
 In Nkamba, the new Jerusalem, in Lower-Congo, Africa
 God is black, Jesus Christ is black, Kimbangu the Holy Spirit is black.
 Brothers, come to Nkamba, all of you,
 To the divine spring take all your problems
 Come to Nkamba and you will find the solution.

This hymn clearly indicates that Kimbanguists consider the Nkamba spring to be the solution to all kinds of problems, including health issues. It remains inseparable from Kimbangu's prophetic mission and his charisma. Since Nkamba also grounds the authority of his sons and grandsons as his successors, the spiritual leaders of the church, and the guardians of its sanctuaries, the Nkamba water gives them a particular aura with church members seeking healing. Indeed, mentioning the role of the successors of Kimbangu within the church implies an acknowledgment of their healing powers. In this context, healing is a matter of faith between the figures

involved in the supply of and demand for healing. The authority of the leaders as descendants of Kimbangu reflects the broader role they play in Kimbanguist tradition.

The structure of the Kimbanguist Church displays two facets: an official, hierarchical church with legal texts and a traditional church in which the authority of tradition and in particular the biological lineage stemming from Simon Kimbangu tend to prevail over the hierarchical order. Since the Kimbanguist Church rests on texts and statutes in conformity with modernity, the status of the spiritual leader is also two-faceted: it is based on legal texts and ecclesiastical functions, but it is also traditional to the extent that there is a sacred function on top of the ecclesiastical function. On the basis of legislation, the spiritual leader is a public persona who fills an administrative and official function, but he is also a traditional leader whose rights and duties, prerogatives and responsibilities, privileges and obligations depend solely on his traditional charismatic skills.

The spiritual leader is recognized as possessing the gifts of clairvoyance, mediumship (he speaks with the dead and knows about their afterlife), and healing (he cures and resurrects the dead) and the ability to interpret signs and decipher omens (he advises people and foretells the future). Finally, he reveals his supernatural identity through inspired songs, dreams, visions, and even apparitions, because, like Simon Kimbangu, he is supposed to have the gift of ubiquity. All these charismatic gifts are deemed hereditary; hence, they confer on the leader a traditional form of legitimacy, while myths about Kimbangu play a dominant role in strengthening his successors' aura. The pastors or collaborators who are not Kimbangu's offspring but have the gift of healing and have been endorsed by the spiritual leader do not enjoy as much consideration (save for Mikala Mandombe, the only helper of Simon Kimbangu who survived until 2001, who was just as much in demand during her lifetime). The spiritual leader's position must be distinguished from the status of church members. He is considered to be a deity, or at least an embodiment of the presence of Simon Kimbangu, and thus able to heal. The church members' positions are grounded in their belief in the spiritual leader's powers.

These two aspects reveal two forms of devotion. On the one hand, church members may seek and find healing on their own by praying and fasting. On the other hand, the spiritual leaders are expected to take on the mass of problems and diseases imparted to them by the church members and to find the solutions by praying and fasting themselves. This second option is the most common among Kimbanguists; consequently, spiritual leaders are

constantly called upon to solve all kinds of issues—deaths, illnesses, infertility, quests for a match, advice, blessings, visas for Europe, passing grades for exams, and so on. The list aptly reflects what the Congolese sociologist Joseph Tonda called “the bodily issues”—unemployment, illnesses, exams, elections, declining businesses, deaths, cheating spouses, infertility, thwarted aspirations, the ever-deferred promise of holding a position in government, money losses, alcohol problems, prolonged celibacy, “unclean thoughts,” “bad dreams,” “nightly husbands,”¹² “bad luck,” and so on. “In short, all of the misfortunes undergone by people, regardless of age, gender, social class, or education, are supposed to find stronger therapeutic solutions or be better countered in Christian healing places than anywhere else.”¹³

In the Kimbanguist Church, all evils can be cured by the spiritual leaders because evils are believed to be caused by the devil and by witchcraft practices. Only the church’s spiritual leaders are endowed with the power to counter the effects of witchcraft and the actions of warlocks, the tools of evil. A well-known anecdote among Kimbanguist believers is that Simon Kimbangu once caught sorcerers by surprise and caused them to remain paralyzed, so that they were found by their relatives at daybreak, stark naked, stunned, and prostrated; these people were eventually banished from their village.

In 1991, I personally witnessed a case of healing at the Kimbanguist welcome center in Kinshasa. I was standing right next to Diangienda when a woman holding a newborn child told him, “Papa, I am a witch.” He snapped, “I know you are, I have been watching you for some time now. You waited until you killed people, and now you are coming to me for shelter?” Then, he walked away. But another woman was kneeling close by; she too had witnessed the exchange, and she began weeping and pleading for the witch, saying, “Papa, please help her for love’s sake. She is your child and a poor sinner.” The spiritual leader returned to the witch and told her, “You are lucky. I will spare your life for the sake of the newborn you are holding in your arms. What do you want now?” The woman answered, “I’d like for you to remove it.” He poured some Nkamba water on her hands and asked her to rub it on her face; he sprinkled some more around her head and in her eyes and ears. This scene exemplifies the exchange between the seeker and the healer. In this case, witchcraft, which is customarily feared and combated within the church, became both a disease and a sin, which must be both cured and forgiven by the spiritual leader. He is recognized as having the power to heal diseases *and* forgive sins, the latter being the cause of the former.¹⁴

Like many other Africans, Kimbanguists attach considerable importance both to the realm of angels and dead people and to the invisible world—a term encompassing evil forces and warlocks. As a result, for Kimbanguists, the supernatural is mingled with the natural, and the invisible world is mingled with the visible one. In Nkamba, dead people, including leaders and church members who have passed away, appear to relatives or community members. Against the backdrop of the Kimbanguist faith, animist beliefs resurface, coinciding with the established norms of African societies. For instance, church members watched the televised testimony of J. C. Katanga, a conjure man (*féticheur*) for several stars of Congolese rumba music before he became a convert to Kimbanguism. When he went to Nkamba in 2007, Katanga brought the spiritual leader Simon Kimbangu Kiangani a live crocodile in a coffin. He is said to have used this crocodile for his nightly misdeeds, leaving his human body and inhabiting that of the animal. When he became a Kimbanguist, he decided to relinquish all of his fetishes, particularly the crocodile. This conversion testimony was deemed so significant that the church found a place for the crocodile in Nkamba; it was kept in a pool that was built especially for it, and tourists and pilgrims were invited to come and see it as proof of a conversion.¹⁵

While this event, steeped in animist beliefs, includes an ostentatious confession, such is not usually the case for healing practices in the Kimbanguist Church. These are never publicized nor performed conspicuously. The healing is done discreetly, although often publicly. When healing sessions are open, either the spiritual leader is seated in an armchair while the church members line up in front of him, waiting for their turn to kneel down in deference to his authority and pose their problems, or the church members are lined up on their knees, waiting for the guide to approach and talk with each of them. When no session is organized, people looking for a cure directly come up to the spiritual leaders or their collaborators to request help. Church leaders hold consultations every day save Wednesday, which is their fasting day, and Sunday, the Lord's day, but they do make exceptions in cases of emergency. They are in such demand that church members in need of help seize any opportunity to ask them for advice, blessings, or healing.

When the people needing healing are dead or thought to be so, or in a coma or unable to walk, they are carried by relatives and brought to the spiritual leaders, but this is always done in an inconspicuous manner. The words spoken by the current spiritual leader, Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, after he had raised a dead or comatose woman, were quite illustrative of



Figure 11. The Kimbanguist band, conducted by Diangienda.

this atmosphere: “If you see a person being raised, do not clap your hands, but rejoice deep down in your hearts, for I am a man, and I cannot take pride in this.”¹⁶ Diangienda likewise said, “When a person comes to me for healing and is cured, don’t tell yourselves that Papa has done the healing. It is the person’s faith and mine which have combined and led up to the healing.”¹⁷ In his own day and age, Simon Kimbangu answered Judge De

Rossi's question about his method for resurrecting the dead by saying, "By the divine power Jesus gave me." Consequently, spiritual leaders and designated pastors are considered to be agents of healing, those who serve as tools for miracles to happen. The hopes of the patients and their families are always high.

The pattern emerging here concerns solely the relation between the patient and the healer. Healing sessions are unpaid and follow a code set up by Kimbangu for his helpers and successors: "As some of you will be elected by Christ to help me, I must remind you what your conduct shall be. Under no circumstances shall you be paid after healing or resurrecting a person, for you have received from the Lord the power to work acts of power, and He who gives freely will harshly punish anyone going counter to His will. You will often have to leave the dinner table or hurry out of bed to help out people who may need your spiritual assistance. In such cases, go and help them without delay or resentment. Be humble and abstain from pride."¹⁸

In this tradition, healing sessions take place one-on-one and are never managed collectively—unlike what happens in the Pentecostal churches filmed in the DRC by Gilles Rémiche in his documentary *Miracle Merchants* or those described by the French ethnologists Sarah Demart and Sandra Fancello, who each showed how a person's illness was handled as a collective issue, publicly proclaimed and processed by the pastors and congregations.¹⁹ Consequently, unlike Pentecostal churches where entire services and campaigns are organized around patients' liberation and microphones play an important part in the atmosphere, making collective prayer particularly loud, in the Kimbanguist Church there are no healing campaigns—which is paradoxical, since this is how Kimbangu began his ministry. The legacy of his prophetic and therapeutic rituals among his successors is prayer—either audible or silent—and the sprinkling of patients' ailing body parts with Nkamba water kept in plastic bottles.

Although healing remains God's prerogative, Kimbanguism combines faith-based healing with modern medicine, which is fully part of the practices of the hospitals and dispensaries developed by the EJCSK and coexists with traditional treatments based on plants. While the latter has lost popularity as a result of the Christianization of lifestyles under the tutelage of evangelical and Pentecostal churches, it is still considered to be a solution of last resort, although it is not regarded favorably within the Kimbanguist Church. As the anthropologist John M. Janzen wrote, "Kimbangu himself decreed that *minkissi* medicines, now discredited, should be abandoned."²⁰

Likewise, Martin related in her book that after healing Nkiantondo, Kimbangu saw her husband, who inquired about plants that might cure his wife. Kimbangu answered the man, "Your wife no longer needs any remedies, for she has found better than that."²¹ In an interesting twist, it is said that Nkiantondo accused Kimbangu of having initiated her condition by casting an evil spell on her, only to appear as her savior later. Kimbanguist commentators give an exegesis on this episode, explaining that since the name Nkiantondo means "what thanks?" in Kikongo, the woman was only confirming the ungratefulness inscribed in her name when attacking her healer. Yet, if the story is true, it is worth asking why Kimbangu was assumed by Nkiantondo's husband to be knowledgeable about herbal medicine and why Nkiantondo suspected Kimbangu of being a sorcerer. A current within Kimbanguist tradition holds that Kimbangu's father was a conjure man or a traditional healer, which may be why the other two protagonists of the story asked him for advice or accused him of witchcraft. Building on the same premise, Van Wing wrote that Kimbangu had succeeded his father as a conjure man, while Efraim Andersson asserted that Kimbangu's mother healed patients with herbs and leaves, and E. Bazola contended that Kimbangu's aunt Kinzembo was a traditional healer.²² Martin aptly concluded, "All these assertions are attempts at ranking Kimbangu in the category of African conjure men and traditional healers."²³

To gain a better insight into Kimbanguists' attitude toward herbal medicine, it is helpful to delineate the role given to it in their church. Both witchcraft and fetish worship have been strongly rejected, both in Kimbangu's time and in the present-day church. Yet herbal medicine is not so explicitly condemned. One of Simon Kimbangu's grandsons gave me a private interview in which he explained that one day, while a teenager, he suffered from a cavity that kept him awake all night, crying. His father, Diangienda, the spiritual leader, asked his driver to go to Lutendele and pick leaves from a particular tree, which, Diangienda instructed, should be folded and placed in the cavity. Once this had been done, the pain instantly disappeared and the tooth was cured.²⁴ This is evidence that the use of herbal medicine is not banned, but rather is left up to the individual person, with no specific recommendations or taboos. J. C. Katanga, the convert mentioned earlier, said in a televised interview that he had requested official authorization from the spiritual leader Simon Kimbangu Kiangani to use herbal medicine on members of the Kimbanguist Church. Since this was denied to him, he eventually chose to leave the church and start a congregation of his own.²⁵

Conversely, it is both authorized and recommended to utilize modern (Western) medicine. The Kimbanguist Church owns dispensaries, clinics, hospitals, and pharmacies. Even in the Nkamba area, there is a dispensary. Church members use both modern medicine and Kimbanguist religious medicine; in extreme circumstances and when in a position to choose, they often prefer to be seen by a spiritual leader. I can still remember the moans of a sick woman who was unable to walk and shivering with fever; when the spiritual leader Dialungana asked her if she wanted to go to the hospital, she answered, "No, you are greater than the hospital." Church members do recognize the skills of modern doctors, but they bear in mind that healing is a God-given process. For instance, a church member told me how, following the instructions of a dream her younger sister had, they both decided to take their diabetic father out of a hospital where he had been admitted more than a fortnight before, in spite of the physician's opposition. During his unauthorized transfer to another hospital, she phoned one of Kimbangu's grandsons, Armand Wabasolele Diangienda, who immediately left Sunday service to join them. In the new hospital, the doctor confirmed that the patient was in urgent need of dialysis and could not have survived another day without it. Next, "Papa Armand also came and asked everybody to leave the room and leave him alone with my father. Then he prayed, and immediately, my father, who was nearly dead, opened his eyes and began speaking."²⁶

This account clearly shows how the quest for healing among church members associates modern medicine and spirituality: the woman trusted the French medical system, but also held fast to her religious values, since the catalyst for the decision to transfer her father to a new hospital was a dream. In following the suggestion in her sister's dream, she called on her spiritual leader, thereby recognizing his healing powers, while also putting her trust in the hospital system. Dreams are implicitly granted special importance and are frequent in similar situations, but they are not systematically expected to occur in the quest for miraculous healing. The spiritual leader's request to be left alone with the patient provides additional evidence of the need for discretion surrounding Kimbanguist healing practices, especially in a hospital. Miracles are a recurrent and essential element in the Kimbanguist conception of spiritual healing as performed by Kimbangu's descendants, which is valued more than both the White man's medicine and traditional African medicine.

In a sermon that I attended in 1990 at the welcome center of the Kimbanguist congregation of the Plateaux des quinze ans in Brazzaville, Pastor

Jean Kouka explained that his wife was five months pregnant when a sonogram indicated that the fetus was dead. The desperate couple decided to see the spiritual leader Diangienda, who said a prayer and gave the woman some Nkamba water to drink, after which she felt her baby moving again. The doctors ordered another sonogram and confirmed the fetus was alive, and she was able to continue her pregnancy and deliver a healthy baby four months later. This testimony shows how Kimbanguists in search of healing subordinate the authority of modern medicine to that of spiritual leaders who have inherited Kimbangu's prophetic traditions. Furthermore, Kimbanguist physicians and nurses never miss an opportunity to testify about the victories of Kimbanguist spiritual medicine over modern medicine. For instance, on September 12, 1991 (the day of the rehabilitation of Simon Kimbangu), I was attending the celebrations in Kinshasa when another Kimbanguist pastor, who was a gynecologist, testified in public about a sterile patient who had gone to Diangienda to cure her in spite of the doctor's initial diagnosis and the unsatisfactory results of the tests he had ordered following the spiritual leader's prediction that she was pregnant. The gynecologist reported that he confronted Diangienda with the woman's test results, and the latter retorted, "Let me repeat that she is pregnant and will deliver a baby girl in the month of July.' . . . This was in November. In March, the same woman came to see me again; she was five months pregnant and . . . in July, she delivered a little girl." This testimony was given in the Kimbanguist welcome center of Kinshasa in front of Diangienda; it is particularly revealing of the mix of cooperation and competition between modern medicine and Kimbanguist spiritual medicine, for the pastor-gynecologist ended his testimony with a question directed to the spiritual leader, "Eminence, who are you?," suggesting that Diangienda was endowed with the divine authority of healing. This divine authority, stemming from the prophetic tradition initiated by Simon Kimbangu, gives his descendants a monopoly over the field of miraculous healing. However, this monopoly leads to a problematic situation since there are too few of them to meet the needs of both church members and nonmembers in search of cures. Pentecostal churches thus attract increasing numbers of followers and even some Kimbanguists, drawn to their ostentatious miracles.

One of the attractions of the Kimbanguist Church is the festive nature of its worship services and feasts. Services are held every Sunday and on specific dates that correspond to landmarks in the church's history (see chapter 7). Sunday services consist of three distinct parts. First comes the

liturgical section, which begins with collective singing and an opening prayer, always delivered by a female member. The latter may be designated by the preacher or volunteer spontaneously if she feels drawn to do so. Kimbanguists explain this feature by saying that since Eve was the first to sin, a woman should be the first to ask for forgiveness in worship services. Then, the preacher for the day, who may be a male or female pastor, deacon, or catechist, reads aloud a psalm of her or his choice, and asks all the groups and choirs in the congregation to share a round of hymns—about ten minutes for each choir. Next comes a second reading, an excerpt from the Ten Commandments (either Exodus 20:1–17 or Deuteronomy 5:6–21, depending on the choice made by the preacher), after which a second round of hymns is called for. Next comes a session of three prayers, usually delivered by a man, then a woman, and then a young man or woman chosen by the preacher; each of the three prayers is preceded by a hymn and focuses on the hardships undergone by human beings all over the world—diseases, war, hunger, poverty, and so on.

The blessing of young children, who are presented to the congregation by their parents, and the collection (called *matondo*, “thanks” in Lingala) are then organized by a pastor chosen by the preacher for the day. The sermon follows; it is delivered in the language understood by the majority of the congregation (generally Lingala, Kikongo, Swahili, or Tshiluba), and its duration is not limited—it may last for thirty minutes, an hour, or more. The sermon is built on biblical themes, which are commented on and buttressed by as many hymns and messages of the spiritual leader as the preacher is familiar with. This is one of the key moments in the service since it allows the congregation to benefit from the spiritual experience of the preacher, as the latter testifies to the miracles she or he has experienced, heard of, or been told about by the spiritual leaders, the descendants of Kimbangu. In addition, dreams and visions experienced by the preacher or someone else are related. The preacher has so much leeway that she or he is the main figure of the liturgical part of the service. The preacher is free to comment on the Bible based on personal or collective understanding,²⁷ and may not be interrupted during the sermon. The sermon may elicit either the agreement of the congregation or negative reactions, which are expressed during the second section of the service, known as the “social part,” during which church members may debate among themselves. After the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, a final hymn closes the liturgical portion of the service.

The social part is divided into two phases. The first is the announcement of weddings, births, deaths, news of church members in the

hospital, and other such information. The second phase consists of music played by the band and the public greeting of Kimbanguist visitors from other congregations, non-Kimbanguist visitors attending the service, and various church officials. This phase closes with the public greeting of any descendants of Kimbangu attending the service: the band plays a special tune for them while the congregants march to honor their spiritual leader, whether he is present or not. After this, the spiritual leader or the descendant of Kimbangu representing him gives the congregation a final exhortation.

The third and last part of the worship service is known as *nsinsani*, a Kikongo word meaning “collection.” It is a sort of financial competition among the various groups and choirs, in which the band plays the lively tunes of the church’s hymns while the donors march in ways sometimes akin to dance. In her study of Kimbanguism in Zaire, Asch noted that “dance moves (which are sometimes difficult to distinguish from rhythmic marching for an outsider) are strictly forbidden and promptly repressed by the guards.”²⁸ Today, many sermons focus specifically on the ban on dancing, since this dimension of Congolese popular culture seems to contaminate Kimbanguist religious practice in the ritual of the march. Many church members openly display new ways of marching, which sometimes clearly borrow from popular, nonreligious dance styles.



Figure 12. The Lord’s Supper, conducted by Diangienda.



Figure 13. Diangienda healing two church members, who could not get rid of some chickens that had nested on their heads.

The festive atmosphere of the march is extremely important, for it is thanks to the *nsinsani* that the church raises the funds necessary to help members in the community and to accomplish the church's development projects—such as the building of a great auditorium seating 2,000 in Kinshasa, hospitals, studios to host foreign visitors, or a radio and television station in Kinshasa. This section of the worship service is considered to be part of the good works (*misala*) in the Kimbanguist triad of love (*bolingo*), commandments (*mibeko*), and work (*misala*).

Kimbanguist worship also involves celebrating the many religious feasts and special events of church life, which include baptisms, the Lord's Supper, weddings, funerals and wakes, and the various anniversaries in the church calendar. The Kimbanguist Church recognizes what it calls "baptism in the Holy Spirit," which is celebrated with the blessing of clergy members; applicants are accepted from the age of twelve, and they may also be converts coming from other denominations not recognized by the WCC. Kneeling down in front of the pastors, they often wear green and white clothes, the two colors of the church—green symbolizing victory and white, purity.

Religious wedding ceremonies are extremely important, and more significance is granted to traditional wedding customs than to the official wedding performed at the town hall. For the couples conforming to Congolese

and, more generally, African traditions, the groom's family is supposed to pay a dowry to the bride's family: cash and presents demanded by her parents and other relatives. In this context, before the pastor performs the religious ceremony, the two families participating in the wedding are publicly asked whether there is any objection to it.

The sacrament of the Holy Supper is administered by clergy members under the supervision of the spiritual leader. Because wine is taboo in the Kimbanguist Church, honey juice is used as the symbol of the blood of Christ, while corn bread is used to symbolize the body of Christ.

PART III

EXPRESSIONS OF KIMBANGUIST MESSIANISM

7

KIMBANGUIST PROPHECY, MESSIANISM, AND MILLENARIANISM

A study of Kimbanguism from its origins justifies the use of every concept listed by David Barrett to define African-initiated churches (see the introduction). It was born out of the prophetic activities of an exceptional person, Simon Kimbangu, who is believed to have had the power of resurrecting the dead and healing the sick and who also gave his followers a religious message challenging colonialism, with the promise that they would see a new social and spiritual order in which the established patterns of domination would be reversed. The millenarian dimension of Kimbanguism is present in believers' expectation of a golden age where the dead will return on earth to coexist with the living. Their spiritual leaders often insist "be ready, for the dead are returning," and inspired hymns are sent by the dead themselves to announce their impending return and to give their vision of a new social order that promises happiness and freedom from witchcraft.

Millenarianism plays an essential part in the Kimbanguist faith, to such a point that it may be said that the eschatological dimension is what draws believers to the church. The millenarian view hinges on the reinterpretation of the Christian message through the inspired hymns and the prophetic sermons of Diangienda and other spiritual leaders; it represents the essence of Kimbanguism and may account for the church's decision to focus on identity reconstruction. The French sociologist Henri Desroche borrowed the philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's neologism "messianosis," that is, placing a messiah on a pedestal against his will, suggesting that it be applied to

representations of Simon Kimbangu as a symptom of both the natives' aspirations for a new order and the colonizers' distress in the face of resistance.¹

Millennial expectations emerged when the first prophecies of Kimbangu—those announcing the independence of African colonies—were taking place. In his 1955 book, *Sociology of Black Africa*, Georges Balandier showed how Kimbanguism developed on the basis of prophetism, messianism, and millenarianism. When it became a church, it built its rhetoric on the principle that Kimbangu would radically transform the status of Blacks, which gradually took hold among the believers. Marie-Louise Martin insisted on the same point: "With time, not just thousands, but millions of Congolese people were influenced by him. Kimbangu has become a legendary figure, whose return was and probably still is expected."² These observations made in the 1950s and 1960s are still relevant nowadays, and eschatological rhetoric is still present in Kimbanguism. A list of events is also given to the believers in the church's inspired hymns. For instance, the following, sung in Lingala by the GTKI choir, warns the believers regarding the harbingers of the Kimbanguist revelation at the end of time:

The Lord's secrets I have shown you already
Let no one fool you!

Chorus: If you hear

Tenor: About
Ethnic strife,

Tenor: Be careful!
If you hear

Tenor: That
There are rivals for power,

Tenor: Be careful!
If you hear

Tenor: That
Nations [races] hate one another,

Tenor: Be careful!

Rejoice and hold fast
Leave it all to Me
Rejoice and hold fast
I will reveal Myself
Rejoice and hold fast
Let the world know you!

One of the key aspects of the church's messianic dimension is the belief that God or Kimbangu will work things out when he chooses, as the hymn above announces by encouraging believers to hold fast until he reveals himself (as Simon Kimbangu or as his youngest son and reincarnation, Diangienda) to the world. This revelation will coincide with a revelation of the Kimbanguist Church's saving nature and message to Black people worldwide. In this logic, ethnic warfare, conflicts, and other social unrest are to be interpreted through the lens of the inspired hymns. This blend of messianism and millenarianism may be compared to what Gérard Mordillat and Jérôme Prieur analyzed in early Christianity: "The sudden advent of the Kingdom, the apocalypse promised by Jesus and taken up by his successors, is literally a revelation, a change in the face of the world, and not just a spiritual change, but also a transformation of beings and things."³

As the anthropologist Mircea Eliade explained, wars often trigger a resurgence of apocalyptic enthusiasm—the certainty that God will soon intervene by hastening the Second Coming of Christ.⁴ The messianic dimension of Kimbanguism is also perceptible in features that the Swedish missionary Bengt Sundkler identified in his observation of South African messianic churches in 1948: messianism often appears with the second generation, with the founder and his successor (usually his son) acting as liberators and mediators for their followers, bridging the gap between the living and the dead but also between humanity and the divine, like the kings of African traditions.⁵ Indeed, the Kongo royal tradition is visible in the rituals of the Kimbanguist Church, with church members and clergy kneeling in front of the descendants of the founder. The Kimbanguist moral code recommends kneeling in front of all authority, especially the descendants of Kimbangu and members of the clergy. The spiritual leader is sometimes considered to be a God-king reigning over the dead and the living and ensuring an ethnic, transnational, and pan-African balance of power.

Martin applied the parameters defined by Sundkler to the case of the Kimbanguist Church, focusing on the biblical, prophetic, and royal factors: "A prophet-healer, Simon Kimbangu, founded the movement which

led to the creation of the EJCSK. . . . The last son of the prophet, Joseph Diangienda, is the head of the church—in fact, its ‘king,’ or *mvwala*, a term which designates the prophetic and royal scepter. But neither Kimbangu nor Diangienda plays the role of a messiah.”⁶ As already mentioned, the *mvwala*, or sacred rod, was a royal attribute, which the king used at the time of the kingdom of Kongo to materialize his charismatic and traditional position of dominance. Kimbangu also carried a rod or cane, which his followers held to be sacred and which they called *mvwala*. It is claimed that it was used for the miraculous healing of several people as well as to give information to its owner about how to respond in confrontations with the Belgian colonial administrators. But Martin was incorrect in writing that neither Kimbangu nor his son Diangienda played the part of a messiah, which she considered to have been reserved for Jesus Christ alone in the Kimbanguist faith. It is likely that she missed or hid the messianic aspect of the church. Yet it remains troubling that each time she addressed this question, in her many articles and in her book on Kimbanguism, she never acknowledged that Kimbangu was considered by the believers to be the incarnation of the Holy Spirit or a messiah. Long before her works were published, Balandier had already pointed out the specificity of Kimbanguist messianism: “First of all there are those proclaiming the omnipotence of God, that represent the Trinity in the form of God (Nzambi Pungu)—Jesus—Kimbangu [sic].”⁷ But Martin refused to acknowledge this fact, and she portrayed Kimbangu not as a second savior or messiah but as a saint in the Catholic tradition, who lives in the presence of the Lord. When faced with Kimbanguists’ belief that the founder was the incarnation of the Holy Spirit, she chose to normalize and justify it, explaining it away as a misinterpretation of the dogma or pointing out some exaggeration in Kimbanguist testimonies.⁸

Today, it is undeniable that Kimbanguists consider the founder of their church to be a messiah on an equal footing with, or even above, Jesus. This is clearly reflected in the following hymn, sung in French, where Kimbangu is identified as Simon of Cyrene (Matthew 27:32):

Tenor: A mystery occurred en route to Golgotha where Jesus had to die

Chorus: There appeared an African whom they took by force,
To bear the cross behind Jesus.

Tenor: Yes, God came to rescue His godly son!

Chorus: Yes, Papa Kimbangu, we have recognized you (bis)
 On Golgotha in Judah, Kimbangu was present
 In Nkamba in Zaire,⁹ Jesus Christ was present
 These words are a mystery
 Our God is a Spirit
 Jesus Christ is a Spirit
 Kimbangu is the Holy Spirit.

Tenor: Jesus told us, brethren,
 That he had a lot to say
 But we cannot bear it;
 The [Holy] Spirit will come and reveal it to us.

Tenor: Why are you doubting so much?
 Why is there such unbelief?
 It was indeed written,
 "Through a foreign people I shall speak, Jerusalem."

The scriptures are thus perceived as a mystery that Kimbangu came to reveal. Jesus announced that the kingdom of God would be taken away from the Jewish people (Matthew 21:42–44) to be given to another, and Kimbanguists consider Blacks, and particularly themselves, to be this new chosen people. As in other hymns, the sin that cost Jesus his life was committed by Blacks, and Kimbangu was present at the same spot where Jesus was crucified. Diangienda commented on this biblical passage as follows: "The man who, the Bible says, came from the fields with a machete and a hoe—where did he come from? After he laid the cross down, what did he and Jesus tell each other, and where did he go? The Bible is silent on this point, but all these things shall be revealed to us in the days to come."¹⁰ The Bible's silences are very present in another dimension of Kimbanguism, which remains to be analyzed: the church's rhetoric around identity reconstruction.

The honoring of ancestors, which is always central to ethnicity, is endowed with a particular significance in Kimbanguist theology. Van Wing wrote the following observations about Simon Kimbangu's attitude toward what Van Wing called "ancestor worship": "Before [Kimbangu] appeared, during the Kiyoka movement which had been started in northern Angola around 1872, all the fetishes had been burned with eagerness. But neither Kimbangu nor any other leader ever called for a rejection of ancestor

worship. Quite the contrary, the Kimbanguist movement squarely based itself on ancestor worship, having their graves cleaned up, as well as the paths leading to them, since their return to life supposedly was to bring back the Golden Age.”¹¹

What Van Wing did not say is that the Kimbanguists’ concern about ancestors does not include ritual practices around the dead, such as making libations or performing rituals on and around the graves. As explained earlier, the Kimbanguist Church focuses only on Simon Kimbangu, Marie Muilu, and their three sons. Consequently, it includes no ancestor worship in the African or Bantu meaning of the phrase, but a displacement of practices to approximate Christian ritual: praying silently in front of the graves. As Issiaka-Prosper Lalayette observed, in African traditions, only those who led a blameless life or had historical or social prestige eventually became ancestors after passing away. While “anonymous” ancestors—those who led simple, discreet, moral lives—are mentioned and invoked collectively, the specific ancestors who are still present in their descendants’ memories are viewed as heroes.¹²

This perspective may be applied to the Kimbanguist worldview, with the difference that, in this case, the process of transformation into ancestors bears the stamp of the Christian faith. Indeed, the Kimbanguist way of referring to the dead who are believed to be in heaven was explained by Diangienda: “In short, Kimbanguist theology renders constant homage to those righteous men and women who in time and space were worthy servants of the Eternal and his redeemer Messiah. They do not belong to the past, they are living and active with Christ, interceding constantly in favour of humankind. They support the action of the Holy Spirit in His intercession for us to the Eternal and Christ.”¹³

This passage demonstrates that in the Kimbanguist worldview, not all dead men and women are part of the ancestor community; the only ones admitted are those who gained fame during their earthly lives thanks to acts of charity, faith, or good works in the church. The preservation of the memory of a dead person corresponds to the importance that person had in the life of the church. Yet this cannot be equated with ancestor worship in the sense Marie-Louise Martin intended: “Though Simon Kimbangu is a mediator, the great ‘ancestor,’ who indeed precludes worship of one’s own ancestors in the family, kindred and tribe, he stands in the closest relationship with Christ and leads his own to Christ and to the Father.”¹⁴ But Kimbangu and his three sons are in no way considered to be ancestors by the church members; they are held to embody the mystery of the Holy

Trinity. Consequently, any prayer to God is by definition directed to them. Kimbangu's wife (always addressed as Mama Muilu) represents the feminine dimension of God; she is often identified, along with her husband and their three sons, in visions, dreams, and inspired hymns. A number of Kimbanguists even consider her to be Jesus's mother, which is reinforced because her first name was Marie.

Kimbanguist theology does not discard tribal or family ancestors, contrary to what Martin contended, but it treats them somewhat nontraditionally. The dead fathers and mothers of the church may be heard in inspired hymns and seen in visions, dreams, or even apparitions. When great feasts are organized in Nkamba, it is not uncommon to hear that someone has seen a parent or another relative who passed away some time ago. Yet this is not necessarily attributable to ancestor worship. The Congolese historian Martial Sinda indicated that Kimbangu insisted on "reverence for the elders" and "paying respect to the dead" based on his Christian perspective rather than ancestor worship. Sinda suggested that Kimbangu's "sole preoccupation was to raise awareness of a historical community."¹⁵

It is interesting that Sinda seemed to credit Simon Kimbangu with promoting an ethnic concept, that of "the Bakongo nation." Yet, even though Kimbangu's movement developed in the Kongo ethnic group, no archived materials show him preaching about Kongo identity; his message, rather, aimed at unity. Indeed, the main prophecy that struck both the colonial authorities and his fellow Congolese was "the White man shall become black and the Black man shall become white," not "the White man shall become Kongo and the Kongo man, white." Kimbangu's focus must therefore be understood from the perspective of a reconstruction of Black, not just Kongo, identity. In his preaching, Kimbangu did not particularly celebrate Kongo forebears, not even Kimpa Vita, though she now holds a central place in the Kimbanguist faith. Instead, he preached the Bible and Jesus, which implied the restoration of a historical consciousness that is rooted less in the history of Congo than in biblical history. As a result, the subjective belief in a common origin, which is at the root of any sense of ethnicity, was framed within the norms imposed by the Bible. While Kimbanguism took root during the rise of Kongo ethnic claims, as depicted by Sinda and Balandier, its modern version reveals a deep need for an affirmation of Blackness beyond ethnic affiliations. Roger Bastide was aware of this, as the following analysis shows: "What is particularly striking is that from now on, messianic movements will be rolled back by prophetic ones, as the temporarily suppressed Blackness [*négritude*] will re-emerge in the new sects that are currently appearing."¹⁶

Hence, awareness of Black identity takes on great importance in the Kimbanguist worldview and representations. As a religion, Kimbanguism bears the signs of ethnic thinking. By reprocessing the Christian message, Kimbanguist identity offers a new understanding of all the major aspects of Christian identity. Thus, by rereading the Bible and analyzing the norms imposed by colonists to explain the positioning of each race, Kimbanguists have been enabled to critique their ethnic identification under the guidance of their spiritual leader Diangienda.

Consequently, the biblical forebears Adam and Eve—who were always represented as White during the entire colonial period—are here believed to be Black. Diangienda preached, “The Black man was the one who was created in God’s image and likeness; so Adam and Eve were Black people.”¹⁷ This statement by their spiritual leader is considered by Kimbanguist believers to be an actual revelation, and it is all the more important and credible because their inspired hymns (which are a theological mystery) regularly insist on these biblical forebears. The following is from a hymn sung in Lingala by the GTKI choir, which conveys this message:

Tenor: Humble dust
Was turned by God into a man:

Chorus: These two, Adam and Eve,
They are our ancestors.

Tenor: Black skin,
God has loved you
From the time of Genesis.

Chorus: These two, Adam and Eve,
They are our ancestors.

For Kimbanguists, it is an absolute certainty that Adam and Eve, whom the scriptures identify as the ancestors of all humankind, were a Black man and a Black woman. It is worth mentioning that Simon Kimbangu never preached this; Diangienda did. But because his early sermons were neither transcribed nor taped due to a lack of adequate devices and the predominance of the oral tradition, it is difficult to know when he began articulating this tenet of the Kimbanguist faith. I have already discussed the manner in which the Kimbanguist Church’s interpretation of the Bible has been

shaped by the teachings of Diangienda, who addressed from a theological angle matters of high scientific and ideological importance. In his speeches and sermons, he emphasized the positive nature of Blackness as the original form of humanity, based on the premise that the first human beings originated in Africa. Marie-France Briselance summarized the present state of knowledge: “The debate is still going on. Whether the oldest human being was discovered in Tanzania in the person of Oldoway or in Ethiopia in that of Lucy, we are certain of one thing—Africa really is the cradle of mankind.”¹⁸

The most recent discovery was of a hominid between 6 and 7 million years old, unearthed by a Franco-Chadian research team; this is the oldest known member of the human lineage, with links to the last common ancestor shared by chimpanzees and human beings. This discovery was made public in a paper published in *Nature* on July 11, 2002.¹⁹ This new species of hominid was named *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* (“Chadian man from the Sahel”) and the specimen was called Toumai, which means “hope for life” in the Goran language.

Diangienda’s take on the debate was framed in purely spiritual terms. From his perspective, the Adam and Eve of the Bible are in no way fictional, but were actual people who really existed. When he spoke on the African origins of humankind, he sometimes hinted at the notion of intellectual property rights, as the following excerpt shows:

Haven’t I told you time and again that Blacks are made in God’s image? All the time I was saying this, people refused to believe me, but now it has really become a topical issue. I see many journals where Blacks are mentioned. . . . It was not until recently, when people—White people—began speaking of Africa as the cradle of mankind, that Blacks began paying attention. But when I was saying the same thing, no, people called me a madman and challenged me, saying, “How do you know?” Oh, but *we* are the ones who were created in the image and likeness of God!²⁰

Diangienda’s assertion is perceived as being authentic because he gave details on the appearance of Adam and Eve: “Let me tell you about the size of Papa Adam and Mama Eve. They were giants and could be taller than this house [pointing to a three-story building in the parish of the Plateaux des quinze ans].”²¹

The Kimbanguist version of the episodes of creation and the book of Genesis is distinct from the relatively sketchy narratives of the scriptures,

for it is supplemented by the prophetic teachings of Diangienda, which have shaped the representations in a more precise fashion. If Adam and Eve are considered to be Black, it is logical to represent them as living on African soil and speaking an African language. According to the French sociologist Pierre-Jean Simon, an ethnic community generally defines itself in relation to a territory of its own, a geographical and environmental space that is imbued with representations, memories, and shared feelings. Hence there is a territorial dimension behind ethnicity—not in every single case, but in most cases—framed in terms of nostalgia, symbols, or myths. This dimension is all the more significant when communities are physically standing on their soil, the ground of a country that is real and not mythical—even though every territory tends to become idealized.²²

This analysis can be seen in the Kimbanguist community as regards Nkamba, which was Kimbangu's birthplace and the setting for his prophetic activities and preaching. It was subsequently renamed Nkamba–New Jerusalem, the place where Kimbangu and his followers were arrested and deported. His body was buried in Nkamba in a mausoleum on April 3, 1960. The significance of Nkamba can only be understood if one takes into consideration the believers' worldview and approach to the place: everyone walks barefoot there since shoes are forbidden, as are spitting on the ground and cutting trees. The soil itself, a red clay, is sometimes taken by pilgrims as a souvenir or for healing purposes; it is said to have therapeutic virtues. Nkamba also holds a unique place in the Kimbanguist faith because it is a theological element of the process of identity reconstruction.

Indeed, chapter 21 of the book of Revelation, which evokes a new heaven and a new earth, is considered by Kimbanguists as having already been accomplished in Nkamba. They therefore consider all the sites there to be sacred—from the mausoleum containing the bodies of Simon Kimbangu and his three sons to a three-story building called Nzo a Mitsinu (“house of promises” or “house of kings”) to a sacred spring flowing into a pool called Sima, in which people immerse themselves to be purified or healed. There is also in Nkamba a huge temple with a seating capacity of 37,000, whose construction was prophesied by Simon Kimbangu shortly before he was arrested. According to oral tradition, Kimbangu said that the period following its inauguration would coincide with great spiritual upheavals in the church as Kimbanguists and all other Christians, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would accomplish acts of power similar to the ones Jesus and the apostles accomplished. The spiritual and moral foundations of the world would be shaken to the core.²³

The devotion of church members to their holy city is such that a number of distinguished visitors have been deeply moved. Hank Crane's testimony, quoted above, is an example of this effect, but he was not alone. Marie-Louise Martin reported her own impressions upon entering the city in the 1960s:

The hill of Nkamba—[New] Jerusalem, which is still inhabited by a number of families, shall in a few years become a place dedicated to prayer, as houses are being rebuilt on neighboring hills. When worshipping in Nkamba and living in this place, one is impressed by what might be called “the achieved eschatology,” in the sense of an awareness of the presence of God. The heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation 21 is somehow anticipated *hic et nunc*, in the here and now. The great stairs leading up to the sanctuary symbolize the stairs that Jacob saw in his dream, signifying the promise of God's presence for all those who will walk up to it in prayer.²⁴

Nkamba—[New] Jerusalem [shows] the reactivation of the redeeming work of Christ. . . . It is the city of Kimbangu just as ancient Jerusalem was the city of David. . . . This is the fulfilment of the divine promises, which are transferred from the ancient city to the New Jerusalem—the promises that people of all nations will come as pilgrims to Zion.²⁵

Likewise, the secretary general of the WCC visited Nkamba in 1999 and imparted his impressions to the Kimbanguist congregation:

Nkamba bears a very special name among these centers of Christianity [in Congo]. We have heard about miracles taking place in Nkamba, blind people recovering sight, deaf people hearing, paralyzed people being able to walk. These are indeed signs of the presence of the Spirit of our Lord. We visited the spring of holy water. We have realized that this really is the Source of Life. It is the source of a Life to be fully shared, not protected and kept for oneself alone. It is a Life that is multiplied in order to be shared. It reminds me of this wonderful vision at the end of the Bible—the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. Certainly, in the center of this holy city, there is a spring that flows into a river. On both banks of this river, there are trees, and you certainly remember that the leaves of these trees are meant to heal all peoples. So it is my prayer upon leaving Nkamba that the Source of Life, the Source of the Living Spirit, should flow into a River of Life.

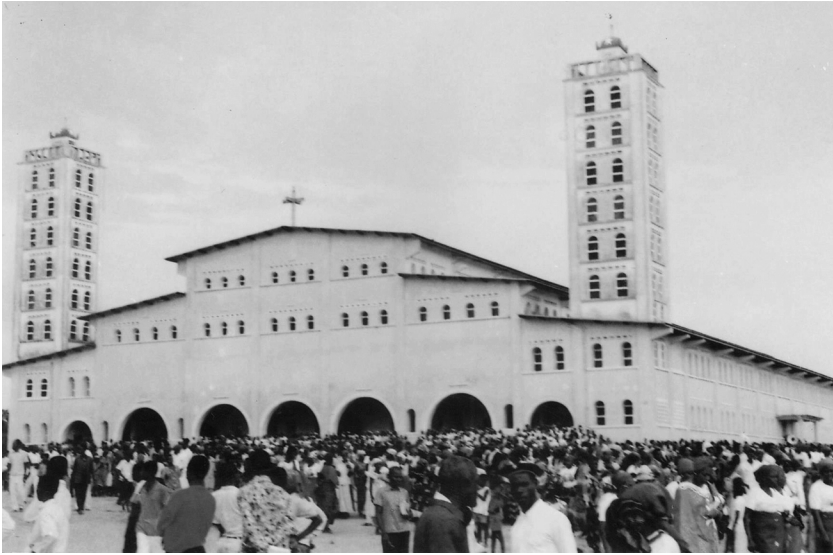


Figure 14. Temple of Nkamba.

This Spirit is healing not just the Congolese people, which has been tried and devastated by a long war; but let this spiritual awakening in Congo become a source of awakening for the whole region in Africa, for a renewal, a reconstruction, a renaissance—an actual renaissance of Africa. So, having visited Nkamba in a pilgrimage, we shall bring back with us this message—a message of life and hope, a message of simplicity, of the Spirit of the Beatitudes; and may the Spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you every day.²⁶

Such praise for the holy city of Nkamba from an official of the WCC naturally paved the way for theological speculation among the members of the Kimbanguist Church, since they understood this as a confirmation by reliable religious officials of a real and tangible manifestation of the presence of God. Nkamba is a city of blessings, which, following Simon Kimbangu's prophecy, welcomes religious leaders from various denominations around the world as well as Congolese and other African politicians, popular music stars, traditional chiefs, and so on. It is open to all races and nationalities. The Nzo a Mitsinu was built there to host the presidents of the three countries of the ancient kingdom of Kongo, because the Kimbanguists see them as the bedrock of the world. This belief is grounded in an inspired hymn received in French and sung by the Chorale des dirigeants:

The God of all nations is Black,
Hallelujah, amen!
Our Lord Jesus, the Savior of the world, is Black,
Hallelujah, amen!

Chorus: The spurned race was the chosen race;
Get together, natives of the initial Congo!
Jesus is calling you.

This hymn is worthy of a lengthy analysis, for it does not simply address Kimbanguists or the modern Congolese, but the Congolese of ancient times. The essential point is that “the initial Congo,” which may be identified as the kingdom of Kongo—unless it alludes to a Congo undocumented by the contemporaries of Kimpa Vita but blended in the Kimbanguists’ collective psyche with the garden of Eden—is inseparable from the Black race and from the Blackness of God and Christ. The hymn reveals the sacredness of Congolese territory in the Kimbanguist faith. Congo—or, more precisely, the area of the modern-day DRC, Angola, and Congo-Brazzaville—is thus considered to be the original garden of Eden mentioned in Genesis. Further, the reason that the kingdom of Kongo was appropriated in the Kimbanguist mythical topography is probably that the Congolese have kept vivid memories of the fight of Kimpa Vita for independence. They care little about the stories that claim that the kingdom of Kongo was founded on acts of violence or even witchcraft, for the nationalist spirit of Kimpa Vita has led many church members to believe that the kingdom was rooted in an unchanging peace and an Edenic form of unity.

The Kimbanguist faith locates in Nkamba the specific place where God took some dust from the soil to shape man, leaving the imprint of his fingers. On February 3, 1989, a map of Africa was discovered in Nkamba: the soil allegedly cracked open, disclosing the shape of the African continent. This place is still visible now; bricks were laid all around it to protect the soil from the rain.

The Kimbanguist faith considers to be sacred any material space that holds memories from Simon Kimbangu, Marie Muilu, and their three sons. Anything that bears their imprints is held sacred. Besides Nkamba, which is the Kimbanguists’ holy land, other sacred places include the courthouse of Mbanza Ngungu, where Simon Kimbangu was tried and sentenced; the prison where he was jailed in Lubumbashi; and Luntendele on the bank of the Congo River, some 120 miles east of Kinshasa, where the Kimbanguist

divinity school was built. Luntendele is where, according to oral tradition, Simon Kimbangu in chains was thrown into the river by Belgian colonists, but he stood on the surface of the water and walked to a safe place in a grotto, where he left his handprints and footprints, which serve today as evidence of his divine power. I have viewed documentaries made by the church, and I saw the marks of two hands and two feet on a rock in the middle of the river.

Other sacred places include areas where Kimbangu, while imprisoned, appeared and spoke to his followers, for example in Boko and Kunzulu in Congo-Brazzaville and in Boma and Lowa in the DRC. His sons have imparted sacredness to Lukulu, DRC, where Diangienda was run over by a car, and to Kieba, a hill near Nkamba, where Dialungana passed away; these sites have become dedicated to meditation. Each sacred place can be considered to be a spiritual antenna that connects with Nkamba–New Jerusalem, with a mission of its own. When prayers are made during memorial ceremonies in these places filled with memories, such prayers are held to be particularly effective. The Kimbanguist identity is thus best understood in correlation with this network of sacred places, whose epicenter is Nkamba.

For Kimbanguists, time is also hallowed in commemorations that tie past events to present and future ones. In the Kimbanguist Church, time is given spiritual significance, and certain dates are singled out as especially fit for prayer. The Kimbanguist conception of time has two aspects—a chronological or historical dimension and a cyclical dimension. In the latter, time renews itself during the celebration or commemoration of past events. As a result, past events are never relegated to mere history, for they rekindle the faith shaped by the spiritual leaders' messages and the inspired hymns. The present continuously tends toward the future, which is the time of promises. Religious feasts give insight into the Kimbanguist experience of time.

The calendar of the Kimbanguist liturgy opens on April 6, the anniversary of Kimbangu's first miracle, which is considered to be the date of the founding of the church. Since this date often coincides with Easter, the latter feast is either not celebrated or given less importance. The other feast days are:

April 27: anniversary of Marie Muilu's death (1959).

May 25: Kimbanguist Christmas, which corresponds to the birthday of Dialungana (1916).

June 6: the day the Belgian authorities failed to arrest Simon Kimbangu.

June 30: anniversary of the independence of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is perceived as the fulfillment of a famous prophecy by Simon Kimbangu.

July 8: anniversary of Diangienda's death (1992).

July 29: the day Diangienda was run over by a car in Lukulu (1959), shortly before he took command of the church; this is understood as manifesting the transmission of power from the founder to his youngest son.

August 4: the day Diangienda had a vision of his father (1951) showing him hosts of young disciples who had been called to serve God under his guidance; this has become Kimbanguist Youth Day.

August 16: anniversary of the death of Dialungana (2001).

September 12: Simon Kimbangu's birthday, his arrest by the Belgian authorities, and his official recognition by the Zairian state.

October 3: the day Kimbangu was sentenced to death by a Belgian military tribunal (1921). His execution, scheduled for October 4, was canceled, and the sentence became a life sentence.

October 12: anniversary of Kimbangu's death (1951) after thirty years in the Elisabethville jail; the official Kimbanguist Church also celebrates Simon Kimbangu Kiangani's birthday on this day.

December 24: official recognition of the church by the Belgian state (1959) as *Église de Jésus Christ sur la terre par son prophète Simon Kimbangu* (EJCSK); on December 24, 1992, the church organized an atonement ceremony for the sin of Adam and Eve.

February 12: birthday of Simon Kimbangu's eldest son, Kisolokele (1914).

March 17: anniversary of Kisolokele's death (1992).

March 22: birthday of Diangienda, the founder's youngest son (1918).

On these days, many Kimbanguists travel to Nkamba to attend the celebrations. Yet, this calendar also attracts criticism. In 2002, attendees at a symposium of the divinity school of the Simon Kimbangu University urged the church to hold fewer celebrations in order to put an end to the confusion between commemorations and religious feast days.²⁷

The Kimbanguist psyche is shaped by an experience of time as consecrated by the succession of feasts and is rooted in a three-part territorial perspective, in which (1) Africa is defined as the motherland, (2) the three Congos (the DRC, Congo-Brazzaville, and Angola) are the landmarks of the world, and (3) there is an ongoing hope of reuniting the three nations into a reborn kingdom of Kongo. Believers associate the reborn Kongo with a

millenarian kingdom of God on earth, where human beings will speak only one language again—Kikongo.

The languages spoken by the inhabitants of the vast territory of the kingdom of Kongo may be grouped into three main categories: languages designated as “ethnic” or Congolese, national languages, and official languages (French for the two republics of Congo and Portuguese for Angola). All Congolese and Angolans speak at least one of the 200 ethnic languages, since they are used locally and for communication with other communities. The people who only speak an ethnic language or dialect are generally the least educated and most rural citizens. These languages, though spoken by many, do not enjoy the same respect as the official and national languages in public opinion.

In Congo-Brazzaville and the DRC, Lingala is the dominant national language in each capital. It represents the linguistic signature of Congolese identity, and it is widely known and circulated across Africa and throughout the world via the extremely popular Congolese rumba. The Kikongo spoken to the south of each capital—which is distinct from the Kikongo dialect—is known as Munukutuba, *Kikongo ya l'état* (“state Kikongo”), or the Kikongo of the press. It ranks second after Lingala as a national language in both republics of Congo. The DRC has two other national languages, Ciluba/Tshiluba, spoken in the southeastern provinces of Kasai and Shaba, and Swahili (the most common African language), spoken in the eastern part of the country. In 2003, Lingala ranked sixth among the most spoken languages of sub-Saharan with 15 million speakers, according to the Francophone newsmagazine *Courrier International*, after Swahili and Hausa (39 million speakers each), Yoruba (22 million speakers), Amharic (21 million), and Ibo (18 million). Kikongo came in twenty-fourth, with 3 million speakers.²⁸ This language, which holds a special place in Kimbanguist theology, is connected to the Kongo ethnic group, which finds its roots in the kingdom of Kongo.

The Kongo group, which has been scattered since the dismantling of the kingdom, is one of the dominant ethnic groups living in the three states born of the colonization of the region—Congo-Brazzaville, the DRC, and Angola. Yet the Bakongo people are not identifiable as a homogeneous group today, and it is quite difficult to visualize the ethnic map that existed at the time of the kingdom of Kongo; only ideologues in search of a lost genealogy are still trying to accomplish such a feat. The Africanist historian Sophie Le Callenet explained that “the group constantly referred to the ancient kingdom as to a Golden Age, and was seeking to restore the unity of the Ba-Kongo and their cultural and social grandeur.”²⁹

A similar feeling of nostalgia for the past greatness of the kingdom of Kongo may be perceived to various degrees among the members of the Kimbanguist Church through the celebration of the Kikongo language not only as Simon Kimbangu's mother tongue but as the sacred language that preexisted the Tower of Babel and is destined to be the universal language of the future. The consecration of the Kikongo language was facilitated under the leadership of Dialungana (1992–2001) because he had not received a formal education or lived in an urban environment, and therefore spoke only his mother tongue. Instead of weakening his aura by making him appear to be a "country boy," this led believers to see his monolingualism as a sign that Kikongo is a special language. The Kimbanguist pastor Assumbe, the aide of Dialungana when he gave me an interview in November 2000, shared the following anecdote:

Papa Mfumu a Mbanza [Dialungana] had given me a mission: I had to bring one hundred copies of the Bible in Kikongo to Europe, including Geneva. When I landed at the Geneva airport, the White man who was in charge of checking my luggage pointed to a café, asking me if I liked coffee. I said I did, and that I usually had Nescafé [instant coffee]. Then he asked me why my bag was so heavy, and if he could check it. . . . After doing so, he cried out, "But what is wrong with you? You go to great lengths to export a hundred copies of the Bible to Geneva, but couldn't you figure out they are published in Geneva?" I answered, "You asked me about coffee in its processed form, yet coffee comes from Africa. It is the same thing with the Bible—it may be printed in Europe, [but] it still comes from Africa."

What is significant in this story is not the pointlessness of bringing back to Switzerland books that were printed there, but the meaning assigned to this act. The fact that the Bible was translated into Kikongo situates the answer in the Kimbanguist worldview, particularly that of the church members who contend that Kikongo is the original language of humanity and thus the language of the biblical patriarchs. This consecration of the Kikongo language is clearly part of the process of appropriation of the Bible by the Kimbanguists. However, this belief is not part of the official dogma and does not seem to be shared unanimously by the members of the church, which includes many different ethnic and linguistic groups. Indeed, since language is in many cases, an extremely significant marker of ethnicity and a very strong factor in maintaining a feeling of belongingness to a particular

community and of separation from the rest,³⁰ if the church officially identified Kikongo as the original language, it would place this language above the rest and seem to minimize the other linguistic and (therefore) ethnic groups, which would weaken the community bonds that Diangienda had insisted on consolidating and preserving. Neither in his sermons to the church members nor in inspired hymns was he ever heard to dwell on the linguistic issue. On the contrary, he avoided taking sides in ethnic matters and always encouraged the church members to pray in their own mother tongues. He also encouraged the young Kimbanguists pursuing higher education to learn international languages, such as English, French, and Spanish, and in an official statement about the EJCSK's position, he said:

Thus the Church of Christ on Earth through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu condemns all tribal, regional and racial arrogance. It hopes for the furtherance of a new humanity in the world, which brings people closer together irrespective of their race, tribe or regional loyalty and whatever their colour of skin or their social position may be. This emphasis on a new humanity which condemns all kinds of racial arrogance shows clearly that the Kimbanguists cannot be accused of "hatred of foreigners" or "hatred of the white." It also shows that the church is not the prerogative of the Bakongo tribe, as is sometimes still claimed today. This is a church which is conscious of its "world mission," hence its name, the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu.³¹

Still, it is worth noting that Diangienda and his two brothers gave Kikongo names to a number of people, both members and nonmembers of the church and both members and nonmembers of the Kongo group. This has resulted in certain names being identifiable markers of a Kimbanguist identity. In the Kimbanguist worldview, when a person is given a name by the spiritual leader—a relatively unusual occurrence—the traditional African understanding of individual personhood is displaced by a Christian theological significance. The two value systems are thus mingled. The process is not new, since the subjects of the king of Kongo had integrated Portuguese first names into their own naming processes. A brief look at the names borne by Kimbanguists may give a better understanding of an identification process that has a direct impact on individual personhood and includes the person thus named in the church's global project of identity reconstruction.

Simon Kimbangu's parents gave him a name meaning "the one who reveals hidden truths." When it was his turn to participate in the traditional naming process, he gave his sons similarly meaningful names in Kikongo: Kisolokele ("It was revealed") Dialungana ("It was accomplished"), and Diangienda ("It's gone").³² It is also worth mentioning that family names, in the Western sense of the term, were not common in the traditional Congolese naming process. This is why none of Simon Kimbangu's sons bore the name "Kimbangu," just as Simon Kimbangu himself never took the last name of his own father, Kuyela. However, when Diangienda and his siblings succeeded their father, they initiated a new system, which both disrupted and maintained the traditional naming patterns. Their children all bear their names, but in a new form since the names of the fathers come first: all of Kisolokele's children have names beginning with "Kisolokele," while those of Dialungana have "Kiangani" as their first names, and those of Diangienda have names beginning with "Diangienda." It seems that family names have taken on a new significance for the founder's grandchildren, who bear the names of their fathers, who are regarded as superhuman beings by Kimbanguists. The descendants of the "three papas" are also considered to varying degrees to be the reincarnations of their own fathers. They insist on being called "Kimbangu": the founder's name has been transformed into a concept, designating his biological lineage and possibly his reincarnation in one of his direct descendants. One last important point is the near-absence of any mention of the figure of the maternal uncle, in spite of its vital importance in the Kongo kinship system.

The new naming process is not limited to the family circle, however. Besides the unsurprisingly high numbers of boys named Simon or Joseph or Charles in Kimbanguist families, several members of the church either were given their names at birth or were renamed by the spiritual leaders. Indeed, many parents now take their newborn babies to the spiritual leader for him to name them. This is why many members of the Kimbanguist Church bear Kikongo names while not belonging to the Kongo ethnic group. These names may be grouped in the following way:

- I. Circumstances of birth. A well-known story in the Kimbanguist Church features a three-month-old girl who was abandoned by her biological mother behind the house of Diangienda in Kinshasa. The spiritual leader adopted the baby, naming her Touzola Divengi Nzambi, which means "Let us love what God created." Likewise, Ndoko, whose name means "curse," had been given this traditional name by his

mother in the hope of countering fate, for he had been born after two stillborn boys. When Ndoko converted to Kimbanguism in his fifties, Diangienda renamed him Lulendo Lua Nzambi, which means “God’s pride.” I received this testimony from his son who, at age thirty-three, had kept this name for himself too.

Other names are evocative of less tragic circumstances. For instance, children born to parents who were thought to be barren and who were cured by the spiritual leaders of the church were given the names Bafuidinsoni (“They are embarrassed”), Lusakumunu (“blessing”), Malungidi (“It has been accomplished”), Nsilulu (“promise”), and Wavuezola (“The one who was neglected”—a name with clear biblical symbolism).

2. Events. George Harris, an African American Baptist from Atlanta who visited Kimbanguist communities in the DRC in 2000, caused a great deal of emotion among Kimbanguists.³³ He asked Dialungana to reveal the name his ancestors bore. He was told it was Diambu Dia Kiese, which means “happy event,” and so he returned to Atlanta with a new name. Another visitor from the African diaspora, a British man called Raymond Reynolds, who was married to a woman from the DRC, testified on the same day that he had had a vision of Simon Kimbangu asking him to go to Nkamba and change his name to Dimonekene, which means “It became visible” or “It was revealed.” Both testimonies were videotaped and circulated among Kimbanguist communities in December 2000.
3. Context of a person’s birth. While Diangienda was busy organizing the return of Congolese pastors and their families to Brazzaville in the midst of the Katanga war in 1964, my older brother was born in the hospital of Gombe Matadi, thus keeping our parents from fleeing the country. The spiritual leader, seeing my father, Antoine Mokoko, the next morning, asked him why he had not left yet, and my father answered that they had just had a baby boy. “He then put his hand into his pocket and retrieved a piece of paper which read ‘Kayendako,’” my mother, Joséphine Elo, testified several decades later. The meaning of the name in Kikongo is “He had not left.”
4. Prophecies. In the Kimbanguist Church, the 1990s were marked by a series of prophecies made by the spiritual leaders, especially Diangienda. While he was in the midst of this euphoria, parents came with their newborn babies for him to name them as usual, and these children received prophetic names, including Mbotumonamo (“We’ll

see”), Molueki (“It is coming”), Munantangu (“There will be a time”), Tufinamene (“We are getting close”), Diakubikua (“What is prepared”), and Situakembela (“We’ll rejoice”).

5. The mission or task of the child. “When I was seven, my mother took me to see Papa Diangienda. When he saw me, he called me Mbuta, and encouraged my family to call me this way.”³⁴ Mbuta means “elder” or “big brother.” This particular church member is renowned for his gift of receiving “songs from the angels” and sometimes puzzles other members of the community.

These names and others become part of both the families’ names and the process of identity reconstruction. They are often read as clues to individual life stories.

Even if it seems that the contemporary Kimbanguist naming process implies a distance from the Congolese cultural context, in reality it has been only a semantic evolution. In the Kimbanguist worldview, a newborn child may be perceived either as an angel or as the reincarnation of a biblical ancestor. But being the reincarnation of an ancestor (or, rather, of God) is only thinkable if the child is one of the descendants of Simon Kimbangu, for he is considered to be the only envoy of Jesus whose mission is to liberate Black men and women from the curse attached to original sin.

8

A THEOLOGY OF IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Belief in witchcraft is not commonly accepted in the Christian faith as defined today by the Catholic and Protestant churches in the West; it is considered paradoxical, if not contradictory, for a Christian to profess a belief in witchcraft. In African countries, missionaries combated practices of witchcraft by designating them as pagan beliefs. Colonial missionizing included an ideology of conversion rooted in the labeling of Africans as pagans, as the French ethnologist André Mary emphasized: “The first task of colonial missionizing is the demonization of cultural difference.”¹ Yet, as the Congolese sociologist Joseph Tonda explained, “it is still in an ethnocentric manner that the civilizing God chooses to treat the genie of witchcraft, by fashioning the latter into the representative of the entirety of Black mankind, who must be freed of its grip through conversion.”² Consequently, the definitions of godliness, witchcraft, and healing must be examined, since salvation is inescapably tied with normative, racialized understandings of civilization, purity, health, and cleanliness.

While ethnologists and historians evidence the difficulties in defining witchcraft, Kimbanguists find explanations for it in the scriptures. The book of Genesis offers an interpretation of the origins of humanity and evokes the transgression of divine law by the forebears Adam and Eve, who ate a mysterious “forbidden fruit.” But the biblical symbolism does not explain the stakes of their fall from grace. Kimbanguist doctrine, as developed by Diangienda, offers its own interpretation for this founding myth,

connecting it to the Trinitarian dogma and the origin of evil. He explained that Lucifer, who, as in classic Christian doctrine, used to be the highest ranking of angels and God's favorite intermediary with them, had fallen from grace after refusing to take orders from the Holy Spirit and acknowledge that the three persons of the Trinity are one God. Diangienda justified the eternal banishment of demons and their leader by quoting Matthew 12:31–32, where blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is presented as the one unforgivable sin. In his subsequent exegesis of the fall of Adam and Eve, man appears as a superior creature to angels so as to resist Lucifer's attacks. This is successful for decades, until Eve is given to Adam as a companion and forgets their renewed covenant with God. This is how their "eating of the fruit" is understood by Kimbanguists: "When she listened to the voice of the serpent, Eve received witchcraft from Satan; and in her turn, she passed it on to her husband, Adam, and their eyes were opened and they knew they were naked."³

Witchcraft—a key aspect of sub-Saharan African cultures—is thus designated as the original sin and identified in the Bible as the root cause of the predicament of Africans and African-descended people. It is not really surprising that this cultural notion was chosen to explain the metaphor of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, given that many personal testimonies and academic studies on African spiritualities and beliefs concur in identifying the "gift of double sight" as proof of initiation to witchcraft or of an understanding of invisible realities. One of the best-known examples concerns a French Catholic missionary, the Jesuit Éric de Rosny, who, after living in Cameroon among the Douala ethnic group for decades, spent ten years being initiated into occult practices between 1970 and 1980. In the book he wrote about this experience, he related what he had been told by the Cameroonian conjure doctor who had initiated him: "We are the ones who can open our eyes at night, in the *ndimsi*. The *ndimsi*, then, is just like being in the light. That's what the *ndimsi* is all about. You can see what's going on in Europe, what's going on over there and in other places too, while staying home all the time. That's what the *ndimsi* is like: you see good and evil."⁴ In another text, Rosny summarized his personal experience in the following terms:

The night-time activities of a local *nganga* [conjure man] could not but attract me, since I was looking for a path to further penetrate the otherworld my students lived in. I later understood that he interpreted my regular visits to him as a wish to become his disciple. . . .

His name was Din. . . . Din was the first and only person who took me beyond the stage of simple knowledge by deciding to “open my eyes” in a ritual introducing me to the practice of his art. To do so, he worked on the eyes of a goat, in conformity with the customs of his tradition. This was completed by August 30, 1975.⁵

Sonia Lazareff, who earned fame in France as a psychic, wrote about her initiation to witchcraft in Ivory Coast: “I accepted everything, for my goal had remained unchanged—I wanted to be initiated, master the secrets of Africa, and become empowered to possess the fetishes created for me and programmed for me. . . . [A]t first I did not experience much. Then I received waves as powerful as electric shocks. The curtain of shadows was ripped apart, and I could see.”⁶

While witchcraft is an object of attraction and positive interest for Europeans, it remains a source of terror for people in Congo and the rest of Africa. What Sinda wrote in 1972 still rings true: “Witchcraft has branched out even into the cities inhabited by Africans raised in the European style. Today still, witchcraft is a cause of panic in such milieus, where people fear it more than any other harm.”⁷ Hence it is not surprising that what is understood by an overwhelming majority of Africans as the ultimate tragedy and the timeless embodiment of calamity should be interpreted in the Kimbanguist cosmogony as the original sin and the cause for the curse of Blackness. The biblical episode of the curse of Africans and their descendants through their ancestor Ham (Genesis 9:24–27), which was used and propagated by Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century (see chapter 2), is appropriated and redefined by the Kimbanguist faith against the backdrop of its project of identity reconstruction. Indeed, Diangienda first celebrated Africanness as revealing the origins of humankind; then he gave Blackness a negative charge by blaming Adam and Eve for the original sin of witchcraft, making Blacks the bearers of the resulting curse. In this case, combating witchcraft amounts to challenging social classification, since it is by equating witchcraft with their own original sin that Kimbanguists, as Africans, became conscious of their oppressed situation and the negative identity that has been foisted on them.

The difference linked to ethnicity may be steeped in a sense of shame, if it is stigmatized as a negative identity, or it may manifest as self-assertiveness or a claim for official recognition, if it is redefined as a positive identity.⁸ Kimbanguist identity is both a racial and a religious one, since the Kimbanguist faith embraces racial consciousness. Yet Blackness is perceived

as a negative identity while the Kimbanguist identity is positive. The negative identity does not disappear but is transformed in the processes of self-identification and in the critique of Blacks' subordinate status, since Kimbanguist theology analyzes the worldwide oppression of Blacks to first establish hypotheses and then to offer metaphysical interpretations for this situation. As already mentioned, this predicament is understood as resulting from a divine curse caused by the original sin—witchcraft—of the forebears Adam and Eve. The existence of a curse is said to be proven both by the lack of participation of Blacks in discoveries and inventions at every turning point in the history of humankind and by their oppression and victimization by the dominant Other.

In Kimbanguist racial consciousness, the negative image of Blacks bequeathed by European missionaries has been internalized, and believers have consequently accepted their place in the social order, seeming to participate in their own domination and oppression. To an outsider, it may be surprising and even shocking to see an African-initiated church embracing as a fact the curse of Ham; yet here, the appropriation of the negative identity is part of the construction of a renewed identity. By asserting the curse of Blacks, Kimbanguists, as Black men and women, define themselves as objects of study and problems to be solved. Internalizing the negative image is combined with appropriating Christianity to eventually engage them in a new interpretation of the Bible and the creation of a better-structured identity.

The prophetic movement initiated by Simon Kimbangu still includes a strong affirmation of Blackness, as it did at its inception, but today it offers a positive-negative dualism. Kimbanguism, as presented by the spiritual leader Diangienda, perceives itself as a type of "Christianity . . . resulting from the sum of the actions and teachings of Simon Kimbangu,"⁹ and as such, it perfectly corresponds to Bastide's definition of syncretism: a "re-interpretation of the Christian message through the African genius and sensitivity."¹⁰ In agreement, Martin pointed out, "Kimbanguism is not only based on a mere acceptance of the Western frame of mind and formulations, but it constitutes an African expression of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rooted in African tradition and embodied in cultural and ritual patterns."¹¹

The relation of Kimbanguists to Blackness appears clearly in their interpretation of the Christian message. Thanks to the existence of an independent religious institution, Blackness is no longer defined from the outside but is perpetually (re)constructed outside of the White gaze. As Pierre Bourdieu remarked, "The veritable miracle produced by acts of institution lies

undoubtedly in the fact that they manage to make consecrated individuals believe that their existence is justified, that their existence serves some purpose."¹² Bourdieu also observed that the representation of the social system is not a given, but the result of countless processes of construction.¹³ The negative image of Blacks framed by the Kimbanguist religion is distinct from that defined by European Christianity, not only because it is dynamic and not static, but also because it is constructed within the processes of interaction with the dominant Other, the White man.

The image of Whites in the Kimbanguist mind dates back to the founder's childhood. As noted earlier, Simon Kimbangu's aunt Kinzembo was the only person in her village to have hosted the Reverends Comber and Cameron, while the other villagers were persecuting the missionaries, whom they considered to be invaders. A well-known anecdote in the Kimbanguist Church tells about Rev. Cameron giving little Kimbangu his blessing and presenting him with a knife. That Kinzembo—who is still featured as one of the icons of Kimbanguism—not only offered shelter to a White fugitive, but also allowed her nephew to accept his blessing, offers ample evidence that in spite of the actual oppression suffered by her people, she did not have a radically negative perception of White people. Kimbangu's choice to become a catechist in the Baptist Church was not incidental, since his aunt had been the first convert of the missionaries she had rescued. Kimbangu would eventually change popular views of both Whiteness and Blackness. While acknowledging the technological gap separating the two races, he promised all Blacks a better future in his famous prophecy "the White man shall become black and the Black man shall become white," without demonizing the oppressor. Although he had every reason to hate all Whites, having been jailed for life by the Belgian colonial authorities, Kimbangu consistently preached nonviolence.

Still, Kimbangu did not leave his successors and followers with any explicit theological guidelines from which they could develop a perception of Whites. These only became articulated in the teachings of Diangienda. The reconstruction of Blackness in Kimbanguist theology is achieved thanks to the confrontation of sameness and Otherness. While, in many cases, the Other is unknown, for the Kimbanguists, the Other is not only known but named—*mundele*, which means "White person" in Lingala. This may be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it may signal the paucity of terms indicating racial differences in African languages. On the other hand, it may be read as a reassertion of identity on a plane other than pseudo-scientific racial classification. The French sociologist Pierre-Jean

Simon argued that racist thinking and doctrines, including a “scientific racism and ideology meant to justify such practices and policies,” are the origin of the idea of races in the first place.¹⁴

Kimbanguism does not reject the logic of classifying races; its racial doctrine is derived from missionary rhetoric and the colonization experience, which are reinterpreted in its own identity project. My analysis of Diangienda’s sermons and messages and of inspired hymns reveals that only two races are under consideration: the White race (*mundele*) and the Black race (*moyindo*). As a result, Kimbanguist identity is built in contrast with the White man, for whoever discusses Whiteness also discusses Blackness. The Kimbanguist perspective has three distinct images of Whites: first, the White man as the descendant or sibling of the Black man; second, the White man as the recipient of God’s blessing; and finally, the White man divorced from God.

The image of the White man as a descendant or sibling of the Black man derives from the dogma that the first man—Adam—was Black. Diangienda asserted, “The Black man is the origin of the other men; he is the one who gave birth to the other races.”¹⁵ Thus, Kimbanguism consciously or unconsciously enters the logic of racial classification. Its claim of superiority is focused on the anteriority of Blacks in the history of humanity, rather than framed in terms of moral or intellectual hierarchy. Africa’s prominence as the cradle of humankind holds a central place in Kimbanguist representations and psyches.

The image of the “blessed White man” stands in contrast with that of the “cursed Black man.” Here, the biblical episode of the usurpation of the birthright and blessing of Esau by his twin brother, Jacob (Genesis 25:23), is used to justify the lack of participation of Africans in technological revolutions, as well as the subordination of one race by the other. When visiting the Kimbanguist congregations of Kinshasa, the French pastor Jacques Marion, from Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church in Korea, prostrated himself at Diangienda’s feet three times in public and said, “Your Eminence, I am not sure I can call you my brother, for my father killed yours.” Diangienda accepted him and acknowledged him as his brother, explaining that it was up to Blacks to rebuild “the spiritual link” with God: “It won’t be done by force, but we have to do our penance so that God may give it to us” and the gap may be bridged.¹⁶

The White person who broke the ties with God is the third representation of Whiteness in the Kimbanguist psyche. Certain Whites were identified by Diangienda as dealing in witchcraft, but in a modern form: “We are

the ones who inherited witchcraft, but the White man transformed it and became a magician, a Rosicrucian, a Freemason. He knows that his divorce from God is already a fact."¹⁷ In this case, the image of Whites that prevails in the Kimbanguist mind is that of the White man who not only errs but takes pride in his separation from the grace of God.

Thus, the Kimbanguist representations of Whites are ambiguous and contradictory, since they imply that Whites are both the descendants and the younger brothers of Blacks; that Whites are blessed (as evidenced by their scientific inventions and technical progress) but also cursed by God (due to their appropriation of witchcraft); and that Whites are both tied to and separated from God. Yet Kimbanguist believers do not blame God or Whites, but rather Blacks, for being the cause of all suffering around the world, since Adam and Eve were Black and received witchcraft from Satan, which they passed down to all their descendants. The following inspired hymn (received in Lingala) exemplifies this tenet:

How is it that you, man, are meditating
 On your suffering, to try and find the means
 To remedy it?
 Why is it that, between the two races in the world,
 The White one is rejoicing and the Black one in pain
 Oh, why is it so?
 Adam and Eve, the ancestors of all mankind,
 Committed a sin on the earth
 For which God punished them.
 This punishment, to this day on the earth—
 Tell me which race suffers from its consequences?

Chorus: It's you, race of snakes!
 You, Black people!
 You refuse to abide
 By my commandments!

I sent my Son to death for you,
 But you won't meditate on this.
 The Holy Spirit also came to you,
 But you won't meditate on this.
 My will, children, is that there should be on earth
 Only one religion.

My will, children, is that there should be on earth
Only one head.
My will, children, is that there should be on earth
Only one language.

This hymn, like many others, expresses a theology of Blackness that brings radically new elements to Christianity. Here, the believers are told of the remedies to solve the issues of Black people. It depicts Blacks and Whites as part of the same humankind, stemming from the Black forebears Adam and Eve, and traces the history of humanity from the Edenic beginnings to the original sin. Positive identity, as defined by the Kimbanguists, remains tied to Blackness, but it is to be understood mainly from a religious perspective, with particular emphasis on the notion that Blacks preexisted Whites. Aware of the consequences for Blacks of their oppressed status, Diangienda preached the following parable about humanization on returning from the 1990 WCC general conference:

[Let's take] two children—one White and the other Black. Isolate them so that there's only the two of them, seeing no one else, hearing no one else's voice nor any language, and being fed automatically by means of machines. . . . When they turn three or four, what language shall they speak—the language of the Whites or that of the Blacks? When they start looking at each other, which of the two will fear the other? . . . On this point, there is a secret. . . . Let's follow the Commandments, Love, and Good Works, and we'll discover the real secrets which separate us and hamper our progress.¹⁸

While humanization commonly includes the acquisition of culture through the process of socialization, the path shown by Diangienda also transforms it into a process of liberation from the mental conditioning inherited from centuries of racial oppression. Given the Kimbanguist reformulation of identity parameters, it is clear in this context that the Black child, who embodies the ancestor of humankind, is compelled to take the leadership position instead of his junior—the White child. Thus, the quest for a positive Black identity implies a new understanding of Black-White relations. Likewise, Kimbanguists consider Blacks to be unable to invent anything in the fields of technology and science as a result of original sin. Whites are not blamed for the hardship of Blacks, but God is the receiver of Kimbanguists' laments about the sinfulness of the Black race and its

subsequent subordination to Whites, as shown in the following hymn (received in Kikongo):

My God,
 My God,
 My God and Father,
 I, Black person, have become
 Like game lost in the forest.
 Am I the only person who ever sinned in this world?
 My Lord, White people too have sinned!
 I was the first man in the world,
 But you abandoned and forgot about me.
 You gave intelligence to the Whites,
 And they have invented weapons to get rid of me.
 I am Black, Lord,
 Am I the only person who ever sinned in this world?
 You have punished me to this day,
 But White people too killed Your Son in this world!
 Yet for the sin they committed, they received blessings.
 Father, I thank you.

This hymn reflects the Kimbanguist understanding of the brotherhood between Blacks and Whites. Here, it is clearly implied that God is a father to both Blacks and Whites, but the elder race suffers more for similar or lesser sins than those committed by the dominant race, whose technological advancement is emphasized as evidence of God's blessing.

Such a distinctive perspective on Black spiritual identity is worth comparing with other theologies claiming links with African independence. While, for Kimbanguists, the Black man is the ancestor or elder brother of the White man, for the followers of the prophet William Wadé Harris, the White man is the elder. Harrists hold God and Whites responsible for this state of things—God, because when creating the Black man, he did so inconsiderately, and the White man, for not playing his role as the elder brother since he refused to share with his younger brother what he had received from God. Albert Atcho, one of the successors of Harris, concluded, “We have remained ignorant and always forced to borrow everything from the Whites. Although we keep saying we are on an equal footing, we never created anything by ourselves.”¹⁹ Jean-Pierre Dozon, a researcher of Ivorian prophetic movements, similarly emphasized “this

belief in one God who had freed [Whites] from fetishism and witchcraft, allowing them as a consequence to produce ever more new and smart machines, contrary to 'Blacks.'"²⁰

The Bwiti movement of Gabon also offers elements for comparison. The Bwitists see Jesus as the new Adam or the new Noah, who came to liberate Blacks from the curse linked to their original witchcraft practices. But they believe that Whites killed Jesus to prevent him from giving Blacks the secret of divine power, a crime for which they are blamed.²¹ Thus, Africans who belong to the Bwiti movement believe that Jesus came to redeem Blacks. Their need for identity reconstruction persuades them that Whites have confiscated the secret of God's power, which brings them to blame Whites for Blacks' present suffering.

Likewise, the Nation of Islam focuses on the reconstruction of Black identity and offers a good comparison with Kimbanguism insofar as it also gives a new interpretation of the Bible, considered by Black Muslims to be a source of inspiration. The Nation of Islam's version of creation also extols Africa as the cradle of the human race.²² In the words of Malcolm X, "Original Man was black, in the continent called Africa where the human race had emerged on the planet Earth."²³ Yet in this case, "Africa" is identified as either Egypt or Mecca in present-day Saudi Arabia. Black Muslims also focus on Esau and Jacob, but the Nation of Islam infers that Whites have an evil nature,²⁴ whereas the Kimbanguist Church reads the story as evidence of God's blessing of Whites. Both sets of beliefs reject White Freemasons. Black Muslims believe that they are "White secret societies plotting for the annihilation of the original man,"²⁵ while, for Kimbanguists, Freemasonry is a product of witchcraft, which they consider to be quintessentially African.

Kimbanguists go even further in their representation of races, since they believe that no color line is impossible to trespass. The power of God or the devil can indeed make a person physically White while being Black on the inside, and vice versa. Kimbanguists routinely share among themselves anecdotes about the victims of witchcraft sold to the West, which Western people find unbelievable but which fit with African worldviews. In the commonly held view of witchcraft, a person may be physically dead, while continuing with his or her life on earth in a different place, where he or she is compelled to work for a sorcerer. Not only are sorcerers able to take the shape of any animal, but they can also turn other human beings into animals or sell them far away from their hometowns, giving them a different family and ethnic group.

The spiritual leaders of the Kimbanguist Church have not rejected this belief. Once, when speaking to Marie-Louise Martin, the dean of the Kimbanguist divinity school, Diangienda addressed her in Lingala. Martin, who was on her knees like all the church members, did not seem to understand his words. On seeing this, he stopped and resumed in French, “Mama Miss Marie-Louise Martin, you have been living in Zaire for quite a long time now, so you certainly grasped what I said in Lingala. . . . Many of the White people we see in Kinshasa are not Whites.” His linking of the two concepts implied that Martin herself might not be White, in spite of her skin color. Then, he told the congregation of students and instructors an anecdote about one of his friends from the colonial period, a Black sergeant major who regularly morphed into a White man in order to eat at fancy restaurants forbidden to natives. One morning, Diangienda had to help the man, who had gotten stuck in his white skin and risked being absent without leave.²⁶

While based on the belief in witchcraft, this worldview is partly comparable to the phenomenon of racial “passing” in the United States, which consisted of letting oneself be identified as a White person in order to escape race-based discrimination.²⁷ Although the goal is the same—accessing White privilege and challenging its unfair, exclusive nature—Americans who passed usually did so in an irreversible process, cutting ties with their relatives and often moving to a different state where their family background was not known. In Diangienda’s story and in Kimbanguist belief, it seems that the trickster is capable of two distinct appearances and is relatively free to choose which one he or she will use, depending on the context. Family ties are not severed, and the person may enjoy a “normal” life as a full-fledged member of each racial group, without being asked any questions, until a confrontation with a seer combating witchcraft results in his or her being trapped in the usurped appearance.

Privilege may also cross the racial line in the other direction. An anecdote related by Kimbangu’s eldest son, Kisolokele, is about a White man who recognized the godliness of Simon Kimbangu. That White man was none other than the Belgian administrator Léon Morel, who had sentenced Kimbangu. He was receiving treatment at the same Belgian hospital as Kisolokele, who claimed that he saw Morel repenting for the wrongs inflicted on the Congolese and particularly Kimbangu, whom he was terrified to meet after dying. This story obviously reinforces the Kimbanguists’ belief that the founder of their church was more than human. From this perspective—notwithstanding the reality of the Belgian oppression of Kimbangu and his followers as enforced by Morel—what meaning can be given to

such an incident taking place in Belgium, far away from the country's former colony? The meeting in person between Kimbangu's eldest son and Morel on his deathbed seems providential, and Morel's confession has implications on two levels.

First, in spite of his Whiteness and Catholic faith, Morel acknowledged that Blacks are part of the human race, and he believed in sharing a common God with the formerly colonized subjects—even the Kimbanguists, whom he suppressed in their religious expression—and in the next world. Second, his qualms indicate that he believed not only that Kimbangu was well situated in the next world, but also that Kimbangu would greet him after his own death—which explains his confession to the doctors. In the Catholic faith, the last sacraments entail a confession by the dying person of his or her sins and an effort to make peace with fellow human beings. The fact that members of the Kimbanguist Church attended Morel's funeral may also be read as a sign of their acceptance of his plea for forgiveness. At

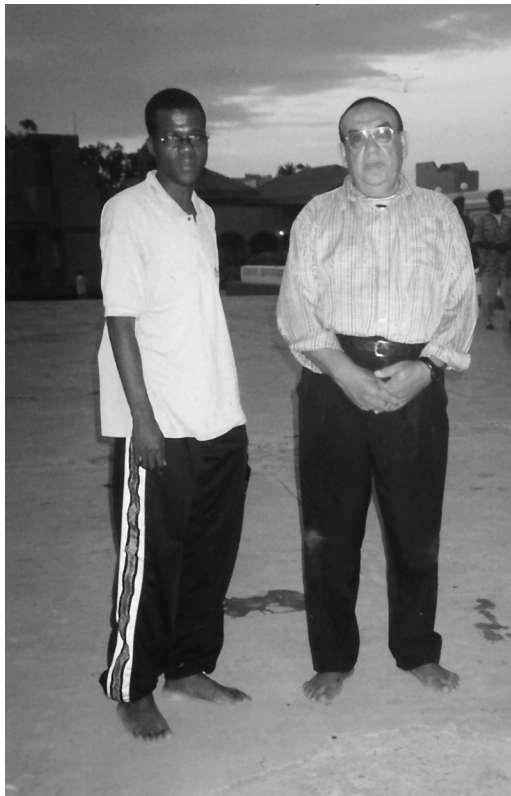


Figure 15. Rev. Angelo Rodrigues Figueiredo (*right*) with the author in Nkamba, November 2000.



Figure 16. U.S. nuclear physicist Kristin Shrader-Frechette kneels in front of Simon Kimbangu's portrait. According to the photographer, she wanted this picture taken. Believers inferred she had seen an apparition of Simon Kimbangu prior to the WCC conference on nuclear energy and ethics held at the Kimbanguist Center in Kinshasa, October 16–22, 1989.

any rate, the remorse of a former colonist was another means for Kimbanguists to further buttress their faith in Simon Kimbangu as an incarnation of God and in racial reconciliation.

The Kimbanguist understanding of races goes further than cases of tricksters using witchcraft to change skins. It is a metaphysical notion that escapes biological control; in the Kimbanguist worldview, a person may very well look White but be Black inside, and vice versa. Diangienda's words of wisdom have led most Kimbanguist believers to perceive certain



Figure 17. Indian ecofeminist Corinne Kumar D'Souza receives a blessing from Diangienda during the symposium on nuclear energy in Kinshasa. According to the photographer, she asked for the blessing after Diangienda's prayer healed her comatose mother.

Whites as actually being Blacks, which can cause cross-cultural misunderstanding when a White person joins the Kimbanguist Church. In 2000 I interviewed Angelo Rodrigues Figueiredo, a Kimbanguist pastor who many Kimbanguists say is the same person as a Black man that his uncle supposedly sold to Portugal many years ago. Figueiredo is a native of Portugal, married, and the father of two. His conversion and settling in Nkamba are understood by most Kimbanguists as evidence of his homecoming. When asked how he identified racially, he answered:

I am White, as you can see! My father is Portuguese, and so is my mother. But I came over here to make a good living, that's all. I am a mechanic, and I made good money. But now I know that I came here to fulfill a mission. . . . I haven't found a "home" here. I have my family in Portugal; my wife and children live there. . . . I was never sold! I used to have my father, and my mother, and my grandfather, a whole family. . . . When my mother had me, she was in her thirties, and I'm an only child. . . . The first time I met His Eminence Diangienda, he told me, "I know you!"²⁸

Undeniably, Figueiredo's choice to live in Nkamba testified to the fact that he deeply believed in Kimbanguism. While most native Congolese are reluctant to do so, due to the lack of food and the hardship linked to a life of prayer and asceticism—which is precisely what led Figueiredo's wife and children to return to Portugal—he decided to live as an outsider in a group where race-centered discourse is the norm. Yet he adamantly denied being Black. At the same time, he looked unsurprised to be asked this question, which seems to indicate he was often confronted with the assumption. Possibly, being a pastor, he did not want to offend a community with which he shares strong bonds of faith. He claimed to have received from Diangienda some secrets that he absolutely refused to share, and said he still saw and communicated with the dead spiritual leader, although Diangienda passed away in July 1992. Figueiredo's eyes brimmed with tears when he answered my questions about his conversion to Kimbanguism.

Thus, whether they like it or not, any White person who converts to Kimbanguism is identified as Black. A Belgian woman interviewed in Nkamba by the Kimbanguist press explicitly gave credit to the Kimbanguist metaphysics of race. Defining herself as "very Kimbanguist," she testified on her 1980s conversion:

February 8, 1985, exactly. . . . At first we came to Congo because of financial interests, and then we were introduced to Kimbanguism. . . . Papa Diangienda received us early in the morning after we arrived in the center. . . . It really felt as if we had never been away from each other. When I stepped into his house, it felt as if I knew the place already . . . and it felt the same when I came to Nkamba. [There] were places I had already seen; but I can't tell you why or how come. That's what I said to Papa Diangienda. So he told me, "Maybe, in your former life, we had already met here." . . . If I could, I would stay here and live with you all, because I may be a mundele [White woman] but inside of me I am a moyindo [Black woman]. This is what I want you to know.²⁹

This testimony introduces elements that tend to disqualify the primacy of phenotypical features such as skin color, since the woman is blonde and fair-skinned, with blue eyes. The hypothesis of reincarnation, suggested by Diangienda, is here associated with a worldview where each soul, or deep self, is assigned a given color.

Hence, the representation of Whites in Kimbanguist beliefs is consistent with their understanding of Blackness. It is positive rather than negative and shapes the entire Kimbanguist theology, even though the latter was elaborated in response to White control. Consequently, Kimbanguism should not be considered to be a racist religion; if racist elements appear in its expressions, they reflect the awareness of Blacks' oppressed status rather than any focus on anti-White action. Martin observed in the 1960s: "People of all tribes, languages, races and colours are welcome as visitors or full members of the Church. That this welcome extends to white people is a miracle when we think of the forty years of persecution through a European colonial administration. There are no traces of xenophobia in the Church."³⁰ In 1991, when the city of Kinshasa was pillaged by both soldiers and its own residents, many Westerners were manhandled and robbed. Diangienda reacted by warning his followers against theft as a rule, but also against violence toward Whites, saying, "If we are suffering, it is not the White man's fault. Don't be violent with them, for you [Black men] are the root of all suffering in this world."³¹ Finally, even though Whites may sometimes be held responsible for the problems of Blacks, they are never blamed. In a hymn received in Lingala, Whites beg God to be lenient with Blacks:

We are calling You, Lord,
 We are calling You, Lord,
 We are calling You, come and solve this problem!

Tenor: We have searched around the world:
 No other race has ever suffered as much as yours
 It is true that you, black-skinned people, are cursed

Tenor: We Whites are rejoicing, while Blacks
 Know only suffering
 Eating is difficult, sleeping and walking are difficult

Tenor: The people we had eaten³²
 Today have become the race of God;
 But they don't even give it a thought.

This hymn discloses the hidden dimension of things and the mechanisms of human relations. The angel who is believed to have transmitted the song insists on Whites' feeling of guilt; they call on the Lord to put an end to the effects of the divine curse on the Black race. The hymn also asserts that Blacks, although historically dominated by Whites, have become God's favorite race—but without realizing it.

The Kimbanguist process of identity reconstruction consistently hinges on the blaming of the Black race, which is perceived to be responsible for original sin and which must be made aware of its redemption by Simon Kimbangu. The next stage in this theology is to offer Blacks a positive identity through the Kimbanguist faith. Kimbanguists understand the world as being neither eternal nor immutable, but a product of history whose destiny is to be transformed by the volition of God. Hence, their attitude toward the current state of things is determined by their expectation of an impending sociopolitical revolution led and waged by God himself. The cornerstone of this revolution will be the shift from an oppressed status to a new status, understood as the primordial one because it will reinstate Black people in the position of the Black forebears Adam and Eve and therefore in a position of seniority vis-à-vis Whites. In Congo, as in all African cultures and social systems, the status of elder implies not only privileges but duties toward the younger siblings. The firstborn has the right of inheritance and the management of family affairs, but also must absolutely be respected. With age, social recognition and prestige increase, until one becomes

revered as an ancestor after death—a sacred position that determines the preservation and happiness of the person’s descendants and sometimes of an entire community. Yet, if blessings may be passed down to future generations, the same is also true of stigma when the ancestors of a lineage have been sinful.

Among the factors that may help explain Kimbanguist messianism today, the first is the identification of Simon Kimbangu as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit in the shape of a Black man, whose goal is to liberate his brothers and sisters from both White oppression and the rule of Satan. The doctrine of original sin—without which, as shown earlier, there can be no understanding of the process of identity restoration—implies the acceptance of the negative part of Blackness and its remediation thanks to the recognition of Kimbangu as the savior and the Kimbanguist Church as the chosen people and the engine of the salvation of humankind. Thus, the Kimbanguist Church offers a rhetoric of globalization bearing on Black internationalism, which they understand as being shaped by the history of Black oppression—a persistent predicament that is considered to derive from a divine curse and is as such critiqued by believers. Another type of rhetoric harps on the Kimbanguist religion and its activities, and Kimbanguism is seen as both the remedy for Black oppression and the means for the reconstruction of Blackness. The following hymn in Lingala, sung by the GTKI choir, gives insight into the belief that this church is the only way to achieve these results:

God struck an agreement with Moses
 So that he should free the Children of Israel
 From the bondage of Satan,
 In Egypt’s land.
 Today He has struck an agreement with Kimbangu
 So that he should free the Black race
 From the bondage of Satan,
 On the African continent.
 Today, for you and me,
 What is the situation?
 Purify your heart,
 And God the Father will save you!
 Think of the suffering our ancestors
 Went through in prison!
 Here is my parable for you,

Followers of my Father:
 When an arrow has struck an animal,
 It does not return with nothing.
 These are my last words, oh, oh,

Tenor: This problem is not unknown
 To you, My children:
 It is the word I have spoken
 Since the beginning, oh,
 Stop your evildoing and you shall see joy, oh!

While Moses's mission is commonly understood as resulting from the punctual intervention of God into human affairs, in the Kimbanguist faith, this intervention did not come to an end after the deaths of Moses, Jesus, or the apostles. In the hymn above, the same God also sent Kimbangu to liberate Black people from Satan and their curse. Consequently, the end of the European colonial order was interpreted by the Kimbanguists as the fulfillment of one of Kimbangu's missions. This explains why they remain acutely aware of and interested in the evolution of the Congolese nations, sub-Saharan Africa, and the world at large. These aspects of Kimbanguist messianism were highlighted in Balandier's study: "They speak of God 'having now arrived in the Congo,' as the 'liberator' of the Congolese. 'God's presence does away with fear,' it justifies putting up with every kind of suffering and makes it possible to reject all other authority. God will reward the 'elect,' that is to say, the most zealous members, by giving them the 'first places.'"³³

A specific Kimbanguist mind-set has thus developed, with a strong belief in individual and collective salvation coming via supernatural means. In this perspective, Simon Kimbangu is constantly referred to as the ultimate messianic figure and the instrument of salvation. As Balandier insightfully summarized, "Through the transfiguration of a man—partly assimilated to God, a deity, or any other power—the transfiguration of history is expected to occur, abolishing an era and ushering in a new one."³⁴ This can be seen in the following hymn (received in Kikongo), sung by the choir of the *Groupe des guitaristes kimbanguistes*:

An event, an event, an event is impending
 An event will occur in this world
 Do not be surprised by it

Tenor: I will show my Kimbangu[ness] to the world
 Yet the world has not known me
 I am the one who led
 The children of Israel;
 I am the One who drowned
 Noah's generation;
 I am the One who destroyed
 Sodom and Gomorrah,
 And I am still the One leading
 This fourth generation [the present time]

Chorus: Miracles will occur in this world
 I would be quite idle if I did not warn you,
 If I did not announce it to you. Beware! (3 times)
 Hardship and happiness will occur all at once.

For Kimbanguists, the passion of Christ and the story of Moses were reenacted in the person of Simon Kimbangu, but from the perspective of the salvation of the Black race; Kimbangu is believed to have supernatural powers enabling him to trigger the expected transformations. This hymn from the 1990s has Kimbangu unambiguously revealing himself to be the God of the Bible. He also announces that history will unfurl again its fabric of hardship and happiness. This is the type of hymn that, along with the prophetic speeches of the leaders, contributes to maintaining the believers in an expectation of a messianic salvation, which is sustained by eschatological promises of happiness for the Black man—or, more precisely, the Kimbanguist person. Diangienda would often repeat these words: “Whether they like it or not, we [Kimbanguists] shall prevail” and “Truth will never turn into lies, nor lies into the truth.” Likewise, his elder brother and successor Dialungana used to say: “No matter how long the night may be, the sun always ends up rising.” Kimbanguist believers, with a mixture of hope and perseverance, thus keep expecting salvation in a context of global crisis. Froelich noted this millenarian element when he stressed that Kimbangu took advantage of his success to preach Christ’s message in these terms: “Christ will come soon, the dead will resurrect, Blacks will be very happy, and even more so than Whites,” and a “golden age” will begin on earth, which will benefit Blacks.³⁵

When studying the corpus of inspired hymns, one can see clearly that promises on the new status of Blacks remain preeminent, as in the following (sung in Lingala):

While we wait for the accomplishment of the promise,
 It is best for us to persevere!
 Among the temptations imposed by Satan
 Let us keep persevering!
 God only will help us in this battle
 But brother, you must persevere!
 See, joy is getting closer.
 O, Black man, rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice!
 Your punishment on earth will come to an end,
 Your tears will be dried up,
 Satan's buffeting will come to an end.
 O, Black man, rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice!
 See, joy is getting closer.

These lyrics, like many others, emphasize the new Black identity as expected by Kimbanguists. The hymn recommends perseverance through hardship. These promises are as inseparable from the identity and mission of Simon Kimbangu as from the salvation of the Black race. Indeed, Kimbangu is the one who, as God or messiah, will help and is already helping Blacks in their struggle for recognition in the eyes of the dominant Other.

When preaching about the Blackness of Adam and Eve and their being created in Nkamba, Diangienda did not offer his audiences any insight into biblical history or, more particularly, the history of the Jewish people. Nothing was said about when God's people moved from Nkamba, the forefathers' birthplace in the Congolese land, and the territories associated with the chosen people's history, such as Mount Sinai, or African territories, such as Egypt or Ethiopia, which are quite remote from Central Africa. This gap in the Kimbanguist reading of the Bible sometimes leads to ethnic, instead of religious, self-identification insofar as a parallel is made between the Jews and the Bakongo people. A recurrent thesis in Kimbanguist literature and oral material (such as lectures, roundtables, sermons, and debates) identifies the Bible's "children of Israel" with the Bakongo people. A number of Kongo sources that do not belong to the Kimbanguist Church also back this theory, even drawing linguistic parallels between Kikongo and Hebrew, thus encouraging a reinterpretation of the origins of the Jewish people.³⁶

The remarks of Pope John Paul II during his 1990 visit to Kenya are also abundantly commented on, since he encouraged Africans to seek authenticity in the following terms: "God is Black, and Christ himself is African."

The pope asserted that if “the sap is that of the universal Church, then the fruits also must have the taste of Africa.”³⁷ The writings of the famous Afrocentric theorist Cheikh Anta Diop from Senegal are also frequently quoted, since he too claimed that the biblical Hebrews were originally Black.

The need to identify with the chosen people of the Bible may be explained as a desire to appropriate the historical legitimacy of the Hebrew people and consequently have a positive self-image. An unwary outsider may be misled by strategies meant to give a better image of Kimbanguists and to portray them in a positive light, although it cannot be denied that the Jewish people of the scriptures, although persecuted for centuries, have benefited from a positive image, thanks to savior figures such as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, or even Jesus. However, Kimbangu never actually said that Jews were black-skinned, while Diangienda, without doing so either, summed up his own teachings by elaborating on the parable of the lost sheep. He applied the metaphor to Black people, emphasizing their oppressed status and the curse they have to cope with in order to raise awareness of the negativity associated with Blackness.³⁸ However, as Anthony Smith stressed, the association of ethnicity with religious notions of “purity,” “authenticity,” or chosenness transforms an ethnic group into a “sacred community.”³⁹ It may be contended that the ethnic dimension of the Kimbanguist community leads it to represent itself as God’s chosen people, with special ties binding it to God—read: Kimbangu—just like the Jewish people. It is essentially Blackness that is the *raison d’être* of the Kimbanguist religion.

Today, Kimbanguists are focused on searching the ruins of the former cathedral of Mbanza Kongo, which is also known as Kulumbimbi, from the Kikongo words *nkulu* (elder or lord) and *mbi* (evil). The place is called “ancestral evil” in reference to the biblical episode of the Tower of Babel, which is revisited in the Kimbanguist interpretation of the new status of Blacks. In this perspective, since Adam, the Black forefather, was created in Nkamba, later events such as the episode of the Tower of Babel took place in Angola. It was supposedly in Mbanza Kongo that Nimrod, a great Black king recast as a grand wizard, gathered around his throne a council of sorcerers with the aim of discovering God’s designs, which triggered divine wrath and linguistic confusion among human beings. The Kimbanguist Church is said to have asked Angolan authorities for a transfer of the property of the ruins, in order to add the former cathedral to the long list of Kimbanguist sacred places.

The historical dimension of this Catholic cathedral is nearly absent, however, from the concerns of Kimbanguist believers, who are much more

focused on theological speculation about the place itself. An eschatological expectation is apparent in the fact that the prophet Kimpa Vita herself has addressed the Kimbanguist community through inspired hymns, speaking about the significance of Kulumbimbi. In the one I heard, the prophet identifies herself as the person who was given by Kimbangu the mission of fighting against what she calls the “lies” Whites told about Blacks. Regarding the property transfer of Kulumbimbi, she claims it will have a universal significance for Black people all over the world. This future event merges with the concept of *layisua*, a Kikongo word meaning “going to sleep.” Kimbangu will cause all human beings to fall into a deep sleep, at the end of which Blacks will recover their initial status—that enjoyed by Adam and Eve before the fall from grace. This is expected to take place on earth, its starting point being the three Congos with Nkamba as the epicenter.

While Kimbanguists wait for the spiritual leader Simon Kimbangu Kiangani to set a date for the inauguration of the site, their millenarian expectation of a new status for Blacks remains as intense as ever. But achieving this final and definitive positive status implies abiding by the Kimbanguist principles dictated by Diangienda in the famous triad: love (*bolingo*), commandments (*mibeko*), and work (*misala*). This is illustrated in a hymn sung in Lingala by the GTKI choir:

Cultivate love,
It is the key to Heaven.
Good works
Are what gives
Man a sense of dignity.
Commandments
Are what gives
Man his intelligence.

It is believed that abiding by these three principles will allow for the enjoyment by all Blacks of all skills, particularly those pertaining to technological inventiveness. The aim is to achieve a better position in the social order by moving up from the oppressed situation common to Blacks all over the world and eventually enjoy a dignified status in the eyes of the dominant Other. In this quest for social recognition, which is rooted in Black internationalism, Black elites are often called to action.

Since Black elites are commonly criticized in the discourse of Kimbanguist believers and the rhetoric of their leaders, how is education addressed

by the Kimbanguist Church? To answer this question, it is necessary to first understand how learned elites perceive themselves in Africa, particularly in Congo, and how they have contributed to their countries' histories. As already explained, the education system was used for Christianization purposes during the colonial period. Africans had to be schooled away from their traditional value systems and convinced of the curse of Ham so that they would participate in their own domination. Although Kimbanguist theology includes a belief in the curse of Ham, it also insists on deconstructing an intellectual identity built on an educational system that, from preschool to the university, remains dependent on European models and incapable of inventing its own templates to compete with Whites in the fields of science and technology. This perception of Blacks as incapable of inventing anything certainly seems shocking to anyone well versed in Afrocentric theory or cognizant of books on African American inventors, such as McKinley Burt's *Black Inventors of America* (1969) or Nathan Aaseng's more recent *Black Inventors* (1997). But popular Kimbanguist theology does not acknowledge the participation of Blacks in scientific or technological progress or in improving inventions already bearing the hallmark of a Western mind.

Since the time of African nations' independence, African elites have become more numerous in all fields of knowledge, and they work in all the sectors of economic and intellectual activities offered by their home countries—health care, agriculture, economics, finance, history, sociology, and many more. Yet, the situation of the elites who have jobs at home is difficult, since they are harshly criticized by the societies they come from and are supposed to serve. Some decades ago, under Mobutu, one of the “sayings of the day” appearing on the screen of the national television channel was “The failure of Zaire is the failure of its elites.” Likewise, students graduating from high school in Brazzaville in 1994 were given a quotation to comment on, which lamented the “tragedy” of the waste of talents by African governments and called for a wiser use of graduates, who were described as languishing, desperate “wrecks steeped in alcohol of all kinds.”⁴⁰

From a Kimbanguist perspective, this critique is relevant because it usually coincides with the perception of a lack of inventions by Black people, who always seem to need the help of Whites. Given the context, how does the Kimbanguist Church view Black elites? Since the 1960s, the Kimbanguist Church has built its own schools, which are open to all children, including Kimbanguists and nonmembers of the church. Yet the Kimbanguist membership includes a considerable number of men and women with very little schooling, who coexist in the church with others who hold

university degrees. Misunderstandings and conflicts often occur between the two categories, because supernatural gifts are valued much more than intellectual ones in this milieu.

There are two reasons why academically trained people are perceived poorly by uneducated church members. The first is that their spiritual leaders have not had any higher education.⁴¹ Most Kimbanguists identify with the leaders and hence do not have any incentive to pursue their studies or revere academics in any way. Second, Kimbanguists' negative perception of academics is backed by the often judgmental attitude of Diangienda. He criticized elites several times in his speeches and sermons as lacking the spiritual stability to remedy Black subordination, because of their imitation of secular Whites ("You may be very learned and hold doctoral degrees of all kinds, [but] you won't do anything")⁴² or White sorcerers: "Even if all Black men of learning get together to find a way to fill the huge gap that keeps us lagging behind, they will never get a positive result. You may be a magician, a Rosicrucian, a Freemason, or whatever you want, you can't find a solution. Let's walk up to the first flight of stairs [he was probably pointing to the entrance to Nkamba] for this is where we'll discover what we lost over there. We have to reclaim it. Haven't I told you time and again that the Black man is God's image?"⁴³ This challenge sounds like a provocation, since the speech was delivered at the inauguration of a training seminar for the religious officials in charge of Kimbanguist school boards.

Paradoxically, Diangienda also encouraged Kimbanguists to persevere in their studies. His discourse on intellectual elites was ambiguous: it rejected contemporary Black elites while recommending that Kimbanguists, who are also Black, hone their own intellectual skills. What, then, do Kimbanguists expect from highly trained individuals, and how do they define their own elites as opposed to "traditional" ones? Although most Kimbanguists are unaware of it, Diangienda's perception of elites corresponded to Seymour Martin Lipset's definition of "intellectuals" as "those who create, distribute, and apply *culture*—the symbolic world of man, including art, science, and religion."⁴⁴ For example, responding to the Zairian press, which regularly insulted him, Diangienda made this barbed comment: "You all have degrees by the truckload, but all you can do is insult and slander. The pencil with which you are writing your papers, do you even know how it was invented? Why, you can't even tell what will happen tomorrow. What makes you so intellectual?"⁴⁵ Here, it is useful to discuss the contributions of Kimbanguism to Lipset's "symbolic world," particularly in matters of art, science, and religion.

One of the most emblematic achievements of the Kimbanguist Church in the realm of learning is the script known as Mandombe, a Kikongo term meaning “for Black people” or “in the way of Black people.” This script was invented in 1978 by David Wabeladio Payi, a Catholic who claimed to have been inspired by Simon Kimbangu and eventually joined the Kimbanguist Church. When I interviewed him, he explained that he had experienced a series of supernatural events. First, he was continuously hearing a voice calling him and commanding him to go to Nkamba to pray because he was meant to receive a mission for the Black race. Then, on the road to Nkamba, he had several extraordinary experiences. Simon Kimbangu in apparition form appeared in the car where Wabeladio Payi was riding along with five relatives, causing them to flee the vehicle in a panic. While still traveling to Nkamba, he heard Kimbanguist hymns coming from above, which said, “He is holy, and you must never reject the holy One.” Then, as they were getting near Nkamba, Wabeladio Payi found himself glued to the soil for several hours, as if he had taken root in it; his relatives’ efforts to remove him from the spot were to no avail, until the soil freed him. Finally, when entering Nkamba, he saw a man in blue pants and a white shirt, who held out his arms as if on a cross, then rose up in the air, flying to and fro between the mausoleum of Simon Kimbangu and the Kimbanguist primary school a few hundred yards away. The man eventually went straight up into the sky. Panic-stricken by this vision, Wabeladio Payi yelled that a man had just flown away, but he was the only one who could see this man. After these experiences, he decided to go to Kinshasa and meet Diangienda, in order to make sense of them. The spiritual leader recommended that he “pray a lot, for it is through prayer that [he] will discover the nature of [his] mission—because [he has] a great mission for the Black race.”⁴⁶

Having decided to retreat from the world into a long period of prayer, which lasted for eight months, Wabeladio Payi eventually discovered while meditating that the bricks making the walls of his room were forming the numbers 5 and 2 in their imbrications. On that day, he said, “I had a dream.” Wabeladio Payi (who died in 2013) claimed that from this basis and thanks to the Mandombe script, he discovered the African way of understanding mathematics, statistics, visual arts, mechanics, geometry, architecture, and physics. He earned recognition for his invention at various African universities, and he claimed he had convinced experts of the truth of his discoveries. This earned him a position as a professor at the University of Kinshasa, where he was given an honorary doctorate in 2011. Mandombe now is taught not only in Congolese schools and universities, but

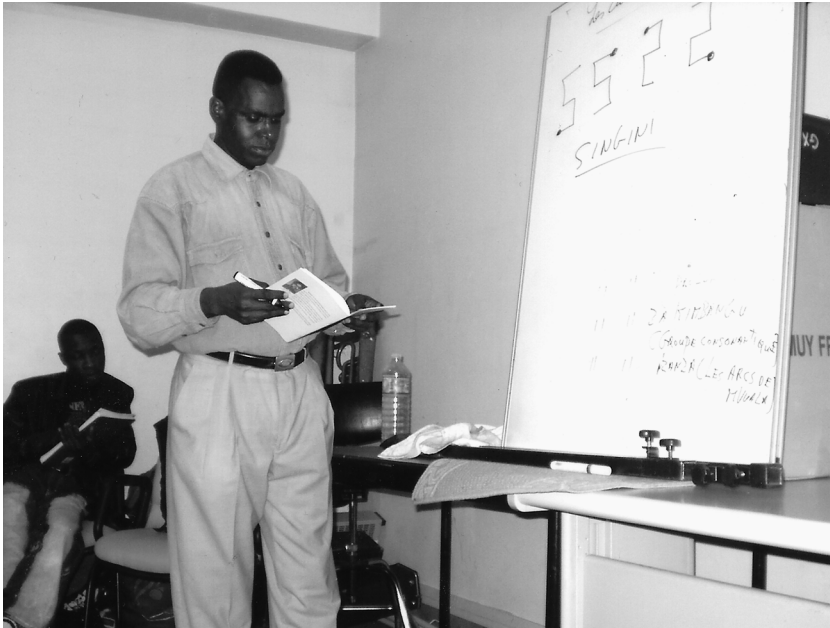


Figure 18. David Wabeladio Payi, inventor of the Mandombe script, teaches church members.

also in the diaspora, and the number of Mandombe proficiency certificates awarded was estimated at 700,000 in 2010.⁴⁷

The Mandombe script, which the inventor codified in the Kikongo language, is considered to be the first of a coming series of inventions by Blacks and a sign of the advent of new African elites. Wabeladio Payi had been initially trained as a mechanic, but he was transformed into a man of learning—in the Kimbanguist understanding of the term—thanks to a mystical experience, which is the only meaningful way of finding one’s calling from the standpoint of the church.

The continued quest for healing has also led to unprecedented discoveries. Until recently, only Kimbangu’s descendants were considered to have healing powers, but members and nonmembers of the Kimbanguist Church are currently enthused by the cures developed by a Muslim woman who claims to be inspired by Simon Kimbangu. A DRC citizen, Véronique Kabeya, born Kaké in 1961, is a housewife who converted to Islam (her husband’s religion). Interviewed as a special guest on a TV show broadcast by the national channel RTNC, she explained that she first saw Kimbangu in 2002, during the period of Ramadan. Around 5 A.M., she said, he appeared in her bedroom and told her, “Mama, I came to tell you that God has sent



Figure 19. Members of the Saint-Denis congregation (greater Paris area) graduate from their Mandombe course.

me to give you Heaven and Earth.” She asked, “Papa, who are you?” He answered, “I am Simon Kimbangu. Do you know me?” She replied, “I do, but by name only. I have never seen you before.” He said, “It’s me, and I came to show you some things that will save the world.” She explained that he then proceeded to show her “how to make medicines that cure AIDS, eye diseases, several forms of cancer, and many sorts of diseases. At 6 A.M., I woke up and told my husband what had happened. He retorted that it was out of the question to bring these stories here. He said, ‘We are Muslims; how can you possibly be seeing Simon Kimbangu?’”⁴⁸

She thus remained silent about this experience, because her husband was skeptical and did not want to have anything to do with Kimbangu. Later in 2002, however, Kabeya became his wife’s first patient. Suffering from a prostate disease, ailing kidneys, and poor eyesight, he was supposed to be flown to France for dialysis, but he could not leave the country due to red tape. Since his condition was worsening into kidney failure, he eventually asked his wife to try her knowledge on him. She purchased the ingredients shown to her in her visions and cured him in a span of five hours, after which he asked for diabetes treatment as well. Also a guest on the TV show, the sixty-four-year-old Kabeya added that from age forty-five he had had very

poor eyesight and used three pairs of spectacles, but since his wife cured him he had enjoyed perfect eyesight and did not need glasses anymore. In another interview, Kaké Kabeya claimed that she had been sick with uterine cancer until she was cured by the herbal medicine revealed by Kimbangu, who also gave her a diet to solve her obesity and tension problems.⁴⁹

These successes persuaded Kabeya to encourage his wife to publicize her accomplishments and cure others. In 2005, they created a pharmacy called *Souffle divin* (Divine breath) in Kinshasa, where they receive patients who have been diagnosed by physicians or labs, offer them treatment, and finally send them back to the doctors to confirm their recoveries. *Souffle divin* initially received a hundred visits per day, according to Kaké Kabeya; the visits have now increased to such a point that she cannot keep track. The Agence congolaise de presse stated that more than a hundred AIDS-infected patients have been definitely cured after treatment.⁵⁰ The press agency mined medical reports and recovery certifications signed by doctors from the main hospitals in Kinshasa to support these statistics. Kaké Kabeya is now so renowned that African patients from all professional backgrounds, along with Europeans, Turks, and Australians, come to her for treatment. She was given a national award, is often invited on TV shows, and has earned a measure of prestige in non-Kimbanguist milieus where people worship Simon Kimbangu.

I had the opportunity to interview her over the phone in January 2016 and asked about her connection with Simon Kimbangu and the church. She claimed to be regularly in contact with Kimbangu, either in apparitions or in her sleep: "He appears whenever he finds it necessary, depending on what he wants to show me. Sometimes he tells me about things related to our country, Congo, but usually he shows me healing plants. By now he has shown me over 500 plants." She contends that this herbal medicine can cure any disease.

Kaké Kabeya is also celebrated in the Kimbanguist Church, with which she is in relatively close contact. When I asked whether she contemplated converting to Kimbanguism, she answered, "All Black people are Kimbanguists." She said that her medicines are sold in Nkamba and that when she met Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, he told her: "In the days to come, various kinds of illnesses will appear in the world, so that people will come to Congo from all over the world to ask Black people for a cure." The medicines are given authentic Congolese names, similar to those of Kimbangu and his descendants; she told me that Kimbangu himself names the cures he reveals to her. Although she has not converted to Kimbanguism, her mystical

experiences with Simon Kimbangu seem to corroborate the church's theology about the new status of Black people, especially since she claims that Kimbangu told her that he granted her this gift to "enhance the honor of the DRC and Africa."⁵¹

Another example of the Kimbanguist definition of a person of learning is Armand Wabasolele Diangienda, one of Kimbangu's grandsons, who rose to fame thanks to his musical talent. He has been recognized as a composer of classical music in his native DRC. Although he was initially trained as a pilot and never attended a music academy ("I thank God for that talent, because I can just look at someone playing, and I can figure it out," he told a journalist),⁵² his work was affirmed by a committee, including a professor from the University of Leuven, Belgium, and the head of the Institut national des arts of Kinshasa. In November 2003, he was awarded an honorary degree as an artist, musician, and composer of classical music by the president of the Congolese parliament. His performances combine Kimbanguist inspired hymns with famous classical masterpieces by Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven.

Wabasolele's father, Diangienda, recommended that he create a group in which all the choirs of the church would be represented. Thus was born in the 1990s the Kimbanguist Symphonic Orchestra, which includes a brass band, a flute group, a guitar ensemble, and a number of different choirs, all composed of amateur musicians who practice during their spare time, when they are not looking for a job or working as electricians, garment cutters, physicians, or housekeepers. Initially, these volunteers made or repaired their instruments themselves: "In the early days, instruments had to be borrowed or made from scratch by reverse engineering. Violin strings were concocted from bicycle brake wire. Hundreds of scores were copied out by hand, individual parts had to be deciphered by listening to the works on CD, over and over again. Music stands were cobbled together from old pieces of wood."⁵³

His talent and energy in setting up and conducting the 200-strong Kimbanguist Symphonic Orchestra triggered the interest of two film directors, Claus Wischmann and Martin Baer, who released in 2010 a documentary on him called *Kinshasa Symphony*, whose behind-the-scenes promotional video was shown on CBS under the title *Joy in the Congo*. The film was well received both in Europe and in the United States. While it says very little about the Kimbanguist Church,⁵⁴ its success prompted invitations for Armand Wabasolele Diangienda from universities in Africa, Europe, and the United States as well as from Prince Albert II of Monaco and the actress



Figure 20. Armand Wabasolele Diangienda and the Kimbanguist Symphonic Orchestra after a concert in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



Figure 21. The Kimbanguist Symphonic Orchestra in concert in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

and filmmaker Angelina Jolie. He was given an award for peace and reconciliation from the Tran Nhan Tong Academy at Harvard University in September 2012. In the United Kingdom, he became an honorary member of the Royal Philharmonic Society. At the University of California, Los Angeles, he performed at the TED conference of February 2013 and subsequently met with the musicians Peter Gabriel, Lionel Richie, and Herbie Hancock. In Seoul, he was invited to conduct the Korean Symphonic Orchestra on the fortieth anniversary of the Arts Festival of Korea. He was awarded the National Prize for Merit in Culture, Arts, and Sciences by the DRC government in December 2015. Besides conducting the Kimbanguist Symphonic Orchestra, he has also composed three classical pieces with French titles, translated as “Breath of Truth,” “Reconciliation,” and “My Identity.”

The inventor of the Mandombe script, the composer-conductor, and the herbal healer reveal the meaning of what the Kimbanguist Church sees as a person of learning: someone who is spiritually connected with Simon Kimbangu and therefore knows herself or himself and who has a mission to benefit Africa. The church asserts that people of learning will offer unprecedented achievements in the arts, sciences, and technology, which will be received as signs of progress for Black people worldwide. This definition is congruent with what Diangienda said of inspired people, whom he considered to be learned, visionary, and prophetic. However, inspired though they may be, these intellectuals remain human, and since they are connected to a church seeking the kingdom of God, they need to abide by the three cardinal virtues of Kimbanguism: *bolingo*, *mibeko*, and *misala* (love, divine commandments, and work). Finally, as Black people, they are expected to always be aware of their subordinate position in the world’s social stratification—in order to successfully challenge this situation. This vision of the mission to be accomplished is quite broad, and it also entails a critique of political leadership.

RECLAIMING KIMBANGU'S PROPHETIC HERITAGE

When discussing the relation of Kimbanguists to their home countries, Georges Balandier evoked a sort of sacred nationalism, preaching the advent of God in Congo and thereby rejecting the foundations of colonial order: "By modifying the entire system of moral reference, Kimbanguism challenged the whole basis of authority, not simply that of the official chiefs . . . but that of the old-style chiefs as well."¹ In the wake of African nations' independence, the key issue was for the political leadership to gain autonomy from the religious leadership—an uneasy goal to achieve, since the former had emerged thanks to the impetus of nationalist religious movements.²

In a context of national autonomy, what part did the religious leaders take in the management of these new nations' affairs? In the former Belgian Congo, Joseph Kasa-Vubu rose to power as the Democratic Republic of the Congo's first president (1960–1965), thanks to popular aspirations that Marie-Louise Martin described as both ethnic and religious: as the head of the first cultural and social organization, the Alliance des Bakongo, developed in the 1950s, Kasa-Vubu was seen as the emissary of Kimbangu.³ When the Republic of the Congo became the Republic of Zaire in October 1971, the Kimbanguist Church was recognized as the largest denomination in Zaire after the Catholic Church. Although the Kimbanguist Church rejected the idea of becoming the state church, it remained very aware of its special mission to Zaire in trust from God.⁴ In Congo-Brazzaville, under

the reign of the *Parti congolais du travail*, which was the only political party from 1969 to 1991, Marxist ideology was imposed, and laws were voted on to eradicate cults. But the state recognized the Kimbanguist Church as a mainstream church, on an equal footing with the Catholic and evangelical churches and the Salvation Army.

Simon Kimbangu is recognized on the national plane as a liberator who raised national awareness among the Congolese. Kimbanguists see him as an embodiment of God, but Kimbangu holds a distinctive place in the collective psyche of the populations of both Congos and Angola. Along with his predecessor Kimpa Vita and political nationalists, such as André Matsoua and Patrice Eméry Lumumba, he is mentioned in history schoolbooks as part of the history of Congolese resistance to European colonization. When visiting the Kimbanguist authorities in Nkamba in June 2001, the president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Joseph Kabila, named Simon Kimbangu as the equal of Lumumba and his own father, Laurent-Désiré Kabila.⁵

The political speech that came closest to the beliefs of the Kimbanguists was delivered in 1991 by the minister of justice, Ms. Nuyabu Nkulu:

Beyond the symbolic nature of this political event, let me point out three major teachings. The first is about the very emergence of this great black leader, who came from the depths of the country, outside of any colonial influence, at a time when there seemed to be no other source of power on our African soil. But nothing in the experience of this modest worker—this humble catechist—had predestined him for such a noble mission. Nothing but the manifestation of the Almighty's power may explain the miraculous rise, among his peers, of a charismatic leader sent to save the black people from the darkness caused both by traditions and by colonialism.⁶

Musicians frequently express their veneration of the memory of Simon Kimbangu in their songs. The best example was performed in 1990 by the songwriter and singer Pascal-Emmanuel Sinamoyi Tabu, who is a celebrity on both banks of the Congo River and across sub-Saharan Africa under the stage name Tabu Ley Rochereau.⁷ In his song, he conjured up a long list of nationalist Congolese forefathers, including Simon Kimbangu, to beg them to oust the enemy (Mobutu) from power and make Zaire a democracy. Thus it is quite logical to question the relation between the Kimbanguist Church and political power.

Diangienda said that the Kimbanguist Church believes in maintaining a separation between church and state: “The Church of Christ on Earth through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu does not consider it fitting to express views concerning the political system that a country should support. But it is against any political system which deprives the citizens of the fundamental liberties, namely freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and worship, freedom of the press, freedom of opinion and freedom of movement.”⁸

Although the Kimbanguist Church displays a conspicuously apolitical stance, which is generally understood as an attitude of submission to political authorities, it nevertheless grants importance to Congolese and pan-African politics. This duality—on the one hand, apolitical and supportive of political authorities and, on the other hand, messianic in its critique of the powers that be—has been generally misconstrued by scholars, including the sociologist Susan Asch. In 1983 she analyzed the church’s position as a trade-off between “apolitical” support for Mobutu’s regime and benevolent toleration of the church by the Zairian state, concluding that the Kimbanguist Church had ceased to be a tool for political protest because it followed the orders of Mobutist nationalism without questioning the nefarious consequences of the regime’s policies—economic dependency, corruption, wasting of national resources, inequality, injustice, unemployment, and increasing poverty.⁹

What Asch omitted was that Kimbangu’s prophetic movement was never based on the principle of openly waging war on colonial political authorities. The writings of both the Belgian lawyer Jules Chomé and the Belgian Jesuit Joseph Van Wing concur: Kimbangu never called for civil disobedience or rebellion against the king of Belgium and never preached against paying taxes.¹⁰ Only indirectly did Kimbangu’s movement become a politico-religious and social one. He focused on ethnicity with the aim of reconstructing Black identity. His actions were effective in part because of his ability to mobilize his fellow citizens around the notion of Blackness in a context marked by the confrontation of discourses; increased race consciousness resulted from the encounter with Whites. The relations of Kimbanguist leaders to Mobutism are illuminated by Mobutu’s speech on authenticity:

Mamas and papas, brethren and sisters—they said that we pray [to] statues. But when you enter the churches of those who came to civilize us, what you see after passing the door are nothing but statues. . . .

Their statues are normal, because they come from Europe; but ours are evil, because they come from the trees. God is God; each person has their own way of praying. . . . Fellow citizens, this is the reason why what I am doing right now [the authenticity program] has been described as a conflict with the [Catholic] church. But there is no conflict with the church! We are a free people, and we must make our decisions as a sovereign nation. If anything is unclear, our duty is to proclaim that it is unclear.

Mamas and papas, look at what happened in 1921 in Lower Zaire [today's Lower Congo] with our brethren who are with us and pray [to] the God of Kimbangu. Kimbangu is our brother, black like us. He said, "I saw God, and this is what God told me." Now what did they do? They put him under arrest and sentenced him to death. . . . On the other hand, what do they show us? They tell us that the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to children in Portugal, in Fatima, and then she appeared to a young woman in Lourdes, in France, or that she appeared in Belgium. Now this is normal: if God appears over there in Europe, they tell us to believe it. But if a black man says that he, too, saw God, they call him a fanatic, put him under arrest, and sentence him to death. Mamas and papas, brethren and sisters, what I am telling you is very serious. It shows the darkness in which we used to live, which is mental alienation. . . . He remained for thirty years in jail without seeing his wife. . . . They are white, we are black; they live in Europe and we in Africa; we cannot imitate them, nor can they imitate us. We eat manioc and they eat bread—that's normal. If a white man comes to Africa, then he must eat manioc. This is what authenticity is about.¹¹

It is hardly surprising that the Kimbanguist Church was perceived as Mobutu's pet church. Yet it is regrettable that critics of Diangienda have often turned him into the scapegoat of the Mobutu regime, while remaining oblivious to the fact that Kimbanguist messianism is the result of a conjunction of doctrines that mutually support one another and fuel the process of identity reconstruction. This is an ongoing process. Believers hope to see the fulfillment of the spiritual leaders' apocalyptic and prophetic promises, and thus escape the consequences of their situation: oppression, war, poverty, disease, famine, and suffering.

In the nationalist setting inspired by Mobutu, the theme of authenticity was ever-present and recurrent. Congo was renamed Zaire, the



Figure 22. President Mobutu (*right*) visits the spiritual leader Diangienda in the 1970s.

greatness of the Zairian nation was extolled, while working together, known as *salongo*, was recommended. It was forbidden to wear suits, ties, close-fitting pants, or miniskirts and to use skin-lightening creams or hair relaxers. Christian first names were banned and Christian feasts abolished. The quest for authenticity resonated with Kimbanguist values, and these symbols of European influence have remained banned in the church, except for the suits, ties, and Christian first names and feasts. What unification achieved in the sphere of the state was also accomplished in parallel by Diangienda within the sphere of the Kimbanguist Church. This is why his apolitical stance was recast as a form of active support of Mobutism in the eyes of most observers. As a consequence, the Kimbanguist Church and the Church of Christ in Zaire were understood to be under Mobutu's control, while the Catholic Church, led by Cardinal Malula, embodied resistance.¹²

Yet, for the leaders and members of the church, supporting the political leadership—not only Mobutu's regime but all the others—was the right choice, and it was justified by the church's recommendation to "submit to state authorities."¹³ The conventional wisdom warning against throwing the baby out with the bath water may offer an explanation for the relations

of the Kimbanguist Church with the state's political leadership. The metaphorical baby stands for national independence, which Kimbanguists believe to have been granted by God through Simon Kimbangu, while the bath water symbolizes the political corruption of the successive regimes. In a sermon where he was encouraging church members from Congo-Brazzaville to submit to the state authorities, Diangienda said: "In 1921, Papa Simon Kimbangu had said that 'the Black man shall become White and the White man, Black.' This was misunderstood. President [Denis] Sassou [N'Guessou] is a Black man. Let's take pride in this."¹⁴ Likewise, the current spiritual leader of the church, Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, keeps recommending submission to the established political authorities in his sermons to church members.

The emphasis is laid on the fact that colonial rule is now over. As a result, the new political players are not defined as intruders, whatever their shortcomings may be; being sons of Africa, they are necessarily considered worthy of ruling their countries, even if they do so in ways that displease the church. While most experts consider the Kimbanguist Church to be an accomplice of established political regimes, the situation may be more complex. Although political leaders have enjoyed a form of legitimacy granted by the people—often in proportion to their ethnic representativeness—and by Western regimes acting as protectors, they are criticized by religious leaders, who often grant them recognition begrudgingly. The Kimbanguist Church, in particular, sees itself as arbitrating the political battles that have shaken the countries in the half century since independence.

The evolution of Kimbanguist messianism must be analyzed in this postcolonial context. Kimbanguist messianism is a belief in the restoration of the kingdom of Kongo or in a "landing" of the kingdom of God. The sociologist Henri Desroche had already observed it in the early 1970s, when he wrote the following:

Unmistakably, people were waiting for the Kingdom to come and the Church came. The independence of Congo came, too. So there was a new church in a new society, each in search of its own peaceful coexistence with other Christian churches or other national societies. But there is little doubt that neither this church, nor even this society would have thus emerged unless there had been a promise reaching further than churches and societies alike; an explosive promise, on whose spin-offs an ecclesiastical body as well as a political body have capitalized.¹⁵

The 1990s were perceived by many Kimbanguists as a first step toward the fulfillment of eschatological prophecies. Since the spiritual leader Diangienda had predicted the perestroika and the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), the millenarian stance of Kimbanguists was reinforced. On September 12, 1991, following a proposal of the court of appeals, President Mobutu signed an order of amnesty, which posthumously reinstated the civil rights of Simon Kimbangu, who had been a prisoner until his death. Upon this occasion, Diangienda stated on national radio and television that the whole world was going to make a new start, which further kindled his followers' hopes.

In November 1991, the future Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade, then the leader of the political opposition in his country, went to Zaire to ease the gridlock between Mobutu and Étienne Tshisekedi, the leader of the opposition party. In a sermon, Diangienda commented on Wade's intervention by engaging the church members in a call-and-response exchange on a legend they were all familiar with:

"After Papa [Simon Kimbangu] was sentenced to death—that was October 10, 1921—when Papa was put on the train, what nationality was the mechanic [driver]?"

"Senegalese!"

"And when the order was given for the train to start, did the train actually start?"

"No!"

"Papa had said that the train would not start until he had seen his children. These days, we have a *mbuta mutu* [elder] who is here for an arbitration. Did you hear that or not?"

"We heard it!"

"He came to reconcile us. Children are taught by means of parables; let's just see where we are going. Child of Papa Simon Kimbangu, keep your eyes and ears open, and use your mind."¹⁶

The legend he was alluding to refers to the time that Kimbangu was being transferred to Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi), where he was to be jailed. After his request to see his children was denied, he allegedly stopped the train—which was driven by a Senegalese man—until his children were taken to him and he could bid them farewell. By connecting this story from 1921 to the political situation in 1991, Diangienda was suggesting that Kimbangu's invisible hand was at work. Instead of hoping for a Senegalese

politician to unlock the situation, Congo—as well as the whole continent—should trust the Kimbanguists to restore order.

In neighboring Congo-Brazzaville in the same year, a national conference was organized to help the country's transition to democracy. It was supervised by a member of the Catholic clergy, Ernest Kombo, the bishop of Owando. Thanks to his political neutrality, he was unanimously elected as the leader and successfully defused the pressure exerted by many of the delegates, who insisted that President Sassou N'Guessou be arrested and that all officials of his socialist regime be barred from the political scene. Instead, drawing heavily on biblical quotations, Kombo encouraged the participants to practice forgiveness and make a clean break with the past to rebuild a new Congo. At the end of the conference, he organized a hand-washing ritual to symbolize these positive resolutions. In the wake of this conference, most citizens' confidence in politicians' ability to rebuild the nation was restored. Still, Diangienda and his church remained skeptical, for they maintained that the solution had to come from the Kimbanguists. The spiritual leader of the EJCSK preached several times about the national conferences taking place in both Congo and Zaire:

I will first discuss the problems in the Republic of the Congo, as their national conference is now over. . . . Papa Simon Kimbangu had said that everything would start from Brazza. All the problems started in Brazza, and now they are done with their conference. They are resting now, but the problems are not over. Have they sought the kingdom of God? Today, they will wash their hands, and all over the country, all the Congolese shall wash their hands. And what's next?¹⁷

Pray as much as you can for the sovereign national conference [in Zaire] to be uneventful, for in that room [where the conference was held] there are minds of different natures; and the decisions that will be made there will result from arbitration, which may, in turn, imply discord and lead us to kill one another. If we are not careful, these arbitrations will result in a disaster, and we'll be the laughingstock of the whole world. . . . Everything lies in your [Kimbanguists'] hands. Try as they might to do things right, as long as you [Kimbanguists] are left out of the talks, nothing will happen.¹⁸

Since the time of African states' independence, the Kimbanguist Church has ceased to be the political protest movement it was during the

colonial period and morphed into a spiritual laboratory of sorts, analyzing the political evolution of the three countries where it was born and the evolution of the African diaspora. Its support of the various undemocratic regimes is typically justified with the analogy of “a wife that remains faithful to her husband in spite of his infidelity.” In an interview with Hilaire Kimbatsa, a journalist from the national radio of Congo-Brazzaville, Diangienda explained his support of Mobutu with that analogy: “You call ‘papa’ the man your mother married. Mobutu was elected with 99 percent of the votes, so it was not just my vote which made him the president.”¹⁹ However, in these comments he was downplaying his personal relation to Mobutu. Indeed, he would frequently make this sort of comment while hinting that he knew the destiny of the DRC and the rest of Africa. For instance, he once said that President Kasa-Vubu had spent in his company the night preceding his election as the first president of the country, letting his audience infer that Kasa-Vubu had sought Diangienda’s spiritual backing.²⁰

It is worth stressing that while Mobutu was the self-styled spiritual leader of Zaire and almost raised himself to the status of a messiah, in the view of the Kimbanguist Church he was simply the living proof of the fulfillment of one of Diangienda’s prophecies. Indeed, to the Kimbanguists, the actual messianic leader was Diangienda himself. Mobutu reinforced this connection in the eulogy he gave at Diangienda’s funeral:

Mamas and papas, my Kimbanguist brethren, it is true, both you and I are aggrieved, for Papa Diangienda is no more. I want to tell you something which had remained a secret between him and myself. But Mama Mobutu, my first wife [who passed away in the 1980s], knew it, and Mama Bobiladawa [his second wife], who is sitting behind me here knows it too. We were the only three people to know this. In the testimony I am about to give, you should not consider the president of the Republic, but citizen Mobutu Sese Seko, who is not a Kimbanguist but a Catholic Christian. . . .

In 1958, Papa Diangienda, who is now asleep but can hear me, had called me to his house. He told me this: “Papa, you wrote many papers to serve us Kimbanguists. This is agreeable to God and to us Kimbanguists.” He took my hand and knelt down and said, “Listen to the word of God: you shall become a great man; and when you have become a great leader thanks to the word of God, don’t forget your Kimbanguists, and keep serving them.” If you really pay attention [to]

these words—from the Round Table [which gave independence to the DRC] of 1960 to the level I have reached now—well, you'll see that this papa who is asleep today, and whose coffin was thrown stones at, was a real prophet among us. People say that only his father was a prophet, but he too was a prophet.²¹

This interpretation of the connection between the political leader and Diangienda was reinforced by the apologies made by Mobutu for the people who threw stones at the funeral procession. I remember hearing a Kimbanguist preacher say the following on the occasion of Mobutu's funeral:

Jesus was crucified with a robber on each side. When one of them insulted him, the other defended him and asked for his forgiveness. In return, Jesus Christ promised him he'd go to Heaven. Although President Mobutu was often called a thief and a dictator, he spoke in defense of Diangienda at the time his funeral procession was pelted with stones. He said, "For this, I ask for forgiveness in the name of the Zairian people and in the name of God. May they be forgiven, for he did not deserve this." I am bold enough to believe that Mobutu, in spite of all the negative charges against him, is today in Heaven by Papa Diangienda's side.

It is worth emphasizing that Mobutu and Diangienda had known each other since the colonial period and had been neighbors in Kananga, long before they became, respectively, the dictator of the country and the spiritual leader of the Kimbanguist Church. Mobutu was a journalist, and he helped Diangienda by writing the Belgian authorities to plead the case of the Kimbanguist movement, which was in search of freedom of expression. This closeness between the two caused Diangienda to be viewed by the Congolese population as one of Mobutu's supporters, so that his funeral procession was pelted with stones by the inhabitants of Kinshasa. As a result of all this, Mobutu's eulogy at his friend's funeral was fraught with emotion and delivered with eyes brimming with tears. When it was broadcast on the Zairian national television channel in July 1992, it was criticized by Mobutu's opponents, who saw it as a way for the dictator to gain Kimbanguist votes. But the eulogy was rather well received by Kimbanguists, who saw it as a confirmation of their leader's divine authority over the president. They said, "Papa Diangienda is the one who gives you power; he is also the one who takes it back."

The coup that deposed Mobutu and brought Laurent-Désiré Kabila into office in 1997 was a moment when much was discussed and many frustrations vented among the Kimbanguists. Diangienda had announced that the third republic of Zaire would be a Kimbanguist one, but he never specified in what way it would come, leaving his audience total freedom of interpretation. For certain Kimbanguist believers, the post-Mobutu period would be handled by a Kimbanguist presidency; for others, it would be a restoration of the ancient kingdom of Kongo. One pastor explained to me that a group of believers had paid a visit to the spiritual leader of the church, Dialungana, to ask how they should interpret Kabila's presidency through the prism of Diangienda's prophecies. Dialungana, he said, answered their query with the following: "If you entrust someone with your field for the purpose of weeding it, does it mean the field belongs to them?"

The Kimbanguist Church has been constantly wooed by politicians for electoral purposes, because it is strong in numbers on both banks of the Congo River. But politicians also seek to gain some spiritual backing from its leaders and solutions for peace when their nations are ravaged by fratricidal wars. For example, in Congo-Brazzaville, there were two civil wars during the presidency of the democratically elected Pascal Lissouba. The first took place in December 1993 between the regime and the so-called Ninjas—the paramilitary soldiers led by the ex-mayor of Brazzaville, Bernard Kolélas. When the war was over, a worship service of national reconciliation was organized by the president on December 24, 1993, with the patronage of the Kimbanguist Church at the Kimbanguist Center of Brazzaville. The second civil war occurred in June 1997 and lasted five months, with the so-called Cobras (Sassou N'Guesso's paramilitary forces) opposing the Cocoyes (President Lissouba's soldiers) assisted by the Ninjas of Kolélas (who was named prime minister in exchange for this support). When that war ended in October 1997, Denis Sassou N'Guesso, who had already reigned over the Republic of the Congo as a Marxist president for thirteen years (1979–1992), came back to power as Sassou II.²² This time, he seemed to promote a more religious attitude. In February 1999, he supported a march of Christian women for peace, and on August 15, 1999, during the celebrations of Congolese independence, he attended a big worship service for national reconciliation, organized with the patronage of the Kimbanguist Church, and said, "I am putting Congo into the hands of God."

In April of that year, ambassadors from Congo-Brazzaville and Angola along with President Kabila's representative met in Nkamba with Dialungana to reconsolidate the Congolese people, saying that the three nations,

united by history, were “bound to live together.”²³ But did this mean that the political leaders would take action and make statements on issues beyond their control, or were they simply appropriating religious rhetoric in their own interests? What matters from a sociological standpoint is that in the eyes of the Kimbanguists, these new behaviors were signs of a return of the three nations to God with the patronage of their own spiritual leaders. Indeed, an inspired hymn (sung in Lingala) conveyed Dialungana's position about the change in attitude:

Mr. President of the [Democratic Republic of the] Congo
 Mr. President of [the Republic of the Congo] Brazza
 Mr. President of Angola,
 You must find an agreement.
 My time has come:
 That which we had agreed upon
 Has come to an end in this world.

Chorus: I, Dialungana, I am done.
 My eyes are on you only.
 I have but little time
 To accomplish my will!
 Open your hearts,
 And the whole world will find peace!
 Thanks to you,
 That which we had agreed upon
 Has come to an end.
 Come and soften your hearts!

Tenor: Mr. President of the Congo, listen to me
 Mr. President of Brazza, listen to me
 Mr. President of Angola, listen to me!
 My time has come:
 I am waiting for you.
 The mission I had entrusted you with
 Has come to an end in this world.

Tenor: I, the Holy Spirit
 Will lead my world.
 I will solve the problem.
 There is no turning back for me anymore.

As mentioned earlier, the Kimbanguist faith considers its three home countries—the DRC (Zaire), Congo-Brazzaville, and Angola—as places where God chose to reside on earth, with Nkamba being first and foremost. In his sermons, Diangienda referred to Zaire as a gift and an earthly paradise given by God to Blacks. In this hymn Dialungana reveals his divine identity and his plan for the three countries. He engages the political leaders in spiritual terms, hinting that he alone embodies the solution to the countries' problems. The challenge to the political sphere is sent in prophetic terms through the inspired hymns sung in the church, where, as a rule, heads of state are not named.

What do the Kimbanguists blame Congolese political leaders for exactly? Many African heads of state, and Congolese heads of state in particular, first adhered to a Marxist ideology after independence and then were inducted into Freemasonry when their countries transitioned to democracy in the early 1990s. In Congo-Brazzaville, President Lissouba, Sassou II, their ministers, and certain members of their cabinets joined Masonic lodges.²⁴ Mobutu was known to be fond of marabouts and traditional conjurers.²⁵ But the Kimbanguist Church openly fights Freemasonry, which it holds on a par with witchcraft. The church teaches that while traditional witchcraft is inherently Black—since it was transmitted by Adam and Eve—Freemasonry is the European, “modernized” version of witchcraft. The messianic dimension of Kimbanguist beliefs allows the church to express disapproval or spiritual protest through its spiritual leaders' speeches and sermons and by means of inspired hymns. Diangienda once preached that “Africa is ruled during the night,”²⁶ which, from an African and, in particular, a Congolese worldview means that political decision making is done by way of occult practices. Against this backdrop, the inspired hymn below from the 1990s calls out both the political leadership and the elites for choosing the wrong solutions:

The crisis shaking the world
 Can never end,
 Even though intelligent men
 Are trying to bring peace.
 It will not end!
 Upheavals in the world,
 Conflicts and warfare
 Will be without end,
 Even if they hold talks after talks

In hopes of restoring peace.
 It will not end—
 All this labor
 Will have been lost on pagans.

Chorus: I had warned you,
 I had concealed nothing.
 Both of your eyes see
 At the same time,
 Both of your ears perceive
 A sound at the same time.
 Believer, beware!
 Peace, believer!
 Let the world twist and writhe!
 I had predicted this.
 Leave the world in the vortex!
 I had predicted this.
 Let the world twist and turn,
 I will come and bring peace.

In this hymn, sung in Lingala, the voice of Kimbangu or Diangienda deciphers for his followers the conflicts occurring in Africa, and calls to order the political leaders, warning them that the remedy for the ills of Congo and Africa will come from himself. The church's members interpret every upheaval in the world and especially in Africa through a prophecy that Simon Kimbangu made on September 10, 1921, in Mbanza Nsanda, Lower Congo, shortly before he was arrested. Even if the contents of the message are not exactly clear, he is understood to have said that there would be two stages of independence—the first political and the second spiritual. In particular, the inauguration of the Nkamba temple would signal the spiritual liberation of Blacks, and the Black race would henceforth be treated on an equal footing with the rest of humankind.²⁷ When the temple of Nkamba was inaugurated on April 6, 1981, many Kimbanguists believed this would bring about the end of the world, because when Kimbangu had prophesied its construction, he had also announced that material and spiritual transformation would follow its inauguration.²⁸

When interviewing or observing Kimbanguists, I have heard numerous allusions to the idea that Africa will experience a second independence after the time of political independence. But the coming of the

second independence will involve many fatalities and much suffering. This will happen at the same time as the advent of a great king, who will be a great political and religious leader. He will be a prince of peace who will pacify the African continent, starting from Congo-Kinshasa and northern Angola (Mbanza Kongo). From the Kimbanguists' viewpoint, political leaders are looking for help in the wrong places, omitting the fact that the solution to Black people's problems can only be given by their church. Diangienda's exhortations to the members of the church made this point even more explicit, as the following example shows: "You are often taken for fools because you adhere to Kimbanguism, but you are no fools. You are more intelligent than all these people [detractors of the church]. . . . Until you are associated [with the affairs of the country] nothing will work. . . . You are a bridge that all these people have to cross."²⁹ He went on with a parable which, though he left it unexplained, seems to buttress the believers' assumption. Cast as an animal folktale, the "parable of the drunken man" gave them tools with which to interpret the coming political upheavals in the DRC:

A man who had gotten drunk with wine found himself in the bush. In his drunkenness, he lit a cigarette and dropped it on the ground. A huge wildfire broke out. The man came back to his senses and ran away. The wildfire caused panic among the animals of the bush. Now, the rat had prepared a nice house for himself in a hole—a very luxurious place. He scampered off to his place. The toad then came along and saw there was a hole, so he leaped in to find refuge. Then it was the turn of the viper, who decided there was room enough for him in this same hole. The rat and the toad were so scared they thought they would die! Alas, the rat had no window in his house that would allow them to escape from the snake. So the viper told himself he'd feast on them when the fire was over, hoping he'd survive the whole thing. But the owner of the bush, seeing the havoc wreaked by the wildfire, prayed to God to put it out. So God sent heavy rain. The rain put out the fire, but it also drowned the three little animals who thought they'd survive the fire.³⁰

In the late 1990s, a few years after Diangienda passed away, Kimbanguist believers saw this parable as a key to understanding the events shaking the former Zaire at the time. Mobutu was identified as the wealthy rat, because of the riches he had accumulated, and the lack of a window in

the rat's hole was understood to symbolize his lack of love for his people. His rival Étienne Tshisekedi was the toad (an animal symbolizing poverty) while Laurent-Désiré Kabila, who would overturn the moribund Mobutist regime in bloodshed, was identified with the viper (an embodiment of authority). A woman I spoke to, who grew up in Diangienda's house, reported that when Mobutu fled the country in 1997, soldiers from the army of Kabila entered Kinshasa and stormed into the house of the late spiritual leader and threatened his son Armand Wabaso. The actual or political deaths of the three protagonists were seen as a confirmation of Diangienda's prophecy in the parable.

The message conveyed by the hymn that begins "The crisis shaking the world" translates political terms into religious ones, reflecting the socio-political situation as it is experienced in Africa and particularly in the Congolese region. The hymn thus appears to be a coherent network of pre-constructed patterns about the role of Kimbanguism in political matters, the key to which is given by the church's spiritual leader. Thus, the critique voiced by the Kimbanguist faith to politicians, while often implicit, is made explicit through inspired hymns, such as the one below—where Simon Kimbangu is outraged to see the political elite celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the independence of Congo without taking into account the role he played in the liberation of the country:

O, Congo! I am asking you:
 Now that you are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary
 Of your independence,
 Congo, what place have you given me?
 Congo, you have forgotten my suffering
 You have neglected the recommendations
 That I, Kimbangu, had given you;
 How is your suffering supposed to end?
 Congo, you have forgotten my greatness;
 You have rejected me!
 From the colonial yoke that weighed on your shoulders,
 Who came to liberate you, Congo?
 Yet today you refuse to hear
 My name, "Kimbangu"!
 But who said,
 "Black shall become white
 And White shall become black?"

But today you refuse to speak
My name, “Kimbangu”!
You have become lords
And you have disowned me; how shameful!
You opted for the wisdom of this world;
You keep glorifying yourselves though you are empty;
You refuse to hear
My name, “Kimbangu”;
You have forgotten
That the uplift of Congo
Lies in my hands,
The hands of Kimbangu—
It is shameful, it really is!
You are bragging
In vain, Congo!
When I think of my suffering,
Thirty years of suffering
In prison,
And think
That I had not done a thing—
And all of this was done for the sake of Congo!
Congo, you have forgotten me,
O, Congo, you have disowned me!
Africa shall rise through you
But you, Congo, lack clear-sightedness:
You are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary
Of the country’s independence;
But, Congo, you have forgotten my greatness
You have disowned the pain I have suffered
At the hands of the Whites.
They humiliated me,
They made me suffer
For saying,
“Black shall become white
And White shall become black.”
This is why they humiliated me.
I have given you independence!
Today you have become
A grown man,

And I have disappeared from the picture.
 What place have you given me?
 What is my place?
 Where is my place?
 This is shameful, Congo, you have disowned me!³¹

This expression of Simon Kimbangu's indignation, albeit in a song, gives insight into the church's critique of political leadership. This type of hymn, which is extremely common in the Kimbanguist Church, shapes believers' attitude to the political sphere and seems to find an echo in that sphere, since political leaders keep an eye on developments within the church.

Joseph Kabila's succeeding his assassinated father in office raised diverging reactions among the believers. Some vented their frustration, while others saw in Kabila the fulfillment of one of Kimbangu's prophecies. Several narratives contend that Kimbangu announced a number of political transformations in his "prophecy on the four presidents," which described each of them, including the type of regime and length of time in power. The repeated allusions to Joseph Kabila's being predestined to be the president of the republic became so widespread that they eventually triggered the interest both of Congolese lawmakers, who hang or paste pictures of Simon Kimbangu in their cars,³² and of the man himself, as the following excerpt from the periodical *Jeune Afrique* shows: "Then, a wise young man shall come. He is the one who shall save the country and bring to the people happiness and real independence.' . . . In terms of legitimizing an authority that came to [Joseph Kabila] almost from nowhere ('I did not see it coming,' he once confessed) this is not a negligible source of support provided people believe it. . . . Hence the symbolic usefulness of this resort albeit apocryphal to Simon Kimbangu."³³

Although Kimbangu never saw a liberated Congolese nation during his lifetime even though he announced decolonization, it is often the glorious kingdom of Kongo that appears between the lines of the messianic and prophetic statements attributed to him. In this sense, the three nations, which, according to Kimbanguists, used to be a single, vast kingdom in precolonial times, are understood as a world in the making, whose reunification, prophesied by Kimbangu, will be accomplished by a king whom Kimbangu will designate and guide from above. This is why some people saw Joseph Kabila as a harbinger of this golden age. Indeed, Kabila's rise to power as the head of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, following Mobutu's demise and the assassination of his father, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, in 2001,



Figure 23. President Joseph Kabila (*left*) visits Dialungana in Nkamba shortly before the latter's death in 2001.

ushered in a new era in the relations between political leaders and Kimbanguism, particularly as regards the figure of Simon Kimbangu. Kabila chose to build an alliance with the Kimbanguist Church on the basis of its political messianism.

Joseph Kabila is the first Congolese president who has behaved like a Kimbanguist. He stayed three days in Nkamba in March 2003 and refused to take the seat the people had prepared for him as the president; he sat instead among the rank-and-file Kimbanguists in the temple—something none of his predecessors had ever done, not even Mobutu, who had only made one brief visit to Nkamba, despite his friendship with Diangienda. It seems that the DRC's political leadership has gained awareness of the role played by Simon Kimbangu in the country's national independence. In the first months of 2008, Kabila ordered the creation of a monument in Matadi, Lower Congo, to pay homage to Simon Kimbangu, and Kabila named him a national hero in 2010.

In July 2011, Kimbangu was declared innocent by a Congolese military high court revising the decision of the colonial War Council, which had sentenced him to death for attacking the security of the state. With the patronage of President Kabila, an international conference entitled "Simon Kimbangu, the Man, His Work, and His Contribution in the Process of Liberation of Blacks" was organized by Professor Elikia M'Bokolo and held

at the Kimbanguist Center in Kinshasa in the midst of the presidential campaign in the DRC.³⁴ The spiritual leader Simon Kimbangu Kiangani encouraged church members to vote for Kabila by prophesying his victory.

After a thirty-year quest for identity, which saw the demise of both Marxism and Mobutism, the challenge facing political leaders in the three Congos is to find a history that is inspiring enough to provide their nations with constructive norms and ideological values. As a result, religion appears to be a tool helping politicians to reinfuse ideology into the countries' populations, allowing the people to better handle uncertainty and to redefine the centrality of identity, without which the Congolese nations cannot be comprehended or ruled. As the playwright Pius Ngandu Nkashama pointed out, to the extent that Western discourse on Africa—particularly and most tragically in Francophone Africa—is in a deadlock, parallel languages, which, in this case, have combined with religious thinking, have become concrete spaces for discursive practices.³⁵

Beyond national political developments, the Kimbanguist Church simultaneously focuses on its dogma that Congo is the garden of Eden and on its goal to remedy the oppression of Blacks all over the world. The pan-African message of identity reconstruction is rooted in an acute awareness of the common situation of domination and leads the Kimbanguists to identify their cause with that of all Black people, who, they believe, all expect their redemption from God. This is evidenced by one of the prophecies of Simon Kimbangu, who announced in 1921 that African Americans and other African-descended people would follow God's plan and go back to Africa to help the continent benefit from their knowledge and resources. Because of this prophecy, during his trial Kimbangu was accused, among other things, of trying to spread Marcus Garvey's ideas in Congo. Two remarks must be made about this point. First, it is not known whether Kimbangu met or even heard about Garvey. Perhaps, when he tried to make a living before obeying the calling of Christ, he heard about Garvey or the Universal Negro Improvement Association at the oil factory where he worked. But there is nothing about Garvey in Kimbangu's sermons, and the only mention of Garvey appears in the prosecutor's attacks on Kimbangu during his trial. Second, when Kimbangu prophesied about the return of African Americans, he was very different from Garvey: he did not say he would live to see a Back-to-Africa movement but instead took his youngest collaborator, Michaëlle (Mikala) Mandombe, as a witness who would live to see the fulfillment of the prophecy. This woman died in 2001 after seeing the delegations of African Americans led by

George Harris from Atlanta, Georgia, and Dr. Ramona Tascoe from Oakland, California.

Since the 1970s, the Kimbanguist Church has included a dynamic diaspora on all continents (with congregations in Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and China),³⁶ which keeps alive the ideal of Black internationalism. But the Kimbanguist version of pan-Africanism grants a special, explicit role to Black America in its systematic interpretation of history as guided by divine Providence. The construction of Kimbanguist identity implies a pan-African consciousness of what Balandier described in the 1950s as “the racial solidarity existing between the Kimbanguists and black Americans”: “A third group of themes emphasizes the gulf [and] highlights the rift between the Blacks and the Whites . . . and reveal[s] the emergence of a kind of ‘counter-racism’ among the Congolese. These publicize the ‘trials and persecutions’ to which the Blacks had been subjected, and glorify their racial solidarity with ‘the Negroes who are now living in America but who will return to their own country, the Congo.’”³⁷ This quotation provides an interesting backdrop to the analysis of the present situation, since African-descended people have played a part in the messianic ideal constructed by Simon Kimbangu from the onset of his politico-religious movement.

From the 1980s through today, groups of African American men and women have regularly visited Nkamba and Kinshasa to learn about the Kimbanguist Church in Congo. In the eyes of the Kimbanguists, this is less a matter of back-to-Africa pan-Africanism than the accomplishment of Kimbangu’s prophecy. Inspired hymns also reinforce the link between America and Africa, embracing the entire African diaspora, whose liberation lies at the core of Kimbangu’s mission, since Africana people also bear the consequences of the specific sin of Blacks. This is made plain by the following hymn, received in Kikongo and sung during the ceremonies of atonement for original sin in 1992:

Alas, my God!
 Who made me a black person?
 Indeed, suffering has been my lot to this day.
 Both we, natives of Africa, the land of suffering,
 And those living in faraway countries, we all share the misery
 Caused by creatures just like us.

Chorus: Our ancestors transgressed and never repented;
 But we are begging Thee, why not listen to us?

Consider at least the suffering of our fathers and pardon us!
 See, my God,
 For so many years I have been a prisoner,
 I, the Black race, jailed for 4,400 years
 To this day, why not listen to us?
 Why allow these persecutions night and day,
 As if the black race were not of Thy making?

This hymn emphasizes the subordinate status of Blacks as a racial group and the belief that it is the consequence of their forefathers' sin. It leads the believers to identify with oppressed Black people all over the world and plead with God for their collective redemption.

Since the turn of the twentieth century, some African Americans have migrated to African countries. Among the factors leading them to visit and sometimes settle in Africa, religion appears to play a significant role. It was the prime motivation of a group of African Americans who currently live in the DRC within the Kimbanguist communities, who are in search of an identity and new forms of expression of their racial consciousness. How do they interact with Kimbanguist believers, and what role are they given by the latter? What is their perception of Kimbanguist messianism?

To better understand the relation between African Americans and Kimbanguism, it is best to grasp first their relation to the Bible. Wimbush analyzed it in the following terms: "For African Americans to read scriptures is to read darkness. By referring here to darkness I do not mean to play the usual rhetorical-symbolization games that set up endless but predictable polarities and dualities. . . . African Americans' engagement of the Bible points to the Bible as that which both reflects and draws unto itself and engages and problematizes a certain complex order of existence associated with marginality, liminality, exile, pain, trauma."³⁸ African Americans who visit or settle in Kimbanguist communities may easily fit this description, as well as St. Clair Drake's analysis of pan-Africanism as an African American initiative aiming at establishing trade relations with Africans and uniting with them to protest and eradicate color discrimination.³⁹ Given that Kimbanguism is rooted in a critique of the subordinate status of Blacks worldwide and the need to build a Black internationalism, it is not surprising that it has attracted African Americans. Among them, three categories may be identified: the first comprises those who make the trip for religious reasons; the second, those who are in search of a history or traditions; and the third, those who go to Congo for humanitarian purposes.

Two types of visitors fall into the “religious” category. First, a number of African Americans go to Kimbanguist communities on ecumenical missions. On December 16, 1989, for example, an interfaith delegation, composed of twenty-seven African American men and women, flew from Boston to visit the Kimbanguist temple in Kinshasa. The head of the delegation, Rev. Lowry, was greeted by President Mobutu and justified their coming in the following terms: “You are at the head of a country which is heaven on earth.” To the Kimbanguists, Rev. Lowry said, “It’s so good to be home. . . . Let it be known that the spirit of your great leader and teacher is alive, and because of that, we will overcome.”⁴⁰ Although these words may be interpreted as simple diplomacy, they were given uncommon significance because they perfectly espoused Kimbanguist millenarianism.

The second type of visitors are those who believe they have received a specific calling in relation to Kimbanguist spirituality. A woman called Harron Farrel, for example, had spent her life in the United States, but mentioned in her last wishes that she wanted to be buried in Nkamba. When she passed away in 1986, her husband complied, in the presence of the Kimbanguist community and the Zairian authorities. Diangienda explained that she had chosen to be buried there as a result of a vision, which had convinced her that Nkamba is the birthplace of humanity. Later, when the Kimbanguists celebrated the eighty-first anniversary of the creation of their church on April 6, 2002, the ceremony held in Nkamba was graced by the presence of a dozen African Americans. Their exhortations were peppered with references to Kimbanguist identity. For instance, some of them identified with the community and publicly (re)asserted their faith in Africa as their homeland, speaking in the names of their ancestors and identifying with the Africans:⁴¹

I’m reminded right now of the Children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt, by the hand of Moses, for the Lord brought them out. I am so thankful, for the Lord blessed me to come to see and to hear my own siblings before I go down into the earth. And I do believe just as the Lord brought the Children of Israel out, He’s going to bring us out.

I want first of all to thank you for welcoming me back home. And in the United States, promises are often made, but you have shown me the only beings who can make promises, ’cause you can keep them. I was very humbled when I saw the homes that you have been building

for us [an allusion to the studios built by the church members to host their visitors].

As I meet you, I look around, and it makes me feel so good. I see so many of you who look like me. I feel like you!

I have been truly blessed by God to touch this ground and to see all of you, [to see] that Africa is the beginning of mankind. I am truly humbled by your hospitality and your graciousness.

I saw you in November, and I told you I was humbled by your presence, and I was centered spiritually. I promised you that I would return and that I would help to bring supplies to the hospital and to the church and to work on special programs. I have returned. I am again centered spiritually, and when I leave next week, you can be sure that we will continue to work on your behalf, and to spread the news among other African Americans about the Kimbanguist Church and about your efforts, and to help bring more African Americans back home to Congo.

My brothers and sisters in Africa, my brothers and sisters of Congo—most importantly, you're my brothers and sisters in God—I give honor to you, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers, and all of the Kimbanguist members. The road here is a spiritual journey. I'm here representing my great-great-grandmother and my great-great-grandfather. I give honor to God for sending me here to be reunited and to be at home.

The last visitor to speak chose to do so in Lingala and French, in order to stress her connection to the country: “Ngai/bino, té. Bisso. And, à cause de ça, ezali essengo mingi! [It's not about me and you. It's us. And because of this, it's a great joy].”

The remarks above are consistent with the tenets of Kimbanguist identity on three points: the belief in Africa as the homeland of the first human beings, a sense of belonging to a Black international community based on a strong phenotypical likeness, and a shared situation of oppression. Most visits of African Americans to Kimbanguist holy places, particularly Nkamba, are typically experienced as a return to the motherland from which their ancestors were forcibly removed and transported across the ocean.

Another important factor in the reception of these African American visitors was the link some of them had established with Kimbanguist spirituality and the way in which they testified to it when justifying their presence in Nkamba. Two such testimonies were particularly significant. Dinah Smith, the wife of Rev. Alfred Smith from California, said she had come to seek a cure for her Parkinson's disease and shared a vision she had: "When I came here to Congo, I heard a song in my spirit, and the name of that song was 'We Are Standing on Holy Ground.' The rest of the words are—I won't sing it, but it says, 'I know that there are angels all around.' And I believe God is going to touch my body because God is here."⁴²

Dinah Smith's description of her mystical experience bears a striking resemblance to Kimbanguist spirituality, which grants considerable importance to inspired hymns; it also neatly fits with the Kimbanguist reading of the Bible, which defines Nkamba as the Holy Land and the place where God resides. At this point, the spiritual leader Simon Kimbangu Kiangani drew the audience's attention to a detail he found significant—Pastor Smith's wife was called Dinah, just like the woman Simon Kimbangu had brought back to life in 1921. "According to me, it is the same Mama Dinah who has come to Simon Kimbangu again, to be healed a second time," he asserted. "It is better for her to leave her illness here in Nkamba." I am unable to say whether Dinah Smith was cured in Nkamba, for I have not been able to establish any contact with the California-based couple.

Another member of the same delegation, a man called Ronny, who managed a maritime company based in California, Nevada, and other states of the American Southwest, gave the following explanation for his presence: "A few months ago sitting in my office in the USA, I received an invitation. It was true, but the invitation was not on paper. It was through your prayers and will I received your invitation. So I decided to come."⁴³ Whether this statement was just meant to please the audience or expressed his actual motivation for his pilgrimage to Nkamba is hard to determine.

Further research is needed to find these men and women and interview them about their intentions and their perspective in hindsight. At any rate, to Kimbanguist believers, it looked as though there were a sort of magnetic spiritual power reaching people of African descent wherever they were and attracting them to Nkamba—as though Kimbangu, from the next world, had decided to bring into his fold Black followers hailing from the African diaspora. This representation seems valid because the visitors themselves described their experiences in these terms.

Other descendants of enslaved Africans, from other parts of the African diaspora, also testified that they had been through similar spiritual experiences with Kimbanguism. A French actress from the Caribbean island of Martinique, Joby Valente, who is well known to Black activists in France, first visited the Kimbanguist Church in the late 1980s. She explained that one day, while lying on her couch napping, she had a vision of a Black woman robed in white, with her head covered, who said to her, "Kimbangu." Since this was the first time she had heard the word, she did not stir, but the same woman repeated in a loud voice, "Kimbangu!" She then began a quest to solve the mystery, which eventually led her to visit a Kimbanguist community in Kinshasa. In her testimony, she asserted that she had the gift of receiving inspired hymns, just like bona fide members of the Kimbanguist Church. A favorite hymn (which she received in French) says:

I believe in You, Lord
 Yes, You are the mightiest.
 I trust in Your goodness, for You promised us
 That next to You we can win everything:
 "Don't ever forget that I am holding your hand,
 As long as I am holding it, there will be no faltering."

A Kimbanguist journalist asked whether she had received the hymn or composed it, since she was also a musician. She said, "When you compose a song, you elaborate on a theme. But in this case, it just came to me in the middle of a dream, without my refining it. I just got up and told myself I mustn't lose it, so I jotted it down on a piece of paper."⁴⁴

Another descendant of enslaved Africans hailed from the United Kingdom. His name was Raymond Reynolds, and he accompanied the African American delegation that visited the Kimbanguist Church in December 2000. He addressed the church members:

After more than 400 years, each one of us has finally—finally—found our way home. And the funny thing is, I could imagine that, you know, maybe one of our ancestors just popped into the forest to get a little bit of fruit. . . . But finally, we're home. There [are] so many things that can be said and that I'm experiencing within my heart. A son of Africa—to be an African or a Black man, it really is a

struggle. Each one of us has to fight for the little bit that we achieve in our lives—fight against a system which works against us. And many times this means spiritually as well as materially. I'm standing here in front of you with the name Dimonekene. And this is the name that Papa Simon Kimbangu gave me. The church that I worship at is not the Kimbanguist Church; in fact this is true for my wife and also for David Hughes [another member of the delegation]. But Papa Simon Kimbangu *came* to us and told us to come to Nkamba. This is the *truth* of what each one of us [is] involved in. Brothers and sisters, [we] . . . have been really moved and have a strong desire to move this fantastic spiritual Providence forward. So today, perhaps you only see a few of us, but in the future we're going to bring *all* our brothers and sisters. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵

Because Kimbanguists believe that the founder of their church has the power to appear even though he has been dead since 1951, such testimonies from outsiders do not come as a surprise. In the case of this man, the naming process was unusual because he received his new name from an apparition instead of a living member of Simon Kimbangu's family. The meaning of the Kikongo name Dimonekene is "This was seen" or "This was revealed." On the basis of his testimony, it seems that the experience of oppression or social exclusion is what drew him to Kimbanguism. Even if he and his Congolese wife did not join the church, he still promised to be an advocate for Kimbanguist spirituality and return with other people from the African diaspora.

As for the category of African Americans who are in search of a history or traditions, it is clearly represented in the speech given by George Harris from Atlanta when he visited the Kimbanguist Center in Kinshasa:

We have come because there is something special [here]. There is something special here in Kinshasa. You have a history here. You have a tradition here. That tradition is the tradition of excellence. You must give this tradition to the rest of the black world, and you must give it quickly. I come to you from Atlanta. Young people in Atlanta need you. They need you because they have been deceived about who is God. For one moment, remember: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that he may not go with us to the Promised Land, but *we* would go. There would not be a place on this earth, but there will be a Promised Land for black people. We did not know! How could we know that

this promise would be fulfilled in the promise of Simon Kimbangu? Is this the Promised Land? Is Kinshasa the Promised Land? Is Congo the Promised Land for all black people—or not? We wait for your answer, and then we'll go to work. *Merci beaucoup*.⁴⁶

Two elements stand out in Harris's account of his meeting with the spiritual leader Dialungana. The first was his request to be told the names of his ancestors; he said that Dialungana answered: *Diambu Dia Kiese* ("happy event" in Kikongo). Not actually naming the ancestors of his African American visitor, Dialungana chose to focus on the present moment of the accomplishment of Simon Kimbangu's prophecy, since the presence of African Americans in Nkamba was understood as a sign of the future status of Blacks. The second significant element was the answer Harris received from the spiritual leader to his complaint about the suffering of African Americans: "The doors are open now." It is not surprising that African Americans in search of a Black theology of liberation may feel attracted to the version of Black internationalism upheld by Kimbanguist theology. The need to believe that Congo may be the Promised Land announced by Dr. King led Harris to suggest that Kimbanguists spread Kimbanguism among all the other Africans and people of African descent. In an interview posted online in August 2015, Dr. Ramona Tascoe said:

My first reaction [to Kimbanguism] was very simple. In the African American church we talk about Jesus being black. We talk about the God of the disinherited, the people who suffer the most, who live at the margin, the poor; and when I heard about Papa Simon Kimbangu, all of that theological, spiritual preaching that I had heard in the African American church came alive. It was something that I could touch, something I could see, something I could [witness inside], if I believed. And for me, there was no question: when I went to Nkamba, when I went to Kinshasa the first time, and I heard all of these stories, I became convinced that the Kimbanguist Church, Papa Simon Kimbangu, was the answer to the African Americans' prayer.⁴⁷

These words reflect the same quest for liberation and for a God who takes into account the suffering of African Americans as in James Cone's definition of Black theology. He sees the historically White American theology as a tool of White oppression, which ignores the problems of being Black in a White-dominated, racist society.⁴⁸

Finally, the category of African Americans who go to the DRC for humanitarian purposes includes nurses from California. A group came to Nkamba with a screening tool for mammography worth \$150,000, with the goal of helping Congolese hospitals detect breast cancers. Of the two women from this delegation who decided to settle in Congo, one is a physician and works at the Kimbanguist clinic of Kinshasa.

It is worth asking whether African Americans who go to Congo to visit Kimbanguist communities are actually “back home.” The answer varies from one person to the next, judging by their choices. Two women from the nurses’ group chose to settle in Kinshasa, while the rest promised to return to Congo in the future. I know of three African Americans who converted to Kimbanguism—two women, both physicians, and a man who publicly gave a spectacular conversion testimony after delivering a speech at the conference on Kimbangu that took place in Kinshasa in 2011. Nkamba has been appropriated by African Americans whose discourses show a quest for roots or for a religion centered on reconstructing Blackness. Undeniably, many African Americans are now used to going to Africa as tourists, but in this case, they seem to deliberately claim the prophecies made by Simon Kimbangu in 1921 about African Americans returning to the homeland.

The symbolism of the return of African Americans is so deep that before he passed away in August 2001, the second spiritual leader, Dialungana, recommended that studios be built to house the African Americans who were expected to throng to Nkamba by the thousands. The construction of these apartments was called *nkendolo*, a Kikongo word designating the “final limit,” implying the ultimate effort required from church members. Kimbanguist millenarianism teaches that among the harbingers of a new Black identity, African Americans will return to Africa en masse to dwell among the Kimbanguists—hence the magnitude of the project and the fervor put into its completion. Dr. Ramona Tascoe from the humanitarian delegation commented:

It’s not because we’re more special than anyone else. We simply represent that group of Africans who were taken across the waters and separated from their families for over 500 years, who are now finally finding their way home to their mothers and their fathers. But this time, we are realizing that you love us, you need us, we need you, and we are going to be able to help one another on our road to prosperity, because we love the Lord. Thank you for teaching us the importance of the expression “our home is your home”; *nkendolo* belongs to all

of us. Thank you for giving it to us first, so that we can share it with all of you. Thank you.

Last point: African Americans need your prayers in the United States right now. We are now beginning to step forward in our leadership. We're becoming more courageous about our ability to lead, help our nation to be kinder, more fair, more loving, more spiritual. African Americans have found their voice to lead in America, and we need your prayers especially now, after the events of this past year [referring to the attacks of 9/11]. So continue to pray for us. Pray for our courage, pray for our determination. We are not afraid to call on the name of Jesus.⁴⁹

In such a context, the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States in 2008 caused great interest among the Kimbanguists. A seventeen-year-old inspired person, a Roman Catholic named Abali Matuni (aka Mbuta), who was mentioned above, regularly sees apparitions of Simon Kimbangu, although he refuses to convert to Kimbanguism, as his mother did. He said in an interview that Kimbangu gave him a list of all the events transforming the world on a global scale, and Mbuta gave a local politician this list, which allegedly predicted 9/11, Obama's election, and other upcoming events concerning Congo and the world, which he is not yet allowed to reveal.⁵⁰ The election of a Black man as the head of the world's most powerful nation triggered the hopes of Africans in general and African Americans in particular, but for Kimbanguists messianic hopes were rekindled by the confirmation of the prophecy contained in the following inspired hymn, sung in Lingala by the GTKI choir in 1996:

America, get ready, come to Jerusalem!
 For the problem we had discussed
 Will be solved now.

Chorus: Africa, be watchful, the time has come!
 Now you shall realize the magnitude of the problem
 That is yours, America. Come, the time has come,
 I am waiting for you, the time has come.
 America, sound the clarion!
 You have been entrusted with this charge
 Sound the clarion for the whole world to know
 That I am the God of the end.

I have finished everything
Now I will shake the whole world
Let the righteous rejoice!

The perception of inspired hymns as messages sent directly from heaven to the faithful in order to help them decipher the visible and invisible world allows for an interpretation of any event affecting Blacks in the world, and particularly in the United States, as providential signs of change. In the process of messianic interpretation that situates America in the context of providential history, inspired hymns establish a link not only between America and Africa, but also among Black people worldwide. According to the Kimbanguist understanding of the Holy Trinity, Dialungana, as the Black reincarnation of Christ, holds the key to all Black people's liberation. He has been dead since August 2001, but this has not put an end to believers' messianic hopes. As already discussed, one of Simon Kimbangu's prophecies announced the return of African Americans to Africa with the aim of furthering its development. This caused him to be accused of having ties with the Garvey movement when he was tried by the Belgian colonial authorities in 1921.⁵¹

Therefore, quite unsurprisingly, the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States was celebrated by the Kimbanguists. On the Sunday following the American vote, I attended a service at one of the congregations in the metropolitan Paris area. All of the preachers interpreted the U.S. vote as a sign from God and as the long-awaited fulfillment of the prophecies of their spiritual fathers. This went far beyond theological speculation, and they reminded the congregation of an episode during a visit to the United States by Diangienda in the 1980s. On stepping out of the airport, he experienced racism when the first cab driver declined to drive him, saying he never took Blacks in his cab. Diangienda answered calmly, "It doesn't matter at all. You'll see, one day, you'll be driven by Black men."⁵²

The election of a Black man to the U.S. presidency triggered hope in all Black people, but among Kimbanguists, it also reinforced the messianic hope conveyed in the hymn above. They expected what to them was the logical next step in the realization of the process of Black liberation—President Barack Obama's visit to Nkamba. George Harris, who visited Nkamba several times, encouraged Simon Kimbangu Kiangani to write Obama a letter of invitation to the city of Nkamba. In an interview with a Kimbanguist journalist, a Congolese-born Catholic identified only as Marie, who lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, testified in Lingala that on December 10,

2009, she had a vision of Simon Kimbangu with Barack Obama standing by his side; she described the visits Obama would make to Lubumbashi and Nkamba.⁵³ The faithful are confident they will some day see Mr. Obama tread the sacred ground of their holy city. A process of appropriation of the Bible led to the birth of a church that is both centered on identity reconstruction in and from Congo, and oriented toward the African diaspora with the aim of mutual salvation from situations of oppression.

CONCLUSION

Building on the Bible, a White, ethnocentric civilization with pretensions to universalism was born. Building on the Bible, peoples deemed uncivilized were Christianized. Building on the same Bible, a culture of resistance and counter-acculturation emerged and gave birth to independent African churches that espoused African peoples' struggle against colonial domination. The guiding purpose of this book has been to analyze the ways in which the Bible was appropriated and made to respond to the needs of identity reconstruction within the frame of African-initiated churches.

I began with the movement of the Antonians, which almost coincided with the start of the Christianization of the kingdom of Kongo in the eighteenth century and is considered by many scholars to be the earliest messianic and prophetic African movement. As the head of this resistance movement, Kimpa Vita initiated a process of revision of the history of sub-Saharan Africa through an appropriation of the Bible, which she claimed had been confiscated, truncated, and ultimately whitewashed by colonial missionaries. Without any in-depth knowledge of scriptures—because the Roman Catholics were opposed to letting laypeople, let alone colonized people, access the Bible freely—she set about reeducating her fellow Congolese to a consciousness of their Blackness, which she believed had been warped by a logic of domination. Placing herself on the plane of myths, she appropriated the Bible by transgressing the imposed norms of Christianity: she defined Jesus, Mary, the saints, and the angels as Black. Although she

was burned at the stake in July 1706 after an ecclesiastical trial, the spirit of appropriation of the Congolese Joan of Arc was not reduced to ashes with her body; it remained alive in new spiritual leaders.

Twentieth-century Africa was the setting for other movements of anti-colonial protest, some of which gave rise to new African-initiated churches. Among the best known in Francophone Africa was the movement led by William Wadé Harris in Ivory Coast and Liberia. While he did not challenge the colonial order, Harris also appropriated the Bible and bequeathed it to his followers as a remedy for the predicament of Africans and their lack of technological development. In his turn, Simon Kimbangu in the Belgian Congo established a link between the scriptures and Blackness, prophesying the independence of African nations and the return of African Americans to the motherland. The lasting success of these prophetic movements is due to the appropriation of the Bible by the successors of the founders, who entirely reprocessed the parameters of Christian identity, which had initially been defined by colonial missionaries. The appropriation of the Bible by African-initiated churches must therefore be seen as a global process, reaching much further than the purely religious life. In these processes, the Bible is embraced so that it can be revised; the combination of acceptance and reinterpretation responds to the need for identity reconstruction that was identified and met by these African spiritual leaders, who transformed the scriptures into an authentically African religion.

This book has focused on the specific way in which Kimbanguists relate to the Bible, because their understanding of it is a religious process centered on an in-depth reflection on race, which involves believers in questioning the implications of Blackness. This process highlights a discrepancy between the normative approach to the Bible imposed by colonial missionaries in the Christianization period and the present understanding of the scriptures, which is shaped by popular beliefs. These beliefs are both informed and sustained by the Kimbanguist faith, and they are supplemented by references outside the Bible, namely the church's inspired hymns and the prophetic messages delivered by its spiritual leaders. These specific features define the Kimbanguist faith.

Thus, the Kimbanguist Church is both an institution that tries to conform to the criteria of Christianity, as they have been universally normalized by the World Council of Churches, and a space for socialization and the internalization and transmission of new biblical norms. These new norms are elaborated by traditional, or popular, Kimbanguism, which dictates how each believer should act as a Black person, while the norms imposed by the

WCC are violated by the legitimizing of Simon Kimbangu as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit and his three sons as the Holy Trinity. Since the biblical norms were publicly modified by Kimbanguist popular theology in the year 2000, when the date of Christmas was officially changed as a result of Kimbanguist Christology, the Kimbanguist Church as an institution has been at odds with the World Council of Churches. Since there is no effort to radically and durably redefine the theology of the Kimbanguist Church in the name of its own founding principles, it is the traditional dogma that will gain ground and establish its legitimacy as the only Kimbanguist theology.

The success of popular Kimbanguist theology may be explained by the need for African believers to be in charge of their own destiny. Since the historical roots of the church in Africa were inseparable from colonial oppression and persecution, it was highly unlikely for its members to adhere to the God of the European colonists and a White, blue-eyed Jesus. As the African American theologian James Cone pointed out in very explicit terms:

It is therefore the task of black theology to make theology relevant to the black reality, asking, "What does Jesus Christ mean for the oppressed blacks of the land?" . . . But black existence is existence in a hostile world without the protection of the law. If Jesus Christ is to have any meaning for us, he must leave the security of the suburbs by joining blacks in their condition. What need have we for a white Jesus when we are not white but black? If Jesus Christ is white and not black, he is an oppressor, and we must kill him. The appearance of black theology means that the black community is now ready to do something about the white Jesus, so that he cannot get in the way of our revolution.¹

These remarks help explain the success of Kimbanguist popular theology over the discourse of the academic theologians of the Kimbanguist Church, who are silent on the future of Black men and women. Traditional Kimbanguism may be seen as revealing a desire to stop believing in a distant, foreign deity and relate instead to a Black God who looks like the believers. To this extent, Kimbanguists' quest for spirituality is not so much a quest for God—for he has already been identified as Kimbangu—as an effort to overturn the existing hierarchy and eventually see Blacks endowed with a respectable, meaningful social status. As Dominique Zahan observed, "It is not to please God or out of love for Him that Africans pray, beg, or make sacrifices. They do so to become themselves and fulfill the order in which they are involved."²

The greatest challenge for Kimbanguism remains the unification of Africans and people of African descent around its religious message. This challenge could be met if Kimbanguism keeps drawing strength from its critique of Blacks' oppressed status and its deconstruction of Blacks' negative identity. Its pan-African dimension leads to a consistent discourse built on a reformatted biblical past, a present interpreted through the exegesis of inspired hymns and messages from spiritual leaders, and a future anchored in a millenarian conception of hope. Even if hope seems shaky these days, because of all the crises affecting Africa and the Kimbanguist Church itself, inspired hymns such as the following (received in Lingala) have a soothing effect on believers:

Sooner or later, oh, sooner or later,
 You will be in peace
 You will be in peace
 In times of joy
 But also in times of suffering,
 And even in times of grief,
 Persevere,
 Do not fear, or falter, or flee:
 We shall overcome,
 We shall rejoice forever!

Chorus: Do not be surprised
 At the things you see:
 You are not without knowledge
 Of all that is happening.
 Sound the clarion,
 Let the whole world hear it!
 For the Judgment Day
 Has begun in this world.

Kimbanguists are here reassured that they are a chosen people who really grasp the meaning of sacred texts (and hymns) and hence are cognizant of the destiny of the world, which is announced by this hymn as being Judgment Day.

Analyzing the relation between Kimbanguism and the scriptures gives insight into the process of revising the parameters of Christian identity away from the legacy of colonial missionaries. In this sense, the biblical past

and the Kimbanguist present constitute a whole, both aiming at the reconstruction of Blackness. This often has caused the Kimbanguist Church to be considered racist by sister churches, but even though racial discourse is real and prevalent in this church, it is not racist. While the critique of social inequalities is formulated in such terms as the “Black race,” “Black people,” and so on, this expresses nothing but a yearning for the end of a situation of racial domination.

Finally, because they are intent on reading the Bible as a means of liberation, Kimbanguism and other African-initiated churches illustrate the successful appropriation of sacred scriptures. Studying Kimbanguist theology shows how an African religious phenomenon may be articulated with the study of the Bible. Kimbanguism represents a unique, African-initiated way for a formerly colonized people to make texts, revisit biblical personas, and both “signify” and “signify on” scriptures as vectors for understanding Black-White relations, in the hope of achieving liberation from the subordinate status imposed on African people since the beginning of the modern era.

NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, all English translations from sources published in French have been provided by Cécile Coquet-Mokoko.

INTRODUCTION

1. Memmi, *Le racisme*, 79–80.
2. Baba Kaké, “De l’interprétation,” 241.
3. Mbonimpa, *Ethnicité et démocratie en Afrique*, 65.
4. Kiamuangana (Verckys) and Orchestre Veve, “Nakomitunaka,” in *Chansons et proverbes lingala*, 14–17.
5. Savarèse, *Histoire coloniale et immigration*, 68–74.
6. Wimbush, *White Men’s Magic*, 49–50.
7. Lambert, “Religion et modernité,” 3.
8. Laburthe-Tolra, *Vers la lumière?*, 99.
9. Lambert, “Religion et modernité,” 5.
10. Rivière, “Rites profanes,” 378–80.
11. Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 1.
12. Messi Metogo, *Théologie africaine et ethnophilosophie*, 36.
13. Gordon, “On the Monstrous Threat of Reasoned Black Desire,” 182.
14. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, 47–48.
15. See Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, and Thornton, *The Kongoese Saint Anthony*.
16. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*.
17. Froelich, *Nouveaux dieux d’Afrique*, 86.
18. *Ibid.*, 63.
19. Balandier, *Sociology of Black Africa*, 503–4.
20. Martin, *Simon Kimbangu*, 197.
21. Asch, *L’église du prophète Kimbangu*.

CHAPTER I

1. J. Cuvelier and L. Jadin, *L’ancien royaume du Congo*, 400, in Randles, *L’ancien royaume du Kongo*.
2. Quoted in Heusch, *Le roi de Kongo*, 69–70.
3. Kabwita, *Le royaume Kongo*, 43.
4. *Ibid.*, 24.
5. Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, 22–23.

6. Van Wing, *Études ba-Kongo*, 9–13.
7. Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, 15–16.
8. The term “Pygmy” is Greek and means nothing in the various African languages spoken in the countries where these indigenous people live. “Batswa” is one of the least derogatory names they are called by their Lingala-speaking compatriots. I chose this term because it is the one I am familiar with. On the Batswa, see Nobirabo Musafiri, “Right to Self-Determination in International Law,” and Musolo W’isuka, “Encountering the Mbuti Pygmies.”
9. See Vansina, *The Tio Kingdom*.
10. Kabwita, *Le royaume Kongo*, 47.
11. MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, 148, 68.
12. *Ibid.*, 66.
13. Cahier 236 selections quoted by MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, 154.
14. Pigafetta and Lopez, *Description du royaume de Congo*, 66–67.
15. Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, 171.
16. *Ibid.*, 167–68. This list of “vices” reflects cultural realities that are still observable to this day. As in most African countries, homosexuality in the Congo is implicitly and explicitly condemned by moral authorities; gay men and women have no other option but to be closeted; and same-sex marriage is considered to be evidence of the moral decline of Western societies by the Kimbanguist Church (and by other Protestant and Catholic churches). The statement in the text does not reflect my personal position on gay rights.
17. Froelich, *Nouveaux dieux d’Afrique*, 21.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, 250.
20. Froelich, *Nouveaux dieux d’Afrique*, 33.
21. Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, 256.
22. *Ibid.*, 254.
23. *Ibid.*, 253.
24. Sinda, *Le messianisme congolais*, 371.
25. Kabwita, *Le royaume Kongo*, 38.
26. MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, 51.
27. Balandier, *Ambiguous Africa*, 20.
28. *Ibid.*, 9.
29. Las Casas published in 1542 his classic *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, in which he gave a firsthand account of the atrocities committed by the conquistadores.
30. Quoted in von Vacano, “Race and Political Theory,” 254. See also Hanke, *All Man-kind Is One*.
31. Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, 79–80.
32. *Ibid.*, 69.
33. Brunschwig, *Le partage de l’Afrique noire*, 110–14.
34. See Wauthier, *L’Afrique*, 217.
35. Lavigerie, *Mémoire secret*, 65.
36. Quoted in Pokam, *Les églises chrétiennes*, 14. See also the controversial book by Fassassi, *Le péché du pape contre l’Afrique*.
37. Coulon et al., *Libermann 1802–1852*.
38. Laburthe-Tolra, *Vers la lumière?*, 63.
39. See http://www.dacb.org/stories/congo/bentley_william.html.
40. See Laburthe-Tolra, *Vers la lumière?* and the research done on this question by the Congolese historian and Catholic priest Kavenadiambuko Ngemba Ntima, *La méthode d’évangélisation*, 148.

41. Laburthe-Tolra, *Vers la lumière?*, 111–87.
42. Heusch, *Le roi de Kongo*, 17.
43. Croegaert, *L'évangélisation*, 2.
44. See Randles, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, 151–52.
45. Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo*, 62.
46. Croegaert, *L'évangélisation*, 8.
47. Wimbush, *White Men's Magic*, 64–65.
48. Bontinck and Ndembe Nsasi, *Le catéchisme kikongo*, 58.
49. See G. Hulstaert in Vinck, "Race and Racism in Schoolbooks."
50. Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, 165–67.
51. Kabwita, *Le royaume Kongo*, 140–43.
52. *Ibid.*, 147–48.
53. J. Cuvelier and L. Jadin, *L'ancien royaume du Congo*, 400, quoted in Randles, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, 160.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Randles, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, 162.
56. Quoted in Laburthe-Tolra, *Vers la lumière?*, 199.
57. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 2

1. See MacGaffey's comments on Kikongo translation of the scriptures in *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, 46.
2. Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, 253–54.
3. MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture*, 27.
4. See Margarido, "Béatrice du Congo," 49, 50.
5. A White settler called Dominik made the same observation among the Beti people of Cameroon; see Laburthe-Tolra, *Vers la lumière?*, 55.
6. *Ibid.*, 60.
7. Erny, "Noir et blanc en Afrique centrale," 45.
8. "Ham derives from the Hebrew *Ch'm*, associated with being black and burnt" (Rattansi, *Racism*, 17).
9. Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black*, 44.
10. Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, 200.
11. *Buku na koyekola: Botangi na likoma o Lingala* (Buta: Marist Brothers, 1925), 41.
12. *28 ans au Congo* (1905) quoted in Massoz, *Le Congo de Léopold II*, 309–10.
13. Wauthier, *L'Afrique*, 221.
14. Quoted in Deschamps, *Les religions de l'Afrique noire*, 106.
15. Quoted in Vinck, "Race and Racism in Schoolbooks," 104. This song also appears in an online article published by Vinck: <http://www.aequatoria.be/04frans/0538manuels/0381influence.htm>.
16. Quoted in Vinck, "Race and Racism in Schoolbooks," 15.
17. Feagin, *Systemic Racism*, 214.
18. *Ibid.*, 214–15.
19. Quoted in Vinck, "Race and Racism in Schoolbooks," http://www.aequatoria.be/04engels/0538manuels_en/0381influence_en.htm.
20. *Buku na botangi mpe boyebi*, lesson 3, 1. Quoted in Vinck, "Race and Racism in Schoolbooks," http://www.aequatoria.be/04engels/0538manuels_en/0381influence_en.htm.
21. Wimbush, *White Men's Magic*, 59.

22. Rubben, *Leçons pratiques de lingala*, 148.
23. Carpenter and Carpenter, *Banto ba monde*, 30.
24. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 35.
25. *Ibid.*, 46.
26. Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*, 7.
27. *Ibid.*, 60.
28. Both authors quoted by Saivre, "Aimé Césaire et Présence Africaine," 160.
29. Melone, *De la négritude*, 116.
30. Quoted in Bidima, *La palabre*, 101–2.
31. See Diop, "Apport de l'Afrique à la civilisation universelle"; Obenga, *L'Afrique dans l'antiquité*; and Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire générale*.
32. Mobutu, *Discours*, 363–64.
33. Ela, *Repenser la théologie africaine*, 69.
34. Pigafetta and Lopez, *Description du royaume de Congo*, 66.
35. Randles, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, 157.
36. Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*, 109–12.
37. *Ibid.*, 29.
38. Balandier, *Ambiguous Africa*, 163–64.
39. Randles, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, 150–51.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*, 110.
42. Quoted in Randles, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, 48.
43. *Ibid.*, 48–49.
44. Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*, 18.
45. Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, 227–28.
46. Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*, 31.
47. *Ibid.*, 116.
48. *Ibid.*, 117.
49. Quoted in *ibid.*, 117.
50. Quoted in Sinda, *Le messianisme congolais*, 49.
51. Randles, *L'ancien royaume du Kongo*, 157.
52. Sinda, *Le messianisme congolais*, 49.
53. Quoted in Kabwita, *Le royaume Kongo*, 62.
54. *Ibid.*, 59.
55. Martin, *Simon Kimbangu*, 33–34.
56. Lucques, *Relations sur le Congo*, 238.
57. Quoted in Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo*, 114.
58. Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, 263.
59. Archives of the Société des missions africaines (Rome), 12/804.07:28:761, 1914, quoted in Shank, "The Legacy of William Wadé Harris," 170.
60. Balandier, *Ambiguous Africa*, 80–84.
61. Quoted in Bureau, *Le prophète de la lagune*, 11.
62. Benoît quoted in Shank, "Le pentecôtisme du prophète William Wadé Harris," 54.
63. Hartz and Harrington quoted *ibid.*, 60.
64. Walker, *Religious Revolution*, 20.
65. Martin, *The Biblical Concept of Messianism*, 136.
66. Quoted *ibid.*, 67.
67. The last will and testament of Harris, given to John Ahui, 1928, quoted in Walker, *Religious Revolution*, 71.
68. For both versions, see Walker, *Religious Revolution*, 50; Rouch, "Introduction," 152. The reference to Helen Valentine is found in Shank, "The Legacy of William Wadé Harris," 172.

69. See Walker, *Religious Revolution*, xvi; Bureau, *Le prophète de la lagune*, 48; Rouch, "Introduction," 150–51.
70. See Walker, *Religious Revolution*, 141–42, 166.
71. Bureau, *Le prophète de la lagune*, 25.
72. Interview with Kwasi, thirty years old, an official of the Harrist Church, in the greater Paris area, 2002.
73. See Walker, *Religious Revolution*, 133.
74. *Ibid.*, 46–48.
75. *Ibid.*, 148.
76. See Dozon, *La cause des prophètes*.
77. Quoted in Quinn, "The Prophet Harris," 99.
78. Walker, *Religious Revolution*, 54.
79. *Ibid.*, 134.
80. *Ibid.*, 156.
81. Martin, *The Biblical Concept of Messianism*, 137.
82. *Ibid.*, 124.

CHAPTER 3

1. Balandier, *Sociologie actuelle*, 428.
2. Van Wing, "Le ki[m]bang[u]jisme," 566.
3. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 29–30.
4. *Ibid.*, 33.
5. Bourdieu, "Une interprétation de la théorie."
6. Van Wing wrote, "While more and more schools were being created in the regions surrounding Bangu, Kibangu's [*sic*] homeland remained deprived of any teaching to the masses" ("Le ki[m]bang[u]jisme," 592). According to this author, the region of Bangu was bounded on the north approximately by the Congo River, on the south by the Matadi-Léopoldville railway, on the west by the Kwilu region, and on the east by the Inkisi region.
7. Jodogne, *La voix du rédempteur* (December 1921), 381, quoted in Chomé, *La passion*, 13–14.
8. C. Irvine, "The Birth of the Kimbanguist Movement in the Bas-Zaïre" (1921), 68, quoted in Simbandumwe, "Understanding the Role of a Modern Prophet," 176.
9. Andersson, *Messianic Popular Movements*, 4.
10. "Mise au point sur le Kimbanguisme," 5.
11. Raymaekers, "L'église," 702.
12. *Ibid.*, 735.
13. Martin, *Prophetic Christianity in the Congo*, 13.
14. Quoted in Balandier, *Sociologie actuelle*, 431.
15. *Ibid.*, 423.
16. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 15.
17. "Mise au point sur le Kimbanguisme," 19.
18. See Martin, *Prophetic Christianity in the Congo*, 15.
19. Van Wing, *Études ba-Kongo II*, 168.
20. Chomé, *La passion*, 15.
21. F. Choffat, "Notes sur le 'Kimbanguisme,'" *Cahiers de la Réconciliation* 5 (1966): 14, quoted in Simbandumwe, "Understanding the Role of a Modern Prophet," 179.
22. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 45.
23. Van Wing, "Le ki[m]bang[u]jisme," 571.
24. *Ibid.*, 575–76.

25. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 64–65.
26. *Ibid.*, 65.
27. Chomé, *La passion*, 26, 27.
28. *Ibid.*, 38.
29. Secret document no. 885, folio no. 4/A. “Only a few pages from this important document have been found in the Belgian colonial archives in July 1960, that is, one month after the proclamation of independence of Zaire. It seems certain that, for the most part, the record of the hearings of Simon Kimbangu was shipped off to Belgium by the Belgian colonial authorities just before the independence of Zaire, then named the Congo” (Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, nn. 28, 96).
30. Van Wing, “Le ki[m]bang[u]isme,” 580.
31. Chomé, *La passion*, 55–56.
32. Balandier, *Sociology of Black Africa*, 417–21.
33. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 103.
34. Nginamau, *Émission ya bazoba*, DVD 34.
35. Van Wing, “Le ki[m]bang[u]isme,” 580–81.
36. Chomé, *La passion*, 93–94.
37. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 82.
38. Balandier, *Sociology of Black Africa*, 414.
39. Jaffré, in the community journal of the boys’ school of M’bamou, 1930, quoted in Sinda, *Le messianisme congolais*, 88.
40. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 168–69.
41. Chomé pointed out that “until Simon Kimbangu was arrested, at no moment was there any rebellion, let alone the appearance of it, among his followers; and at no moment was the blood of any White person shed” (*La passion*, 24).
42. Kimbanguist Catechism, in Diangienda, *Essence of Kimbanguist Theology*, 25–28.

CHAPTER 4

1. Brou, “Le prophétisme,” 83.
2. Van Wing, “Le ki[m]bang[u]isme,” 564.
3. *Ibid.*, 571.
4. Brou, “Le prophétisme,” 78–79.
5. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 82.
6. Marie-Louise Martin reported this legend in *Kimbangu*, 39.
7. Balandier, *Sociologie actuelle*, 425.
8. Diangienda Kuntima, sermon to the congregations of Nkamba during the five-month retreat (December 1988–May 1989), PRESKI Nkamba.
9. Dorès, *La beauté de Cham*, 24.
10. Goffman, “The Interaction Order.”
11. MacGaffey, “The Beloved City,” 130–31.
12. Press conference, Ngobila harbor, Kinshasa, November 6, 1990, PRESKI Kinshasa.
13. Kisolokele, speech delivered to the Kimbanguist congregation of the Plateaux des quinze ans, Brazzaville, 1994, author’s notes.
14. Martin, *Kimbangu*, 149. “Princes héritiers” is best translated as “heirs apparent.”
15. Froelich, *Nouveaux dieux d’Afrique*, 68.
16. The title was given to him by the Zairian state authorities, according to Marie-Louise Martin, so that he would be on an equal footing with the highest dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church.

17. Ecumenical information review for Congo-Brazzaville, *Le Chemin* 103 (January 2001): 6.
18. Diangienda, sermon to church members, January 12, 1992, PRESKI Kinshasa.
19. Sermon by Rev. Dr. Adama Iyefa, “Forum ya le 31/01/2000 et 15/01/2001,” *Cahiers des Forums* 8 (n.d.): 9–13.
20. Interview with Martorel Kututukidi Diangienda, Évry, France, July 15, 2006.
21. The phrase “occult market” designates a place in the invisible world where the supply of and demand for human souls meet. Such markets attract sorcerers, who exchange for greater occult powers the souls (i.e., vital powers) of the people they hold under their influence. The phrase “occult restaurant” designates a place in the invisible world where human flesh is (symbolically) eaten. These notions are part and parcel of Congolese culture, hence the absence of any need for explanation in the sermon.
22. Diangienda, sermon, October 1991, PRESKI Kinshasa.
23. Van Wing, “Le ki[m]bang[u]lisme,” 108.
24. Diangienda, farewell sermon, January 2, 1992, PRESKI Kinshasa.
25. Asch, *L'église du prophète Kimbangu*, 142–43.
26. Martin, *Kimbangu*, 72, 164.
27. Balandier, *Sociology of Black Africa*, 422.
28. Rouget, *La musique et la transe*, 78.
29. *Ibid.*, 79.
30. Eliade, *Initiation, rites, sociétés secrètes*, 25.
31. “Spiritual leader” in Kikongo; the title for Diangienda, as explained above.
32. Rev. Assumbe, interview with author at the temple of the Plateaux des quinze ans, Brazzaville, November 2000.
33. Rouget, *La musique et la transe*, 50.
34. Froelich, *Nouveaux dieux d'Afrique*, 31.
35. Mayol, *Les enfants de la liberté*, 237–38.
36. Munukutuba, a language spoken in the southwestern portions of the two Congos, is officially recognized as one of the national languages in each country.
37. Raymaekers, “L'église,” 690–91.
38. Rouget, *La musique et la transe*, 85–89.
39. I met this interviewee again eleven years later, in 2011. His premonition proved accurate, for he had recovered his gift by that time.
40. Oosthuizen, *Theology of a South African Messiah*.
41. Krabill, *Hymnody of the Harrist Church*, 303.
42. See Mokoko Gampiot, “Inspired Hymns as a Belief System.”

CHAPTER 5

1. Martin, *Kimbangu*, 39.
2. Thibaud, *Dictionnaire des religions*, 208.
3. Quoted in Gélie, “Israël,” n.p.
4. Speech to church members, September 12, 1991, PRESKI Kinshasa and author's notes. Diangienda (who had received long before his father the medal of the Order of the Leopard) had just received another decoration on behalf of his father on the occasion of Simon Kimbangu's rehabilitation by the Zairian state. Building on the legend, he drew the members' attention to the similarity between the medal he was wearing and the one presented his father.
5. Diangienda's reaction to an article by Ndinga Masakuba, in a speech to church members, April 27, 1991, Matete, PRESKI Kinshasa.

6. Diangienda, speech to church members, November 5, 1990, Brazzaville, author's notes.

7. Simon Kayobo, archives of the Kimbanguist press, Nkamba, 2000. This testimony is reminiscent of the Indian Sufi understanding of healing studied in Speziale, *Soufisme*, 172, where the author related how ailing Muslim believers saw themselves being operated on by saints in their dreams and woke up healed and bearing surgery scars.

8. Diangienda to church officials, January 2, 1992, Kinshasa, PRESKI Kinshasa.

9. Diangienda, speech to the congregation of Kimbanséké, Zaire, December 2, 1990, PRESKI Kinshasa.

10. Martin, *Kimbangu*, 152.

11. See <http://www.ejcsk-munich.com/resolution.html>.

12. Ibid.

13. Oosthuizen, *Theology of a South African Messiah*, 3–4.

14. Gunner, *Man of Heaven*, 27.

15. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 207–9.

16. Interview with Pastor Jacques Maury, July 2006.

17. Crane, "Rapport sur une visite à l'église kimbanguiste," 13.

18. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 210–11.

19. Bitemo, "Conseil œcuménique," 4.

20. Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, "Déclaration . . . sur les relations de l'Église catholique avec le Kimbanguisme," <http://archives.kimbanguisme.net/bibliotheque/faq/presse/cenco/article.htm>.

21. Jean-François Mayer, "Congo: Quelle identité pour l'Église kimbanguiste? Entretien avec Nduku-Fessau Badze," *Religioscope*, August 29, 2004, http://religion.info/french/entretiens/article_91.shtml.

22. This is also true of the sixty-three resolutions passed by the Kimbanguist Church in October 2002.

23. Letter by Rev. Jean Keller, Aix-en-Provence, to Rev. Olivier Dubuis, Lausanne, Switzerland, November 21, 1984, accessed at the DEFAP Library, Paris.

24. The resolutions drawn up in Nkamba in October 2002 presented Simon Kimbangu; his wife, Marie Muilu; and their three sons, Kisolokele, Dialungana, and Diangienda, as saints.

25. Kuntima, *The Essence of Kimbanguist Theology*, 28.

26. Asch, *L'église du prophète Kimbangu*, 95.

27. See Nguapitshi Kayongo, *Dr. Marie Louise Martin, théologienne*.

28. Martin, "À la recherche d'un pastorat pleinement africain."

29. Ngalula Tshianda, a Roman Catholic theologian, concurs in "Du pouvoir de la piété populaire," 32.

30. Walker, *Religious Revolution*, 124.

31. Interview with Gilbert, forty years old, an apostle of the Harrist Church, in the greater Paris area, 2002. See also Mokoko Gampiot, "Harrisme et kimbanguisme."

32. Walker, *Religious Revolution*, 124.

33. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, 281–85.

34. Oosthuizen, *Theology of a South African Messiah*, 4.

35. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, 285–86.

36. Echtler, "Shembe Is the Way," 262.

37. Baubérot, "L'évolution récente du conseil œcuménique des églises," in "Œcuménisme," 777.

38. A man calling himself Prophet Mangongele, residing in Kinshasa, claimed to be in contact with Simon Kimbangu. He explained that the sons of Kimbangu had betrayed their father's memory in choosing the biblical and Christian way. His movement claimed

to be authentically African. Another man from the DRC, who called himself Messenger Mvuka Mbambi-Mozandu, claimed to be a “real Kimbanguist,” unlike the members of the Kimbanguist Church, who are Christians. See Nginamau, *Émission ya bazoba*, DVDs 16 and 21.

39. Mayer, “Congo: Quelle identité,” n.p.

40. “La commission théologique de l’EJCSK (COTHEKI) clarifie la doctrine trinitaire du Kimbanguisme,” report published on October 12, 2005, Kinshasa, PRESKI Kinshasa.

41. Etinga, “L’Église kimbanguiste.”

42. Exhortation to Kimbanguist congregation, Kimbanseke, Zaire, June 11, 1989, PRESKI Kinshasa.

43. Rev. Keller to Rev. Dubuis, November 21, 1984.

44. See the Franco-Belgian documentary by Remiche, *Miracle Merchants*.

45. Nguapitshi Kayongo, “Kimbanguism,” 243.

46. Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire*; Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

47. Poulat, “Aujourd’hui il y a vingt siècles,” 59.

48. *Ibid.*, 61.

49. Chenu, *Le grand livre*, 136. See also Chenu, *The Trouble I’ve Seen*.

50. Hervieu-Léger, “La religion, mode de croire,” 151.

CHAPTER 6

1. Martin, *Kimbangu*, 46–47.

2. Diangienda Kuntima, *L’histoire*, 40–41.

3. *Ibid.*, 45–65.

4. Quoted in Chomé, *La passion*, 46–47.

5. Quoted in Diangienda Kuntima, *L’histoire*, 65.

6. Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques*.

7. Diangienda Kuntima, *L’histoire*, 36.

8. MacGaffey, *Modern Kongo Prophets*, 185.

9. “Document secret, annexe 3. Suite 3. Histoire de l’apparition du prophète Simon Kimbangu,” quoted in Martin, *Kimbangu*, 46.

10. Simbandumwe, *A Socio-Religious and Political Analysis*, 97.

11. Nsiangani, *Éphémérides kimbanguistes*, 124–26.

12. This term refers to widely held beliefs about supernatural beings that visit men and women at night to sexually abuse them. Alternative names are “incubus” (for a male supernatural being) and “succubus” (for a female one).

13. Tonda, *La guérison divine*, 36–37.

14. In the Gospels, Jesus also simultaneously heals and forgives sins.

15. Nginamau, *Émission ya bazoba*, DVD 14.

16. Message from Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, Luntendele, 2002, PRESKI Kinshasa.

17. Diangienda, message to the congregations of Brazzaville, 1990, author’s notes.

18. Diangienda Kuntima, *L’histoire*, 38.

19. Demart, “Les territoires de la délivrance”; Fancello, *Les aventuriers*, 150, 179–80.

20. Janzen with Arkininstall, *The Quest for Therapy*, 25.

21. Martin, *Kimbangu*, 45.

22. Van Wing, “Le ki[m]bang[u]isme,” 575; Andersson, *Messianic Popular Movements*, 50–51; Bazola, “Le kimbanguisme,” quoted in Martin, *Kimbangu*, 41.

23. Martin, *Kimbangu*, 41.

24. Interview with Martorel Kututukidi Diangienda, Évry, France, July 15, 2006.

25. Nginamau, *Émission ya bazoba*, DVD 14.
26. Mokoko Gampiot, *Les Kimbanguistes en France*, 280.
27. Dialungana, who succeeded his brother Diangienda as the Kimbanguist Church's spiritual leader, aptly summed up this point: "When you are taught something, it is best for you to have your own understanding" (PRESKI Kinshasa).
28. Asch, *L'église du prophète Kimbangu*, 143.

CHAPTER 7

1. Desroche, "D'un évangile à une église," 11–12.
2. Martin, "Face aux mouvements prophétiques," 234.
3. Mordillat and Prieur, *Jésus après Jésus*, 113.
4. Eliade, *Histoire*, 343.
5. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, 42–43.
6. Martin, "Les églises indépendantes," 43–44.
7. Balandier, *Sociology of Black Africa*, 427.
8. Martin, "Les églises indépendantes," 33; see also Martin, *Prophetic Christianity in the Congo*, 36–37.
9. After Mobutu's demise in 1997, this word was changed to "Congo."
10. Diangienda, exhortation to the congregants of Kinshasa, January 12, 1992, PRESKI Kinshasa.
11. Van Wing, *Études ba-Kongo II*, 168.
12. Lalayette, "Les religions de l'Afrique noire," 698.
13. Diangienda Kuntima, "The Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by the Prophet Simon Kimbangu," 8.
14. Martin, *Kimbangu*, 147.
15. Sinda, *Le messianisme congolais*, 99.
16. Bastide, "Les Christs noirs," 12.
17. Diangienda, speech to church members, January 4, 1989, PRESKI Nkamba.
18. Briselance, *Histoire de l'Afrique*, 23.
19. Brunet et al., "New Hominid for the Upper Miocene."
20. Diangienda, speech to religious officials of the Kimbanguist schools of Congo-Kinshasa, August 1989 (emphasis in original), PRESKI Kinshasa.
21. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Brazzaville, 1987, author's notes.
22. Simon, *La bretonnité*, 84–85.
23. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 244–45.
24. Béguin and Martin, "À la découverte du Kimbanguisme," 31.
25. Martin, *Kimbangu*, 152–54.
26. Konrad Raiser, speech, Nkamba, July 8, 1999, PRESKI Nkamba.
27. J. Kabongo, "L'Église kimbanguiste précise: Diangienda n'est pas le Saint-Esprit," *Le Phare* (Kinshasa), August 5, 2002, <http://fr.allAfrica.com-Congo-Kinshasa>.
28. *Courrier International*, special issue, 65.
29. Le Callenet, "Les voies de l'émancipation," 473–74.
30. Simon, *La bretonnité*, 94–95.
31. Martin, *Kimbangu*, 123.
32. Martin contended that the policy of Zairianization imposed by Mobutu in 1972 had an impact on the additional names chosen by the sons of Kimbangu: Charles Kis-olokele became Kisolokele Lukelo (Lukelo means "It is revealed now"), Paul Salomon Dialungana became Dialungana Kiangani ("What belongs to another"), and Joseph Diangienda became Diangienda Kuntima ("It went straight to my heart"). See Martin, *Simon Kimbangu*, 17–18.

33. Harris visited the Kimbanguist communities of Brazzaville, Kinshasa, and Nkamba (PRESKI Kinshasa).
34. Interview with Rufin Ossiala, Brazzaville, November 4, 2000.

CHAPTER 8

1. Mary, "Conversion et conversation," 787.
2. Tonda, *La guérison divine*, 20–21.
3. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Nkamba during the five-month retreat (December 1988–May 1989), PRESKI Nkamba. In Congolese culture, nakedness is considered to be the "combat outfit" of sorcerers. Many of my interviewees, as well as the non-Kimbanguist press, reported lived experiences in which men or women had been found at daybreak entirely naked and dazed, allegedly as a result of their souls being prevented from reentering their bodily envelopes at the end of their travels in the invisible world. A well-known anecdote in Kimbanguist spheres says that in 1921, Simon Kimbangu encountered naked sorcerers and struck them with paralysis so that their families would find out their real identities at dawn; this resulted in their banishment from their village.
4. Rosny, *Les yeux de ma chèvre*, 60.
5. Rosny, *La nuit, les yeux ouverts*, 15–16.
6. Lazareff, *La sorcière blanche*, 66–88.
7. Sinda, *Le messianisme congolais*, 371.
8. Simon, *La bretonnité*.
9. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 11.
10. Bastide, "Les Christs noirs," preface to Sinda, *Le messianisme congolais*, 11.
11. Martin, *Simon Kimbangu*, 15.
12. Bourdieu, "Rites of Institution," in *Language and Symbolic Power*, 126.
13. Bourdieu, "L'identité et la représentation," 70.
14. Simon, "Race," 96.
15. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Nkamba during the five-month retreat (December 1988–May 1989), PRESKI Nkamba.
16. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Kinshasa, May 17, 1992, PRESKI Kinshasa.
17. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Nkamba during the five-month retreat (December 1988–May 1989), PRESKI Nkamba.
18. Diangienda, sermon to the congregation of the Plateaux des quinze ans, Brazzaville, November 6, 1990, author's notes.
19. Quoted in Bureau, *Le prophète de la lagune*, 186.
20. Dozon, *La cause des prophètes*, 239–40.
21. Mary, *Le bricolage africain*, 150–52.
22. Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 199–200. See also Malcolm X and Haley, *Autobiography of Malcolm X*.
23. Malcolm X and Haley, *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 107.
24. See Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*, ch. 55 ("The Making of the Devil").
25. Kepel, *À l'ouest d'Allah*, 44.
26. Diangienda, speech to students and dean, Kimbanguist divinity school, Lutendele, July 1990, PRESKI Kinshasa.
27. Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both*, 247–48.
28. Interview with Angelo Rodrigues Figueiredo, November 30, 2000, Nkamba, DRC.
29. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBTCPrpNRUU>, beginning at the 4-minute mark. Figueiredo may be seen beginning at 1 minute, 37 seconds.

30. Martin, *Prophetic Christianity in the Congo*, 15.
31. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Kinshasa, September 29, 1991, PRESKI Kinshasa.
32. This term may be understood as referring to colonial oppression or in the sense of bewitching a person by stealing his or her soul.
33. Balandier, *Sociology of Black Africa*, 427.
34. Balandier, *Le détour*, 28.
35. Froelich, *Nouveaux dieux d'Afrique*, 64.
36. Bavua Ne Longo, "Les douze tribus d'Israël," 8.
37. Quoted in Clouard and Placca, "L'Afrique de Jean-Paul II," 138.
38. When Simon Kimbangu was granted posthumous recognition by the Zairian government on September 12, 1991, the EJCSK replaced the term "prophet" in its official name with "special envoy" to emphasize that Kimbangu had been entrusted by Jesus with the task of retrieving the "lost sheep," that is, Black people.
39. Smith, *Cultural Foundations of Nations*, 40–46.
40. The exam topic was brought back by one of my cousins and is in my personal possession.
41. The exception is Kisolokele, who was a high-ranking cabinet member in the government of Joseph Kasa-Vubu in the independent Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1960 to 1965.
42. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Kinshasa, June 9, 1991, Kimbanguist conference center, PRESKI Kinshasa.
43. Diangienda, speech to religious officials in charge of regional Kimbanguist school boards, August 17–20, 1989, PRESKI Kinshasa.
44. Lipset, *Political Man*, 333, emphasis in original.
45. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Kinshasa, November 18, 1990, PRESKI Kinshasa.
46. Interview with David Wabeladio Payi, November 2000.
47. See <http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2011/11053-mandombe.pdf>.
48. Congo Histoire, "Témoignage de Maman Véro Kaké Kabeya sur Papa Simon Kimbangu."
49. "Interview of Mama Véronique Kabeya and Her Husband."
50. Mususa Kitenge K., "Un phythérapeute congolais croit avoir trouvé un traitement contre le VIH-SIDA," *RDC Info Non-Stop*, June 16, 2011, <http://rdc-news.blogspot.fr/2011/06/un-phythoterapeute-congolais-croit.html>.
51. Phone interview with Véronique Kaké Kabeya, January 4, 2016.
52. Okeowo, "Handel in Kinshasa."
53. Morgan, "The Scratch Orchestra of Kinshasa."
54. By choosing to portray the essential motivation of the musicians and choir members as their common need to raise themselves out of poverty and escape misery through art, the filmmakers not only obscured the link between their energy and determination and the spirituality and sense of belonging given to them by their Kimbanguist community, but also erased the royal status of Armand Wabasolele Diangienda, whose charisma is attributable less to his sheer musical talent than to the prestige of being one of Kimbangu's grandsons.

CHAPTER 9

1. Balandier, *Sociology of Black Africa*, 425.
2. Diangienda said that he paid out of his personal funds the wages of Jacques-Arnold Croquez, the attorney who pleaded in favor of the independence of the former

Belgian Congo. See Diangienda's interview by Lembi Dilulu in *La mort de Simon Kimbangu*, 77.

3. Martin, *Kimbangu*, 118–19.
4. *Ibid.*, 125, 128.
5. Joseph Kabila, speech in the Kimbanguist temple of Nkamba, June 18, 2001, PRESKI Kinshasa.
6. Nuyabu Nkulu, speech at the Palais de la nation, Kinshasa, September 12, 1991, author's videotape and notes.
7. Tabu Ley Rochereau, "Démocratie" (1990). The song was released seven years before the demise of the Mobutu regime. The artist, who died in 2013, served as the minister of culture of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
8. Quoted in Martin, *Kimbangu*, 125.
9. Asch, *L'église du prophète Kimbangu*, 64, 300.
10. Chomé, *La passion*, 31, 38–39, 86–87; Van Wing, "Le ki[m]bang[u]lisme."
11. Quoted in Mokoko Gampiot, *Les Kimbanguistes en France*, 49–50.
12. See Braeckman, *Le dinosaure*, 180–81.
13. See 1 Peter 2:13–14; 1 Timothy 2:2; Titus 3:1; Hebrews 13:17.
14. Diangienda, sermon to church members, Kunzulu, February 4, 1990, PRESKI Brazzaville.
15. Desroche, "D'un évangile à une église," 12.
16. Diangienda, sermon to the congregations of Kinshasa, November 17, 1991, PRESKI Kinshasa.
17. Diangienda, sermon to church members, Kimbanguist Center, Kinshasa, June 9, 1991, PRESKI Kinshasa.
18. Diangienda, sermons to church members, January 19 and May 31, 1992, PRESKI Kinshasa.
19. Interview of Diangienda by Hilaire Kimbatsa, Radio Congo, September 13, 1991.
20. Interview of Diangienda by Lembi Dilulu in *La mort de Simon Kimbangu*, 77.
21. Broadcast by the Office zairois de radio et de télévision, July 12, 1992.
22. The term Sassou II serves both to distinguish Sassou N'Guesso's second regime from the first and to designate the president after he returned to power.
23. Statement by ambassadors from the Republic of the Congo and Angola at Nkamba–New Jerusalem, April 6, 1999, PRESKI Nkamba.
24. See Mannée-Batschy, "Sodalité et politique au Congo-Brazzaville," 105.
25. Braeckman, *Le dinosaure*, 180–81, and the documentary *Mobutu* by Thierry Michel.
26. Quoted in Matondo Mbiyeyi, "La prédestinée de l'homme noir," 47.
27. Diangienda Kuntima, *L'histoire*, 244–45.
28. *Ibid.*, 245.
29. Diangienda to church officials, Kinshasa, January 2, 1992, PRESKI Kinshasa.
30. Diangienda, sermon to church members, January 19, 1992, PRESKI Kinshasa.
31. Hymn sung in Lingala by the Groupe des guitaristes kimbanguistes, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdekS2EpkzM>.
32. Guillaume Nsuami Nienga, "Cherchant à séduire les fidèles kimbanguistes aux élections: Les parlementaires affichent le portrait du prophète Simon Kimbangu sur leurs Jeeps," *Digitalcongo.net* (accessed May 1, 2006).
33. Soudan, "Le jeune sage." See also the comments made by the spokesperson for the presidency on the official website of the president of the DRC (<http://www.presidentrdc.cd>) on January 26, 2006.
34. The conference proceedings, sixty-one contributions in all, were published in M'Bokolo and Sabakinu, *Simon Kimbangu*.
35. Ngandu Nkashama, *La pensée politique des mouvements religieux*, 76.

36. See Garbin, “The Visibility and Invisibility of Migrant Faith in the City”; Garbin, “Marching for God in the Global City”; Sarro and Mélice, “Kongo-Lisbonne”; Simon, “Christian Pluralism”; and Mokoko Gampiot, “Kimbanguism as a Migrants’ Religion.”

37. Balandier, *Sociology of Black Africa*, 428.

38. Wimbush, *African Americans and the Bible*, 17.

39. Drake, “The Black Diaspora in Pan African Perspective.”

40. Transcribed and translated from videotape, PRESKI Kinshasa.

41. All quotations below are transcribed and translated from a videotape of the feast of April 6, 2002, in Nkamba. A copy was made for the author by PRESKI Nkamba.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Interview of Valente by Bobé Belo on the Kimbanguist program *La Crainte de Dieu est le Commencement de la Sagesse*, Office zaïrois de radio et de television, August 4, 1991. See also the testimony she gave in Nkamba in 1991: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM1vtYnxqPQ>.

45. Videotape of the African American and Afro-British “Prophecy Tour to Nkamba–[New] Jerusalem,” October 6–14, 2000, PRESKI Nkamba. An account of Reynolds’s name change, “homecoming,” and reparations ceremony (under the auspices of the organization African Family Reunion and the DRC’s Ministry of Culture), titled “Britannique de race noire,” can be found at <http://www.digitalcongo.net/article/22323>.

46. Videotape of the “Prophecy Tour to Nkamba–[New] Jerusalem,” October 6–14, 2000, PRESKI Nkamba.

47. “Dr. Ramona Tascoe’s Interview with Papa John (part 1),” 4:45–6:03.

48. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 9.

49. Videotape of the feast in Nkamba, April 6, 2002, PRESKI Nkamba.

50. Quoted in Nginamau, *Émission ya bazoba*, DVD 34.

51. See Mokoko Gampiot, *Kimbanguisme et identité noire*, 62–63, 338–43.

52. Exhortation by Marie Muilu (one of Diangienda Kuntima’s daughters) to the congregation of Saint-Ouen, November 10, 2008, author’s notes.

53. “Bendele Ya Lobiko,” esp. 5:05–10:05.

CONCLUSION

1. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 116–17.

2. Quoted in Stamm, *Les religions africaines*, 5.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andersson, Efraim. *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo*. Uppsala, Sweden: Collection Studia Ethnographica, 1958.
- Asch, Susan. *L'église du prophète Kimbangu: De ses origines à son rôle actuel au Zaïre*. Paris: Karthala, 1983.
- Baba Kaké, Ibrahima. "De l'interprétation abusive des textes sacrés à propos de la malédiction de Cham." *Présence Africaine* 94, no. 2 (1975): 241–49.
- Balandier, Georges. *Ambiguous Africa: Cultures in Collision*. Translated by Helen Weaver. London: Chatto and Windus, 1966.
- . *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo, from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*. Translated by Helen Weaver. New York: Pantheon, 1968.
- . *Le détour: Pouvoir et modernité*. Paris: Fayard, 1985.
- . *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire: Dynamique sociale en Afrique centrale*. 1955. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991.
- . *Sociology of Black Africa: Social Dynamics in Central Africa*. 1955. Translated by Douglas Garman. London: Andre Deutsch, 1970.
- Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. 1962. New York: Modern Library, 1995.
- Barrett, David. *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Bastide, Roger. *Les religions africaines au Brésil*. 1960. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995.
- Baubérot, Jean, et al. "Œcuménisme." Paris: Encyclopédia Universalis, 1996.
- Bavua Ne Longo. "Les douze tribus d'Israël." *Zaïre Actualité*, July 15–31, 1991.
- Béguin, Willy, and Marie-Louise Martin. "À la découverte du Kimbanguisme." *Le Monde Non-Chrétien* 89–90 (1969): 5–37.
- "Bendele Ya Lobiko: On Mama Marie, a Catholic Christian Who Met with Father Simon Kimbangu on 10/12/2009 in Charlotte, N.C., U.S.A." Interview with Papa Natalicio Dungi and Papa Dieudonné, May 24, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=em-Chvj3tlo>.
- Bidimo, Jean-Godefroy. *La palabre: Une juridiction de la parole*. Paris: Michalon, 1997.
- Bitemo, Raymond. "Le conseil œcuménique des églises chrétiennes du Congo se sépare de l'Église kimbanguiste." *Le Chemin* 103 (January 2001): 4.
- Bontinck, François, and D. Ndembe Nsasi. *Le catéchisme kikongo de 1624: Réédition critique*. Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Overzeese Wetenschappen, 1978.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "L'identité et la représentation: Éléments pour une réflexion critique sur l'idée de région." *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 35 (1980): 63–72.
- . "Une interprétation de la théorie de la religion selon Max Weber." *European Journal of Sociology* 12 (1972): 3–21.
- . *Language and Symbolic Power*. 1982. Edited by John B. Thompson. Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

- . *Raisons pratiques: Sur la théorie de l'action*. Paris: Seuil, 1994.
- Braeckman, Colette. *Le dinosaure: Le Zaïre de Mobutu*. Paris: Fayard, 1992.
- Briselance, Marie-France. *Histoire de l'Afrique*. Vol. 1, *Les grands royaumes: Des origines de l'homme à l'an 1000*. Paris: Jeune Afrique Livres, 1988.
- Brou, Alexandre. "Le prophétisme dans les églises protestantes indigènes d'Afrique." *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Marseille* 12 (1888): 71–84.
- Brunet, Michel, et al. "A New Hominid from the Upper Miocene of Chad, Central Africa." *Nature*, July 11, 2002, 145–51. doi:10.1038/nature00879.
- Brunschwig, Henri. *Le partage de l'Afrique noire*. Paris: Flammarion, 1971.
- Buku na botangi mpe boyebi. Lesson no. 3. Niangara, DRC: Dominican Fathers, 1951.
- Bureau, René. *Le prophète de la lagune: Les harristes de Côte-d'Ivoire*. Paris: Karthala, 1996.
- Carpenter, John, and Eunice Carpenter. *Banto ba monde (les hommes du monde)*. Bongandanga, Belgian Congo: Congo Balolo Mission Press, 1929.
- Chenu, Bruno. *Le grand livre des negro spirituals*. Paris: Bayard, 2000.
- . *The Trouble I've Seen: The Big Book of Negro Spirituals*. Translated by Eugene LaPlante. Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 2003.
- Chomé, Jules. *La passion de Simon Kimbangu*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959.
- Cloudart, Jean-Luc, and Jean-Baptiste Placca. "L'Afrique de Jean-Paul II." *Jeune Afrique Économie* 135 (September 1990): 136–42.
- Cone, James H. *A Black Theology of Liberation*. 1970. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2010.
- Congo Histoire. "Témoignage de Maman Véro Kaké Kabeya sur Papa Simon Kimbangu." Posted March 4, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoSElgPavvI>.
- Coulon, Paul, et al. *Libermann 1802–1852: Une pensée et une mystique missionnaires*. Paris: Cerf, 1988.
- Courrier International*. Special issue: "Cause toujours! A la découverte des 6700 langues de la planète." March–May 2003.
- Crane, William Hank. "Rapport sur une visite à l'Église kimbanguiste, Conseil œcuménique des églises, comité exécutif, Cantorbéry, Angleterre." August 10–12, 1969, document no. 10.
- Croegaert, Luc. *L'évangélisation du royaume Kongo et de l'Angola*. Rome: Pontifica Università Gregoriana, 1996.
- Demart, Sarah. "Les territoires de la délivrance: Mises en perspectives historique et plurilocalisée du réveil congolais (Bruxelles, Kinshasa, Paris, Toulouse)." PhD diss., Department of Sociology, Université Toulouse 2, Le Mirail, France, 2010.
- Deschamps, Hubert. *Les religions de l'Afrique noire*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960.
- Desroche, Henri. "D'un évangile à une église: Note sur le Kimbanguisme et la diversité de ses images." *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 31 (1971): 7–14.
- Diangienda [Kuntima], Joseph. "The Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by the Prophet Simon Kimbangu: The Essence of Kimbanguist Theology." *WCC Exchange: A Bi-Monthly Documentation Service from the World Council of Churches* 4 (July 1978): 1–28.
- . *Essence de la théologie kimbanguiste*. Kinshasa: Kimbanguistes in collaboration with Éditions du Soc, Lausanne, 1977.
- . *The Essence of Kimbanguist Theology*. Kinshasa: Kimbanguistes, May 1963.
- . *L'histoire du Kimbanguisme*. Kinshasa: Kimbanguistes, 1984.
- Diop, Cheikh Anta. *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. 1967. Edited and translated by Mercer Cook. Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1989.
- . "Apport de l'Afrique à la civilisation universelle." In *Actes du colloque international: Centenaire de la Conférence de Berlin 1884–1885*, edited by Jean Devisse, 41–71. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1987.
- Dorès, Maurice. *La beauté de Cham: Mondes juifs, mondes noirs*. Paris: Balland, 1992.

- Dozon, Jean-Pierre. *La cause des prophètes: Politique et religion en Afrique contemporaine*. Paris: Seuil, 1995.
- . “Les prophétismes africains ou l’anthropologie à l’épreuve continue du religieux.” In *Approches scientifiques des faits religieux*, edited by Jean Joncheray, 229–37. Paris: Beauchesne, 1997.
- Drake, St. Clair. “The Black Diaspora in Pan African Perspective.” *Black Scholar* 7, no. 1 (1975): 2–13.
- “Dr. Ramona Tascoe’s Interview with Papa John (part 1).” Posted August 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTzBzGUXrBA>.
- Echtler, Magnus. “Shembe Is the Way: The Nazareth Baptist Church in the Religious Field and in Academic Discourse.” In *Bourdieu in Africa: Exploring the Dynamics of Religious Fields*, edited by Magnus Echtler and Ukah Asonzeh, 236–66. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Ela, Jean-Marc. “L’Église, le monde noir et le concile.” In *Personnalité africaine et catholicisme*, edited by Meinrad Pierre Hebga, 59–81. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963.
- . *Repenser la théologie africaine: Le Dieu qui libère*. Paris: Karthala, 2003.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses*. Vol. 2. Paris: Gallimard, 1959.
- . *Initiation, rites, sociétés secrètes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1959.
- Erny, Pierre. “Noir et blanc en Afrique centrale.” *Dilonga: À Chacun Son Afrique* 2 (June 2000): 39–45.
- Etinga, Stéphane. “L’Église kimbanguiste est instrumentalisée par des politiciens véreux,” April 2, 2003. <http://www.digitalcongo.net/fullstory.php?id=22264>.
- Fancello, Sandra. *Les aventuriers du pentecôtisme ghanéen*. Paris: IRD, 2006.
- Fassassi, Assani. *Le péché du pape contre l’Afrique: Jésus-Christ outragé, l’Afrique courroucée*. Paris: Al Qalam, 2002.
- Feagin, Joe R. *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Fleg, Edmond. *Anthologie juive des origines au moyen âge*. Paris: CRES, 1923.
- Froelich, Jean-Claude. *Nouveaux dieux d’Afrique*. Paris: L’Orante, 1969.
- Garbin, David. “Marching for God in the Global City: Public Space, Religion and Diasporic Identities in a Transnational African Church.” *Culture and Religion* 13, no. 4 (December 2012): 425–47.
- . “The Visibility and Invisibility of Migrant Faith in the City: Diaspora Religion and the Politics of Emplacement of Afro-Christian Churches.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39, no. 5 (2013): 677–96.
- Geertz, Clifford. *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*. 1968. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Gélie, Philippe. “Israël: Le messie noir de Dimona.” *Le Figaro*, July 27, 1999.
- Gobineau, Arthur de. *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*. 1853. Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1967.
- Goffman, Erving. “The Interaction Order.” *American Sociological Review* 38, no. 1 (February 1973): 1–17.
- Gordon, Lewis. “On the Monstrous Threat of Reasoned Black Desire.” In *Black Intersectionalities: A Critique for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Monica Michlin and Jean-Paul Rocchi, 178–94. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013.
- Gracia, Jorge J. E., ed. *Race or Ethnicity? On Black and Latino Identity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.
- Gunner, Elisabeth. *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God / Umuntu Wasezulwini Nabantu Abahle Bakankulunkulu: Writings from Ibandla Lama Nazaretha, a South African Church*. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. 1952. Edited and translated by Lewis Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

- . *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en Terre sainte*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1941.
- Hanke, Lewis. *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indian*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994.
- Hervieu-Léger, Danièle. "La religion, mode de croire." *Revue du MAUSS* 22 (2003): 144–58. <http://www.cairn.info/revue-du-mauss-2003-2-page-144.htm>.
- . *La religion pour mémoire*. Paris: Cerf, 1993.
- Heusch, Luc de. *Le roi de Kongo et les monstres sacrés: Mythes et rites bantous*. Vol. 3. Paris: Gallimard, 2000.
- "Interview of Mama Véronique Kabeya and Her Husband." Posted November 10, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydsGNaUKNAQ&index=146&list=PLIJEaeiwUD8yKsZ2oMbNhS5mOYhgwdstj>.
- Janzen, John, with William Arkininstall. *The Quest for Therapy: Medical Pluralism in Lower Zaire*. Oakland: University of California Press, 1978.
- Kabwita, Kabolo Iko. *Le royaume Kongo et la mission catholique, 1750–1838: Du déclin à l'extension*. Paris: Karthala, 2004.
- Kepel, Gilles. *À l'ouest d'Allah*. Paris: Seuil, 1997.
- Kiamuangana (Verckys), and Orchestre Veve. *Chansons et proverbes lingala*. Collected and translated by A. Dzokanga and Anne Behaghel. Paris: Edicef, Collection Fleuve et Flamme, 1993.
- Ki-Zerbo, Joseph. *Histoire générale de l'Afrique*. Vol. 1, *Méthodologie et préhistoire*. Paris: Jeune Afrique, Stook, UNESCO, 1980.
- Krabill, R. James. *The Hymnody of the Harrist Church Among the Dida of South-Central Ivory Coast (1913–1949): A Historico-Religious Study*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995.
- Laburthe-Tolra, Philippe. *Vers la lumière? ou, Le désir d'Ariel: À propos des Bétis du Cameroun, sociologie de la conversion*. Paris: Karthala, 2000.
- Lalayette, Issiaka-Prospér. "Les religions de l'Afrique noire." In *Le fait religieux*, edited by Jean Delumeau, 645–710. Paris: Fayard, 1993.
- Lambert, Yves. "Religion et modernité: Une définition plurielle pour une réalité en mutation." *Religions et Sociétés* 273 (October–December 1995): 3–12.
- Las Casas, Bartolomé de. *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. 1542. Translation by Nigel Griffin. London: Penguin, 1992.
- Lavigerie, Charles-Martial. *Mémoire secret*. January 2, 1878. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
- Lazareff, Sonia. *La sorcière blanche*. Paris: Dauphin, 1997.
- Le Callenet, Sophie. "Les voies de l'émancipation." In *Afrique noire: Histoire et civilisations*, vol. 2, *XIX^e et XX^e siècles*, edited by Elikia M'Bokolo, 473–74. Paris: Hatier-AUPELF, 1992.
- Lembi Dilulu, Pierre. *La mort de Simon Kimbangu*. Kinshasa: Réflexions, 1997.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin. *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.
- Lucques, Laurent de. *Relations sur le Congo du Père Laurent de Lucques, 1700–1717*. Translated by J. Cuvelier. Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 1953.
- Lugan, Bernard. *Atlas historique de l'Afrique des origines à nos jours*. Paris: Rocher, 2001.
- MacGaffey, Wyatt. "The Beloved City: Commentary on a Kimbanguist Text." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 2 (1969): 129–47.
- . "Cultural Roots of Kongo Prophetism." *History of Religions* 17, no. 2 (1977): 177–93.
- . *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

- . *Modern Kongo Prophets: Religion in a Plural Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983.
- . *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The Bakongo of Lower Zaire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Mannée-Batschy, Alphonse. "Sodalité et politique au Congo-Brazzaville: Le cas des Francs-maçons." *Recherches africaines* 2 (1999): 100–110.
- Margarido, Alfredo. "Béatrice du Congo: De la résistance au supplice." In *Les Africains*, vol. 9, edited by Charles-André Julien et al., 49–79. Paris: Éditions Jeune Afrique, 1977.
- Martin, Marie-Louise. "À la recherche d'un pastorat pleinement africain." *Flambeau* 33 (1972): 35–38.
- . *The Biblical Concept of Messianism and Messianism in Southern Africa*. Morija, Lesotho: Morusa Sesuto, 1964.
- . "Les églises indépendantes d'Afrique et l'Église de Jésus-Christ sur la terre par le prophète Simon Kimbangu en particulier." *Flambeau* 29 (1971): 41–49.
- . "Face aux mouvements prophétiques et messianiques en Afrique méridionale." *Monde Non-Chrétien* 64 (1962): 226–55.
- . *Kimbangu: An African Prophet and His Church*. Translated by D. M. Moore. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975.
- . *Prophetic Christianity in the Congo: The Church of Christ on Earth Through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu*. Johannesburg: Christian Institute of Southern Africa, 1968.
- . *Simon Kimbangu: Un prophète et son église*. Lausanne: Soc, 1981.
- Martiniello, Marco. *L'ethnicité dans les sciences sociales contemporaines*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995.
- Mary, André. *Le bricolage africain des héros chrétiens*. Paris: Cerf, 2000.
- . "Conversion et conversation: Les paradoxes de l'entreprise missionnaire." *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 160 (2000): 779–99.
- Massoz, Michel. *Le Congo de Léopold II: Récit historique*. Liège, Belgium: Gomez, 1989.
- Matondo Mbiyeyi, Joseph. "La prédestinée de l'homme noir à travers l'Église kimbanguiste, religion d'inspiration mixte chrétienne et négro-africaine." In *Les religions africaines: Tradition et modernité*, edited by Berthin N'Zelomona, 45–60. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999.
- Mayer, Jean-François. "Congo: Quelle identité pour l'Église kimbanguiste? Entretien avec Nduku-Fessau Badze." *Religioscope*, August 29, 2004. http://religion.info/french/entretiens/article_91.shtml.
- Mayol, Pierre. *Les enfants de la liberté: Études sur l'autonomie sociale et culturelle des jeunes en France, 1970–1996*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997.
- M'Bokolo, Elikia, and Jacob Kivulu Sabakinu, eds. *Simon Kimbangu: Le prophète de la libération de l'homme noir*. 2 vols. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014.
- Mbonimpa, Melchior. *Ethnicité et démocratie en Afrique: L'homme tribal contre l'homme citoyen*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994.
- Melone, Thomas. *De la négritude dans la littérature négro-africaine*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1962.
- Memmi, Albert. *Le racisme: Description, définition, traitement*. Paris: Gallimard, 1982.
- Messi Metogo, Eloi. *Théologie africaine et ethnophilosophie*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985.
- Michel, Thierry. *Mobutu: King of Zaire*. Belgium, 1999.
- "Mise au point sur le Kimbanguisme." *Courrier Africain*, no. 47 (January 8, 1960).
- Mobutu, Joseph Désiré. *Discours: Allocutions et messages 1965–1975*. Vol. 2. Paris: Jeune Afrique, 1975.
- Mokoko Gampiot, Aurélien. "Harrisme et kimbanguisme: Deux églises afro-chrétiennes en Île-de-France." *Hommes et Migrations* 1239 (September–October 2002): 54–66.

- . “Inspired Hymns as a Belief System in the Kimbanguist Church: A Revelation of the Meaning of Blackness.” In *Churches, Blackness, and Contested Multiculturalism in Europe, North America, and South Africa*, edited by R. Drew Smith, William Ackah, and Anthony G. Reggie, 217–34. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- . “Kimbanguism as a Migrants’ Religion in Europe.” In *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*, edited by Afe Adogame, Roswith Gerloff, and Klaus Hock, 304–13. New York: Continuum International, 2008.
- . *Kimbanguisme et identité noire*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004.
- . *Les Kimbanguistes en France: Expression messianique d’une église afro chrétienne en contexte migratoire*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2010.
- Mordillat, Gérard, and Jérôme Prieur. *Jésus après Jésus: L’origine du Christianisme*. Paris: Seuil, 2004.
- Morgan, Andy. “The Scratch Orchestra of Kinshasa.” *The Guardian*, May 9, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/may/09/scratch-orchestra-of-kinshasa-congo>.
- Muhammad, Elijah. *Message to the Blackman in America*. Chicago: Muhammad’s Temple no. 2, 1965. http://www.seventhfam.com/temple/books/black_man/blk55.htm.
- Musolo W’isuka, Paul Kamuha. “Encountering the Mbuti Pygmies: A Challenge to Christian Missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.” PhD diss., University of South Africa, 2013.
- Nederveen Pieterse, Jan. *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Ngalula Tshianda, Josée. “Du pouvoir de la piété populaire: Enjeux théologiques de la crise kimbanguiste entre 1990 et 2005.” Doctoral diss., Facultés catholiques de Kinshasa, 2007.
- Ngandu Nkashama, Pius. *La pensée politique des mouvements religieux en Afrique*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998.
- Ngemba Ntima, Kavenadiambuko. *La méthode d’évangélisation des rédemptoristes belges au Bas-Congo (1899–1919): Étude historico-analytique*. Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1999.
- Nginamau, César. *Émission ya bazoba*. DVD 14, 16, 21, 34.
- Nguapitshi Kayongo, Léon. *Dr. Marie Louise Martin, théologienne*. Hallennes-lez-Haubourdin, France: TheBookEdition.com, 2015. <http://www.thebookedition.com/fr/dr-marie-louise-martin-theologienne-p-136474.html>.
- . “Kimbanguism: Its Present Christian Doctrine and the Problems Raised by It.” *Exchange* 34, no. 3 (2005): 227–47.
- Nobirabo Musafiri, Prosper. “Right to Self-Determination in International Law: Towards Theorisation of the Concept of Indigenous Peoples / National Minority?” *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 19, no. 4 (2012): 481–532.
- Nsiangani, Simon Énée. *Éphémérides kimbanguistes: Combat et souffrances de Kimbangu pour les peuples Kongo*. Paris: Entraide Kimbanguiste, 2004.
- Nzeyitu, Josias Melo. *Jésus l’Africain: Le vrai grand secret de Fatima*. Paris: Pyramide Papyrus, 2002.
- Obenga, Théophile. *L’Afrique dans l’antiquité: Égypte pharaonique—Afrique noire*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973.
- Okeowo, Alexis. “Handel in Kinshasa.” *New Yorker*, November 9, 2015. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/09/handel-in-kinshasa>.
- Oosthuizen, Gerhardus Cornelis. *The Theology of a South African Messiah: An Analysis of the Hymnal of the Church of Nazarites*. 1967. Leiden: Brill, 1976.

- Pigafetta, Filippo, and Duarte Lopez. *Description du royaume de Congo et des contrées environnantes*. 1591. Translated and annotated by Willy Bal. 2nd rev. ed. Louvain, Belgium: Nauwelaerts, 1965.
- Pokam, Kengne. *Les églises chrétiennes face à la montée du nationalisme camerounais*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987.
- Poulat, Émile. "Aujourd'hui il y a vingt siècles." *Archives des Sciences Sociales des Religions* 64, no. 1 (July–September 1987): 59–61.
- Quinn, Frederick. "The Prophet Harris (William Wadé Harris), Evangelist, Liberia and Ivory Coast, c. 1865–1929." In *African Saints: Saints, Martyrs and Holy People from the Continent of Africa*, edited by Frederick Quinn, 99–101. New York: Crossroad, 2002.
- Randles, William. *L'ancien royaume du Kongo: Des origines à la fin du XIXe siècle*. The Hague: Mouton, 1968.
- Rattansi, Ali. *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Raymaekers, Paul. "L'Église de Jésus-Christ sur la terre par le prophète Simon Kimbangu: Contribution à l'étude des mouvements messianiques dans le Bas-kongo." *Zaire, Revue Congolaise* 13, no. 7 (1959): 679–756.
- Remiche, Gilles. *Miracle Merchants*. Belgium: Films de la Passerelle, 2006.
- Rivière, Claude. "Rites profanes, bribes de sacré." *Enjeux du Rite dans la Modernité: Recherches de Sciences Religieuses* 78, no. 3 (1990): 373–95.
- Rosny, Éric de. *La nuit, les yeux ouverts*. Paris: Seuil, 1996.
- . *Les yeux de ma chèvre: Sur les pas des maîtres de la nuit en pays douala (Cameroun)*. Paris: Plon, 1981.
- Rouch, Jean. "Introduction à l'étude de la communauté de Bregbo." *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 33, no. 1 (1963): 129–202. http://www.persee.fr/doc/jafr_0037-9166_1963_num_33_1_1368.
- Rouget, Gilbert. *La musique et la transe*. 1980. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.
- Rubben, E. *Leçons pratiques de lingala*. Dison, Belgium: S. Winandy, 1928.
- Saivre, Denyse de. "Aimé Césaire et Présence Africaine." *Europe* 832–833 (August–September 1998): 160–69.
- Sarró, Ramon, and Anne Mélice. "Kongo-Lisbonne: La dialectique du 'centre' et de la 'périphérie' dans l'Église kimbanguiste." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 46, no. 3 (January 2012): 411–27.
- Savarèse, Éric. *Histoire coloniale et immigration: Une invention de l'étranger*. Paris: Séguier, 2000.
- Shank, David A. "The Legacy of William Wadé Harris." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, n.d. <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/g-h/harris-william-wade-c-1860-1929>.
- . "Le pentecôtisme du prophète William Wadé Harris." *Archives des Sciences Sociales des Religions* 105 (January–March 1999): 51–70.
- Simbandumwe, Samuel S. *A Socio-Religious and Political Analysis of the Judeo-Christian Concept of Prophetism and Modern Bakongo and Zulu African Prophet Movements*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992.
- . "Understanding the Role of a Modern Prophet in Kimbanguist Hymns." *History of Religions* 32, no. 2 (1992): 165–83.
- Simon, Benjamin. "Christian Pluralism and the Quest for Identity in African Initiated Churches in Germany." Paper presented at the CESNUR conference "The Spiritual Supermarket: Religious Pluralism in the Twenty-First Century," April 19–22, 2001, London. <http://www.cesnur.org/2001/london2001/simon.htm>.

- Simon, Pierre-Jean. *La bretonnité: Une ethnicité problématique*. Rennes: Terre de Brume, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1990.
- . “Éléments de la bretonnité.” Unpublished master’s course in sociology, University of Rennes 2, 1996–1997.
- . “Race: Contribution à l’analyse d’un mythe.” *Racisme et relations raciales*, edited by Hélène Bertheleu, a special issue of *Bastidiana* 29–30 (January–June 2000): 87–125.
- Sinda, Martial. *Le messianisme congolais et ses incidences politiques*. Paris: Payot, 1972.
- Smith, Anthony D. *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.
- Sollors, Werner. *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. 1997. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Soudan, François. “Le jeune sage.” *Jeune Afrique*, February 28, 2006. <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/67570/archives-thematique/le-jeune-sage>.
- Speziale, Fabrizio. *Soufisme: Religion et médecine en Islam indien*. Paris: Karthala, 2010.
- Stamm, Anne. *Les religions africaines*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995.
- Sundkler, Bengt. *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*. 1948. Cambridge: James Clarke, 2004.
- Thibaud, Robert-Jacques. *Dictionnaire des religions*. Paris: Maxi-Livres, 2002.
- Thornton, John K. *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition (1641–1718)*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.
- . *The Kongoese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Tonda, Joseph. *La guérison divine en Afrique centrale (Congo, Gabon)*. Paris: Karthala, 2002.
- Turner, Richard Brent. *Islam in the African-American Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Vansina, Jan. *The Tio Kingdom of the Middle Congo, 1880–1892*. London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1973.
- Van Wing, Joseph. *Études ba-Kongo: Sociologie, religion et magie*. Brussels: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959.
- . *Études ba-Kongo II: Magie, sorcellerie et religion*. Brussels: Librairie Falk Fils, 1938.
- . “Le ki[m]bang[u]jisme vu par un témoin.” *Zaire, Revue Congolaise* 12 (1958): 563–618.
- Vinck, Honoré. “Race and Racism in Schoolbooks of the Belgian Congo.” *Revue Africaine de Théologie* 43 (1998): 104–15. http://www.aequatoria.be/04engels/0538manuels_en/038influence_en.htm
- von Vacano, Diego A. “Race and Political Theory: Lessons from Latin America.” In *Race or Ethnicity? On Black and Latino Identity*, edited by Jorge J. E. Gracia, 248–66. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.
- Walker, Sheila. *The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and the Harist Church*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.
- Wauthier, Claude. *l’Afrique des Africains: Inventaire de la négritude*. Paris: Seuil, 1964.
- Wimbush, Vincent. *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*. New York: Continuum, 2000.
- . *White Men’s Magic: Scripturalization as Slavery*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- X, Malcolm, and Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine, 1965.

INDEX

- Adam, 3, 32, 96, 106, 123, 140, 182–84, 189, 196–99, 201–3, 205, 212, 216–18, 240
- Africa as cradle of mankind, 43, 183, 201, 205
- African Americans, 12, 65, 74, 194, 206, 219, 247–59, 261, 262
- African descended people, African diaspora, 129, 194, 222, 236, 248, 253, 254, 259
- Afrocentrism, 6, 42, 217, 219
- ancestors, 2, 3, 4, 8, 12, 16, 18–20, 22–23, 35–36, 38–39, 42, 45, 47–49, 56, 101, 125, 179–83, 194, 195, 198, 202, 203–4, 213, 248, 250, 251, 253, 255
- Angola, 4, 15, 17, 18, 26, 27, 30, 35, 65, 76, 78, 158, 179, 187, 189, 190, 217, 229, 238, 239, 240, 242, 277 n. 23
- Antonian movement, 8, 44, 46, 50–52, 68, 260
- apparitions, 76, 160, 181, 208, 221, 224, 254, 257
- Asch, Susan, 10, 93, 143, 169, 230
- Bakongo. *See* Kongo (ethnic group)
- Balandier, Georges, x, 9, 10, 15, 16, 21, 23, 26, 45, 52, 62, 67, 75, 76, 77, 85, 96, 176, 178, 181, 214, 228, 249
- Baptist missionary society, 29, 34, 68
- Barrett, David, 7, 175
- Berlin Conference, 4, 26–27, 28, 29
- Black identity, 31, 37, 43, 59, 67, 182, 203, 205, 216, 231, 256
- Bwiti, 205
- Cameron, Rev. Ronald, 68, 200
- Cão, Diogo, 26, 35
- Catholics, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 41, 44–48, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 70, 71, 75, 76, 83, 88, 89, 109, 139–42, 156, 178, 196, 197, 207, 217, 221, 228, 229, 231, 232, 235, 236, 257, 258, 260
- Chomé, Jules, 69, 71, 74, 76, 230
- chosen people, 86, 179, 213, 216–17, 263
- Christianization, 3, 4, 6, 18, 24–30, 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 45, 48, 52, 56, 83–4, 164, 219, 260, 261
- Christmas, 96, 128, 138, 153, 188, 262. *See also* Dialungana
- Commandments (mibeko), 45, 55, 66, 84, 93, 96, 97, 104, 112, 116, 119, 122, 132, 168, 170, 202, 203, 218, 227
- Congo-Brazzaville, 17, 18, 24, 78, 106, 114, 117, 166, 187, 190, 194, 219, 228–29, 233, 235, 238–40
- curse, 2, 32, 36–43, 89, 136, 193, 195, 198–99, 201–2, 205, 212–14, 217, 219
- Da Gallo, Bernardo, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51
- dance, 24, 32, 66, 87, 95, 103, 104, 108, 119, 120, 169
- Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 16, 17, 18, 27, 62, 64, 90, 91, 139, 140, 145, 149, 164, 187, 188, 189, 190, 194, 222, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 236, 237, 239–40, 242, 245, 246, 247, 249, 256, 273 n. 38, 276 n. 41, 277 n. 7 and n. 33, 278 n. 45. *See also* Zaire
- Dialungana, 12, 62, 87, 88, 110, 113, 125, 126–28, 133, 138–39, 140, 141, 145, 150, 153, 166, 188, 189, 191, 193, 194, 215, 238, 239–40, 246, 255, 256, 258, 274 n. 27 and n. 32
- Diangienda, 12, 62, 63, 69, 71, 75, 76, 78, 83, 85, 87–94, 96, 105, 109–10, 114, 115–17, 120, 125–26, 127, 128, 129, 130, 132, 133, 134, 136–38, 140, 141, 142, 145, 149, 150, 155, 156, 161, 163, 165, 167, 170, 175, 177, 178, 179, 180, 182, 183, 184, 188, 189, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 203, 206, 208, 209, 210, 211, 215, 216, 217, 218, 220, 221, 225, 227, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236–37, 238, 240, 241, 242, 243, 246, 250, 258, 271 n. 4, 274 n. 32, 276 n. 2

- Dona Beatriz. *See* Kimpa Vita
- double sight, 115, 197, 206
- dreams, 35, 89, 93, 95, 106–8, 110, 113, 115, 121, 127, 129–30, 137, 160, 161, 166, 168, 181, 185, 221, 253, 272 n. 7
- Eden, 85, 96, 187, 203, 247
- education, 2, 24, 29, 30, 32, 45, 54, 95, 117–18, 126, 149, 161, 191, 192, 218–20
- ethnicity, 4, 10, 28, 33, 47, 85, 179, 181, 184, 191, 198, 217, 230
- feasts, 23, 48, 70, 167, 170, 181, 188–89, 232
- Freemasons, 202, 205, 220, 240
- Ham, 2, 36–43, 198–99, 219
- Harris, William Wadé, 9, 52–60, 65, 78, 121, 136, 147, 204
- healing, 1, 12, 23, 44, 46, 64–67, 71, 72, 74, 75, 93–94, 108, 126–27, 154, 155–67, 170, 175, 178, 184, 185–86, 196, 209, 222–24, 227, 252, 272 n. 7, 273 n. 14
- Holy Spirit, 23, 48, 55, 59, 67, 83, 84, 89–90, 101–2, 110, 111, 122–25, 130, 134, 142, 144–47, 149–51, 155, 159, 170, 178–80, 184, 197, 202, 213, 239, 254, 262
- holy water, 126, 131, 185. *See* sacred spring
- incarnation, 20, 23, 78, 122–25, 134, 143, 149, 178, 208, 213, 262. *See also* reincarnation
- inspired persons or hymns, x, 11, 25, 83, 89, 90, 94–121, 124, 126, 127, 128, 131, 134, 135, 137, 138, 147, 150, 152, 158, 160, 175, 176, 177, 181, 182, 186, 188, 192, 201, 202, 215, 218, 221–27, 239, 240, 243, 248, 252, 253, 257–58, 261, 263
- intellectuals, 41–42, 117, 149, 183, 219–20, 227
- inventions, 2, 16, 29, 70, 96, 199, 202, 203, 204, 218, 219, 220, 221–22, 227
- Jennings, Rev. Robert Lanyon, 70, 94, 156
- Jerusalem, 94, 126, 128, 157, 159, 179, 184, 185, 188, 257
- Jesus Christ, 3, 12, 40, 47, 48, 49, 59, 60, 64, 65, 66, 69, 70, 72, 73, 78, 85, 89, 90, 95, 106, 110, 111, 113, 122, 123, 124, 125, 127–29, 134, 136, 137–52, 155, 156, 158, 159, 164, 177, 178–79, 181, 186, 187, 192, 195, 199, 205, 214, 217, 237, 255, 257, 260, 262, 273 n. 14, 276 n. 38
- Jews, 40, 67, 150, 152, 179, 216–17
- Kabila, Laurent-Désiré, 229, 238, 243, 245
- Kabila, Joseph, 229, 245, 246–47
- Kasa-Vubu, Joseph, 236
- Kiangani, Simon Kimbangu, x, 87, 110, 130–34, 149, 162, 165, 189, 218, 224, 233, 247, 252, 258
- Kikongo (language), 24, 29, 31, 45, 47, 62, 67, 72, 78, 88, 90, 95, 102, 107, 113, 116, 119, 126, 134, 138, 158, 165, 168, 169, 190–94, 204, 214, 216, 217, 218, 221, 222, 248, 254, 255, 256
- Kimbangu, Simon
- apparitions, 75–76, 109, 118, 137, 160, 194, 208, 221–25, 227, 257, 259
- calling, 63
- childhood, 62, 68, 122–23, 200
- collaborators, 155, 160
- healing, 63–65, 71, 158, 164, 165, 252
- hymns, 70, 94, 98, 105, 110, 123, 131–32, 147, 150–52, 156, 243–45
- national hero, 229, 234–35, 243–46
- nonviolence, 78
- preaching, 66–8, 70, 76, 86, 94, 118
- savior (mvuluzi,) 67, 72, 85, 121, 175–80, 212–16, 276 n. 38
- and sorcerers, 155, 161
- trial, 72–74
- See also* Adam, African Americans, ancestors, feasts, Holy Spirit, incarnation, Jennings, Kikongo, layisua, Morel, mvuala, Nkamba, reincarnation, sacred places, succession crisis, Trinity, Van Wing, Whites
- Kimpassi, 24, 25, 44, 105, 106
- Kimpa Vita, 8, 44–52, 56, 65, 181, 187, 218, 229, 260
- Kintwadi, 78
- Kinzembo, 68, 165, 200
- Kisolokele, 12, 62, 88, 110, 128, 140
- Kongo, kingdom of, 8, 15–21, 24–26, 30, 32, 44–52, 56, 178, 233, 238, 245, 260
- Kongo, ethnic group (Bakongo), 10, 15, 18–21, 23, 24, 25, 27, 32, 35, 44, 45, 47, 48, 50, 62, 65, 67, 84, 92, 107, 177, 181, 190, 192, 193, 216, 228. *See also* Kikongo
- Kulumbimbi. *See* Kimpa Vita
- Kulututu, 88. *See* Kisolokele
- Las Casas, Bartolomé, 25–26
- layisua, 218

- Lingala (language), 38, 41, 84, 90, 102, 111, 123, 124, 127, 132, 134, 135, 143, 145, 150, 157, 168, 176, 182, 190, 200, 202, 206, 211, 213, 215, 218, 239, 241, 251, 257, 258, 263
- MacGaffey, Wyatt, 10, 18, 35, 85, 157
- Mandombe, Mikala, 65, 66, 160, 247
- Mandombe script, 221–22, 227
- Martin, Marie-Louise, 10, 51, 67, 88, 96, 125, 132, 136, 144–45, 148–49, 155, 165, 176, 177–78, 180–81, 185, 199, 206, 211, 220, 228
- Matsoua, 78, 229
- Mausoleum (kilongo), 131, 137, 158–59, 184, 221
- messianism, 7–8, 123, 144, 176–78, 213, 231, 233, 246, 249. *See also*
- Mfumum a Longo, 88. *See* Diangienda
- Mfumum a Mbanza, 88. *See* Dialungana
- millenarianism, 7–8, 175, 176, 177, 250, 256
- missionaries, 1, 6, 15, 21, 24, 25, 27–41, 43, 46, 50–53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 65, 68, 69–71, 76, 84, 142, 153, 156, 177, 196–201, 260, 261, 263
- Mobutu, Joseph, 43, 219, 229, 230, 231, 232, 234, 236–38, 240, 242, 243, 245, 246, 250
- Morel, Administrator Léon, 66, 71, 73, 156, 157, 206–7
- Mpadi, Simon, 78
- Muilu, Marie, 62, 63, 75, 76, 77, 78, 88, 110, 180, 181, 187, 188, 272 n. 24
- mvuala (sacred rod), 20, 67, 79, 124, 158, 178
- naming, 12, 24–25, 47, 134, 165, 192–95, 224, 232, 254–55, 274 n. 32
- Nation of Islam, 50, 205
- ndoki. *See* witchcraft
- Negritude, 6, 28, 42–43, 181
- new status of Blacks, 12, 212, 215, 217, 218, 225
- nganga (medicine or conjure (wo)man), 23, 24, 44, 47, 197
- Nkamba, 12, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 68, 71, 72, 73, 74, 77, 87, 88, 93, 109, 126, 127, 128, 130, 132, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 162, 166, 179, 181, 184–88, 189, 194, 207, 210, 211, 216, 217, 218, 220, 221, 224, 229, 238, 240, 241, 246, 248, 250, 251, 252, 254, 255, 256, 258–59
- resolutions, 133–34
- Nkiantondo, 63–64, 155, 165
- Nzinga Nkuvu, 20, 30
- Obama, Barack, 257–59
- Panafricanism, 43, 177, 230, 247–49, 263
- passing, racial, 206
- prophetism, 7–8, 83, 176
- Protestants, 27, 28, 31, 32, 34, 41, 48, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 62, 66, 70, 71, 83, 84, 88, 89, 94, 95, 103, 136, 137, 141, 142, 156, 196, 266 n. 16
- race, 1, 4, 8, 26, 36, 37, 39, 42, 43, 47, 49, 50, 56, 67, 69, 77, 85, 113, 136, 139, 142, 143, 176, 182, 186, 187, 192, 200–205, 206–13, 215–16, 221, 230, 241, 249, 261, 264
- racism, 39, 43, 136, 148, 248, 258
- reincarnation, 20, 78, 125, 127, 130–31, 133, 138, 177, 193, 195, 211, 258. *See also* incarnation
- retreat, spiritual, 25, 96, 105–9, 118–19, 270 n. 8, 275 nn. 3, 15, and 17
- sacred places, 187–88, 217
- sacred spring (Nkamba water), 93, 126, 131, 157–59, 161, 164, 167, 184–85
- small soldiers of Armageddon, 90–92
- Shembe, 9, 120, 135, 147–48
- Sinda, Martial, 10, 23, 49, 181, 198
- succession (crisis), 21, 58, 116, 132–35
- syncretism, 7, 8, 9, 10, 34–35, 48, 152, 199
- taboos, 21, 97, 103–4, 165, 171
- time. *See* feasts
- Toko, Simão, 78
- Temple. *See* Nkamba
- Trinity, 12, 78, 79, 88, 98, 124, 125, 128, 129, 136–47, 149, 153, 178, 181, 197, 258, 262. *See also* incarnation, reincarnation
- Van Wing, Father Joseph, 15, 62–63, 69, 71, 74, 76, 84, 92, 165, 179–80, 230
- wait-and-see attitude, 115, 145, 216, 218, 233–34, 239, 257, 258
- Whites, perception of, 1, 3, 29, 31, 33, 35, 36, 39, 41–43, 49–50, 57, 59–60, 68–69, 72–74, 76, 77, 129, 139, 157, 200–12, 215, 218–20, 230, 244, 248

- witchcraft, 5, 23–24, 47, 55, 56, 59, 66, 69, 89, 92, 104, 151, 161–62, 165, 175, 187, 196–9, 201–2, 205–6, 208, 217, 220, 240, 271 n. 21, 275 n. 3, 276 n. 32
- women, 16, 20, 21, 23, 24, 44, 46, 47, 52, 59, 63, 65, 69, 93, 95, 102, 104, 105, 106, 110, 113, 120, 121, 123, 126, 129, 145, 155, 161, 162, 165, 166, 167, 168, 170, 180, 182, 194, 210–11, 219, 222, 238, 243, 247, 248, 250, 252, 253, 256, 273 n. 12
- World Council of Christian Churches (WCC), 136–44, 147–49, 170, 185–86, 203, 208, 262
- Zaire, 10, 17, 43, 119, 137, 169, 179, 206, 219, 228, 229, 231, 232, 234, 235, 236, 238, 240, 242, 270 n. 29

“This book is a refreshing, in-depth scholarly and empathetic analysis of Kimbanguism, a movement considered to be one of the most enduring African-initiated churches on the continent and in the African diaspora. Mokoko Gampiot brilliantly explores how Kimbanguists engage the Bible on issues of ultimate and secular concerns, and eloquently combines an insider’s knowledge with deep scholarly insights to produce an excellent book that illuminates what the movement means today for Africans and the world at large.”

—**Jacob Olupona, author of *City of 201 Gods: Ilé-Ifè in Time, Space, and the Imagination***

Aurélien Mokoko Gampiot is a scholar in the sociology of religion at the GSRL-CNRS (Sorbonne University). He is the author of two reference books on Kimbanguism for the French-speaking public.

Cécile Coquet-Mokoko is Associate Professor of American and African American Studies at the Université François Rabelais.

In this volume, Aurélien Mokoko Gampiot, a sociologist and son of a Kimbanguist pastor, provides a fresh and insightful perspective on African Kimbanguism and its traditions.

The largest of the African-initiated churches, Kimbanguism claims seventeen million followers worldwide. Like other such churches, it originated out of black African resistance to colonization in the early twentieth century and advocates reconstructing blackness by appropriating the parameters of Christian identity. Mokoko Gampiot provides a contextual history of the religion’s origins and development, compares Kimbanguism with other African-initiated churches and with earlier movements of political and spiritual liberation, and explores the implicit and explicit racial dynamics of Christian identity that inform church leaders and lay practitioners. He explains how Kimbanguists understand their own blackness as both a curse and a mission and how that underlying belief continuously spurs them to reinterpret the Bible through their own prisms.

Drawing from an unprecedented investigation into Kimbanguism’s massive body of oral traditions—recorded sermons, participant observations of church services and healing sessions, and translations of hymns—and informed throughout by Mokoko Gampiot’s intimate knowledge of the customs and language of Kimbanguism, this is an unparalleled theological and sociological analysis of a unique African Christian movement.

signifying (on) scriptures / vol. 5

The Pennsylvania State University Press
University Park, Pennsylvania
www.psupress.org

Cover illustration: Temple of Nkamba, 2013. Photo: Wikimedia Commons (Patrick Andries). Licensed under CC-BY-SA-3.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>.