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In this remarkable study, at once nuanced and intense, the author sets aside the usual modes of response to religious syncretism, embarking instead on a wideranging theoretical inquiry which is as illuminating as it is, in the end, inconclusive. It will not do, he says, to explain the mixture of Christian and indigenous traits in the religious complex known as Bwiti by the ignorance of its practitioners, or to see it as paganism inadequately masked in sheep's clothing. Nor may we avoid the challenge by declaring that all culture is syncretic. Bwiti is intrinsically a struggle of incompatibilities which energize its evolution and its schismatic tendencies. The challenge is to comprehend this struggle without reducing it or denying it: "[Re]trouver au fin fond de la forêt équatoriale Lucifer et saint Michel archange ou Adam et Ève, mêlés à des histoires de gorilles, de chimpanzés ou de serpents python, apprendre que les rites secrets des Bantu répètent aujourd'hui la crucifixion du Christ à un des arbres les plus majestueux de la forêt primaire, ou encore découvrir à la place des belles statues des reliquaires fang que l'on peut admirer dans tous les musées du monde, les icônes d'un culte de la Vierge Marie, il y a là quelque incongruité" (p. 469). The last temptation to avoid, obviously, is that exoticism. Bwiti, like the *ngunzisme* of Congo, emerged among the Fang of Gabon in the period between the wars, in the labor camps of the high colonial period, where bearers of diverse cultural traditions sought to make sense of their experiences of both Christianity and the "modern", which defined them as African and backward. The syncretisms are multiple, among competing cults within and between different ethnic groups, as well as Catholic and Protestant Christianity. Mary's decisive initial move is to treat syncretism as

an ongoing process rather than a condition. At the same time he rejects J. W. Fernandez' treatment of Bwiti as a complex of integrating metaphors; the discontinuities are radical. Although richly ethnographic, this is not primarily an ethnographic work; it relies on the existing ethnographies by Fernandez, Swiderski, Sillans, the author himself, and others. Mary makes a series of analytical frameworks out of problematics necessarily confronting almost any religion: the legitimation of a prophet's mission in a given ideological field; the relationship between innovation and genesis; the relation between death-dealing and life-giving in sacrifice; symbolic representation of the eternal return in initiation; the role of occult vision in trance and divination; and more. These crosscutting questions are often of explicit concern to *bwitiste* intellectuals themselves; in pursuing them as they are developed in the formulations and practices of different branches of Bwiti, Mary draws heavily upon the insights of Bastide, Maw Weber, Lévi-Strauss, Sahlins, and others, in a fruitful syncretism of its own. "Quel intérêt scientifique peut bien avoir la recherche désespérée d'une cohérence au coeur d'un univers de discours contradictoires et de pratiques inspirées du délire visionnaire de quelques vieux chefs de village d'Afrique centrale?" he asks. The book amply answers that question by treating Bwiti with the seriousness due to any religion, locating it on a universal plane rather than in a corner reserved for the primitive or the local. The lack of a resounding conclusion results not only from the open-endedness of the syncretic process itself, but from the author's recognition that every analytical scheme is but one among many. This book deserves the attention of anyone interested in religious innovation and ritual process.

From time to time Mary makes reference to other parts of Africa, but the closely considered details of Bwiti that he presents belong clearly to the culture of the western equatorial forest, from Cameroon to Angola, and could be of great value in a comparative study of religious movements in the area.