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THE BELOVED CITY: COMMENTARY ON A KIMBANGUIST TEXT

BY

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The *Eglise de Jésus-Christ sur la Terre par le Prophète Simon Kimbangu* (EJCSK), which claims a membership of at least a million, is the leading indigenous church of the Republic of Congo and has legal status equivalent to the Catholics, the Protestants, and the Salvation Army.¹⁾ Most Kimbanguists are Bakongo from the western Congo, but the church has important congregations in Kisangani (Stanleyville), Lubumbashi (Elisabethville) and other towns in Congo and in neighbouring countries.

The EJCSK, like almost all of the numerous indigenous churches of the western Congo, claims spiritual descent from Simon Kimbangu, nominal leader of the great messianic movement of 1921.²⁾ Since Kimbanguism in general, and EJCSK in particular, have been the subject of several studies and usually appear on short lists of African messianic movements, it is regrettable that no Kimbanguist theological texts of any length have been published or studied. It is sometimes suggested that Kimbanguists have no theology, and make do with a syncretic assortment of heterogeneous beliefs. Here is a representative comment:

In brief, Kimbanguism seems to accept uncritically the body of Protestant belief on the one hand and much of tribal religious beliefs on the other. Thus far there seems to be small concern about the problems that would seem to be inherent in such a position.³⁾

Concern is small because, from a Kimbanguist point of view, the

1) P. Raymaekers, *L'Eglise de Jésus-Christ sur la Terre par le prophète Simon Kimbangu — Contribution à l'étude des mouvements messianiques dans le Bas-Congo, Zaïre*, 13, 1950, 677-756, and H. W. Fehderau, *Kimbanguism: Prophetic Christianity in Congo*, *Practical Anthropology*, 9, 1962, 157-158.

2) E. Andersson, *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo* (Upsala, 1958).

3) J. E. Bertsche, *Kimbanguism: A challenge to missionary statesmanship*, *Practical Anthropology*, 13, 1966, 26.

problem does not exist. The EJCSK would like to publish some formal theological statements, not for internal use, but to disabuse outsiders of their misconceptions; it is prevented from doing so by the demands made on the energy and talent of its leaders by the administrative problems involved in creating, with relatively small resources, an ecclesiastical and educational establishment to rival the non-indigenous churches. Another inhibiting factor, not mentioned by these leaders themselves, is the difficulty of translating from Kikongo the expression of beliefs profoundly rooted in Kongo culture, for which foreign languages (in this case, French) have no suitable vocabulary; and translating them for the attention of a largely unsympathetic public which automatically attaches pejorative connotations to expressions of 'tribal religious beliefs.' The operation of this inhibition is clearly seen in the public and private statements of church leaders, when discussing theology in French, and has led some observers to the view that the EJCSK demonstrates an opposition between its urban, bourgeois elements and the masses:

The oppositions come to light in questions of faith between educated elements who define themselves as a black christian Church and illiterate elements who claim to be essentially followers of Simon Kimbangu. This opposition however is easily camouflaged by the apparent doctrinal flexibility of the sect.⁴⁾

Much of the apparent flexibility results simply from awareness on the part of spokesmen of the EJCSK that, of several possible French translations for a given Kikongo phrase, some will give rise to a more favorable reaction than others in a European audience or an audience applying European values. A conspicuous example is the official translation 'Chef Spirituel' for the title *Mfumu a Nlongo*, of the head of the EJCSK. The translation is legitimate, but a closer approximation to what Kikongo speakers, whether Kimbanguist or not, understand by the phrase is "Sacred Head."

Some ambiguities can be avoided, therefore, by going directly to texts on faith and morals put out by the EJCSK, in Kikongo, for internal use. Such texts are not very numerous. Most of them are short occasional papers of a transitory nature, or else catechetical aids. It seems that the basic organizing postulates of Kimbanguist belief, which the outsider unsuccessfully seeks, are so much taken for

4) G. Bernard and P. Caprasse, Religious movements in the Congo: a research hypothesis, *Cahiers Economiques et Sociaux*, IRES, Lovanium, 3, 1965, 59.

granted that no need to formulate them is felt. The basic scripture is the Bible, which is constantly quoted and studied. Kimbanguists appear to have no idea that any other interpretation of the Bible is possible than the one they put upon it.

The longest and most important, also the most often reprinted, of the texts distributed among members of the EJCSK is called *Zolanga Yelusalemi dia Mpa*,⁵) which may be translated 'Being loyal to the New Jerusalem,' but for which a happier title is aptly provided by a phrase from *Revelation*, "*The Beloved City*." Its background is as follows.

Simon Kimbangu was exiled in 1921 to Elisabethville, where he died in 1951. In April 1960, shortly before national independence, his body was brought back to the Lower Congo and enshrined in his native village, Nkamba, renamed the New Jerusalem or the New City, which became the spiritual and theological centre of the EJCSK. Here the major feasts are celebrated, and programmes of instruction carried on for pastors, catechists and the faithful at large.

Kimbangu's three sons are the leaders of this church, the youngest, M. Joseph Diangienda, being its head and bearer of the title *Mfumu a Nlongo*. The second brother, Dialungana K. Salomon, directs the affairs of the holy city. He has published in mimeograph form for the use of pilgrims a number of texts, including *The Beloved City*, first put out in 1961, which was still being distributed at Nkamba in 1966.

The first version of this document, called *Strengthening the Church*,⁶) was prepared in connection with a special assembly at Nkamba in 1959. The situation confronting the church at the time was that by then it had become apparent that the EJCSK was not going to be able to enfold all of the many Kimbanguist movements into a single Kimbanguist church. The assembly, with this in mind, clarified or re-defined certain important concepts, and laid the foundation of the church's present administrative structure.

According to *Strengthening the Church*, centralization of control was necessary, now that Kimbanguism was no longer operating clandestinely. Every organization needed a headquarters, and for Kimbanguists that meant Nkamba. Admission to the Church would be registered and subject to conditions. New enterprises would have to be approved by "la direction" at Nkamba. The pamphlet concludes with

5) Dialungana K. Salomon, *Zolanga Yelusalemi dia M pa*, Nkamba: EJCSK (mimeo., 1961).

6) Dialungana, *Nsikulusu za Dibundu*, Nkamba: EJCSK (mimeo., 1959).

the germ of the argument later developed in *The Beloved City*, namely the scriptural justification for the claims of Nkamba as the New Jerusalem, and the denunciation of rival movements advancing parallel claims for their own holy cities.

A second version, called *Studying the Bible*,⁷⁾ was prepared for another general assembly in April 1960. It begins with a long homily in the Protestant Baptist style adopted by Kimbanguism from the missions. After deploring the extent of discord within and without the church, the author insists that discipline is the only road to salvation, and that discipline begins with recognition of the unique authority of Nkamba. There follows an expanded version of the scriptural argument concerning the New Jerusalem.

The present text, the third version, omits the administrative prescriptions of its predecessors. What remains is not so much a statement of Kimbanguist belief as an argument, grounded in that belief, against the claims of other movements to deserve the loyalty of the Bakongo.

In this translation, a few paragraphs have been omitted, one or two have been rearranged, and a selection has been made of the Biblical verses to be cited in full; that is the extent of the editing. The translation is as literal as possible, considering that the language of the original is that of the spoken rather than the written word and full of repetitions and redundancies. Interpretative notes have been added, and a commentary follows.

THE BELOVED CITY

1.1 First, you must understand that after the children of Noah multiplied and dispersed throughout the earth, not one of the peoples of the earth respected Yave the Lord our God,⁸⁾ but all were lost in sin, and made idols which they set up as their gods. But the Lord God in his holiness and great love chose a man from Chaldea among the sinners, and sent him into the land of Canaan; and his name was Abraham (Genesis 12). The place to which he came was Jerusalem.

1.2 In the old world, this city was called Salem, later changed to Jerusalem. It was known by other names also; do not forget these four: Salem, Jerusalem, City of David, City of God. I will show you why the city and these names were loved by the Jews and by strangers also.

7) Dialungana, *Tufimpulul'esono kia Nkand'a Nzambi*, Nkamba: EJCSK (1960).

8) *Yave* in the original.

1.3 Salem. Because in it dwelt the priest of the Most High God, Melchizedek (Genesis 14 : 18-20); that is, it was a blessed city. I have already written that after the dispersion of the children of Noah, the people did not honour God but sinned and made idols. So it is surprising to find that in the city of Salem appeared the priest Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham. This means that he was himself the Lord Jesus. Read Psalm 110 : 4, and Hebrews 6 : 20. "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

1.4 City of David. Because David, the second king of Israel, was anointed with the holy oil of kingship by the famous prophet, Samuel (I Samuel 16 : 13). Because David was the king chosen by Yave, the Lord God endowed him with his power and strength to judge the enemies of Israel.

1.5 In those days, David the anointed of God wanted to enter Jerusalem, but the Jebusites would not let him into their city, and since the time of Joshua the children of Israel had not been able to take it out of their hands. The reply the Jebusites made to David was, "Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither" (II Samuel 5 : 6).

1.6 Nevertheless, by the power and strength of the Lord God which were with David, the king attacked the city and took it. And when he had taken it he gave it the name of City of David (II Samuel 5 : 7-9). Later the name was changed from Jerusalem, City of David, to Jerusalem, City of God.

1.7 Why was it called the City of God? Because King David caused the Ark of the Lord to be put in it. Thus the blessing and the strength of the Lord God entered the City of Jerusalem. Blessing truly derives from the Ark of the Lord (II Samuel 6 : 12).

1.8 How do we know that the strength of God our Father was in the Ark? Because when the children of Israel crossed the river Jordan, the waters divided in two on account of the Ark of Yave which was crossing. The children of Israel walked upon dry land when they crossed the Red Sea on leaving Egypt, until all the host had crossed Jordan. This is a very important matter and extremely astonishing (Joshua 3 : 13-17).

2.1 Here are eight reasons found in the Bible which show why Old Jerusalem was loved:

1. Because in Salem Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek. That is,

it was a city of blessing because Jesus was in it, as is shown in the chapters of *Hebrews*.

2. Because David as the anointed of God was able to take it from the Jebusites.
3. Because David put in it the Ark, containing the power and strength and blessing of the Lord God Almighty. In the Ark were the two tablets of the law of God which he gave to his servant Moses on mount Sinai in the desert; the rod of Aaron, that budded; and the golden pot in which they kept mana, the food they showed to their children as testimony from generation to generation (*Hebrews* 9 : 4), because the Lord God gave it to their fathers when they were in the wilderness.
4. Because the Ark was in the temple, which was the place where they met the Lord God (*Numbers* 17 : 4).
5. Because the city was called the City of God.
6. In it reigned the kings of the throne of David.
7. In it sat the priests of the tribe of Levi, according to their succession.
8. In it sat the famous prophets, such as Nathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Ezekiel, when they returned from the exile which lasted seventy years.

2.2 There are other reasons, but these are the most important. None of the tribe of Israel, old and young, men and women, could forget Jerusalem. For, as we see from the answers he gave to the prayers of King Solomon, the Lord himself consecrated the temple:

I Kings 9 : 3 I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.

See also *John* 2 : 16; *Deuteronomy* 12 : 11.

2.3 How much the Jews sought after Jerusalem is obvious from the songs they sang when they went up to celebrate the feasts of God in Jerusalem. ⁹⁾ Children were taught to know these songs thoroughly, by heart. They were not to be sung for fun, but only on going up to

⁹⁾ Psalms or songs (*min'kunga*) are an important feature of Kimbanguist worship. A special booklet, *Going up to Jerusalem*, was distributed at Nkamba in 1965 to those who attended the Church's principal feast, 6 April, the anniversary of the return of the prophet's body. It contained the fifteen psalms mentioned, and a number of Kimbanguist hymns. The hymns are not composed but "recorded," by spiritually gifted persons, "from the singing of the angels."

Jerusalem. There are fifteen of these songs of David which you should know and understand, especially the content of Psalm 122:

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord.

The fifteen psalms are the following: 120, 122-135. There are also psalms which denounce other peoples who are jealous of Jerusalem, such as

Psalm 68 : 16 Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever.¹⁰⁾

2.4 In all things the Lord God gave them his law and commandments that they should be holy even as he is holy (Deuteronomy 5 : 6-33). He laid down two things:

1. Blessed are they that keep his law and commandments.
2. Cursed are they that disobey his law and commandments.

2.5 Yave showed his people what would happen if they failed in keeping his commandments:

Deuteronomy 28 : 1-68 The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand;

A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young :

And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed . . .

The tender and delicate woman among you . . . her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son and toward her daughter for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates.

Also every sickness, and every plague . . . them will the Lord bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed.

And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the Lord thy God. And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you.

2.6 In entering the land of Canaan they kept close to the law and

10) In the original text, there follows at this point a section referring to the respect in which Jerusalem was held by such strangers as Cyrus, Darius, and the eunuch official of Candace. Kimbanguists correspondingly emphasize (and exaggerate) the interest shown in Nkamba and its healing powers by Europeans.

commandments of the Lord their God, but later they fell into all sorts of wickedness. The Lord God in his holy charity sent them prophets to warn them to leave their sins and return to his law and commandments. Many times they sought mercy and the Lord also was merciful to them. In a little while they returned to their evil ways, but God did not tire; he continued to send prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Micah. However, his people did not abandon their wickedness until they were delivered wholly into the hands of their enemies and were taken into exile lasting seventy years, by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (II Kings 24 : 1-20).

2.7 God promised that he would create a New Jerusalem:

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God (Revelation 21 : 10; see also Isaiah 65 : 18; Revelation 21 : 2; 3 : 12; Hebrews 12 : 22; 11 : 16; 13 : 14; 11 : 1-10; Philippians 3 : 20; Ezekiel 40 : 2; Jeremiah 3 : 17; Galatians 4 : 26).

And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2 : 2-3).

(They) came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many (Matthew 27 : 53).

2.8 Thoroughly understand the chapters I have shown you, for God made the New Jerusalem known through the mouth of his prophets. But because of sin God withdrew his promise.

3.1 Know this, that we the black race are the most dishonoured of all races whom God created in this earth. And especially in this black body we were given by God our Father. We could not finish telling the torments imposed upon us by the white man, especially the government white man. Think how we were transported by the peoples of Europe, how many blacks were put in ships like sardines in cans. Many times, thousands of blacks were drowned at sea, with never a hand extended to save them. At other times, a small number managed to arrive in America and other countries of the white man, but even those few fell into unlimited suffering. Those who remained to work in Kongo were put to death for any little thing, especially while they carried loads from Matadi to Leopoldville. From Leopoldville to Matadi, thousands and thousands died!

3.2 Then the people of this country were put to digging the rail-

road from Matadi to Leopoldville. Multitudes crowded to their death. Note also that in the year in which World War I ended, 1918, a serious epidemic occurred; in all Kongo there remained no village and no house without a corpse. A little more and the black race would have entirely disappeared.

3.3 In all these troubles and sufferings our fathers bewailed greatly, that they also should have a chief who should save them from their troubles, but no saviour was seen, until in their anguish they could only say, God does not know us black people, but white people only; for if he knew, how could he leave us in suffering like this, without term nor ending?

3.4 Then it was that the missionaries came to shine light among us here in Kongo and among all nations of the earth, following the Commandment of Jesus as given in the Bible they themselves brought (Matthew 28 : 19). But they did not care to obey the words of the Lord Jesus, taking them over only to fabricate deceits to enrich themselves in the name of Jesus. For they were hired men, and cared not for the sheep (John 10 : 12-13).

3.5 See the commandment that the Lord Jesus commanded:

Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give (Matthew 10 : 8).

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover (Mark 16 : 16-18).

3.6 Because the missionaries did not obey the voice of the Lord Jesus, they taught the people that having left their sins it was in the missions that they would find Christ their Saviour. But only a small number believed; many villages showed not a single convert. When the missionary travelled in the villages, the elders would impress upon their juniors to hide in the forests lest the white man catch them by witchcraft and send them to Europe. The people as a whole did not leave their wickedness; fetishism, dancing, drinking and witchcraft continued among them.

4.1 *But see the great thing that happened on 6 April 1921!*

In Nkamba a man appeared who had never studied at a mission station, but he was a believer and had learned to read and write a little

from a village teacher. ¹¹⁾ His name was Simon Kimbangu. He raised the dead, caused the paralyzed to stand upright, gave sight to the blind, cleansed lepers, and healed all the sick in the name of the Lord Jesus. But he chased away those who practised witchcraft.

4.2 In the twinkling of an eye this news spread, and the whole country went wild. Like dust the news spread that in Nkamba had appeared a Prophet who was raising the dead. From that time Nkamba was called the New Jerusalem.

Note two astonishing things!

1. The Prophet.
2. The New Jerusalem.

Think well on both of them.

4.3 When the prophet was revealed, the dead in stretchers and the sick of all kinds were brought to the Prophet of God. But in everything, whether raising the dead, healing the sick, or giving a blessing in the name of Jesus, first there must be prayer, then hymns, and then a teacher must read the Bible and teach the doctrines that change hearts, in order that all men should leave their wickedness; for if that does not happen, then these blessings you have come to get become as fire to you. Believe in the Lord Jesus, he who saves you from your sins. For I am in obedience to him.

4.4 Now God our Father and his Son Jesus Christ are returned to us, so cease your wickedness. Every day the doctrine of repentance must be taught, and when it is finished the sick will be healed and the dead raised.

4.5 Now see how all the villages hastened to abandon their fetishes; see all the roads littered with fetishes of all kinds. People confessed their sins. Drums were broken, dancing forsaken. People struggled to seek out teachers. Churches were built overnight in all the villages. Those who had not cared to pray to God fought for places in church, and those who had had no use for schools fought to enter the classroom.

4.6 Thus the words of Jesus were fulfilled, when he promised:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;
 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 : 16-17).

¹¹⁾ It is generally accepted that Kimbangu was educated at the British Baptist Mission at Ngombe Lutete, near Nkamba.

See now the power of the Lord Jesus revealed in his Servant, Simon Kimbangu, he having said:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father (John 14 : 12).

4.7 Because Simon Kimbangu obeyed the voice of Jesus, all things promised by Jesus were fulfilled in him, the work of Jesus was revealed, and the names of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus were glorified. Since the coming of the missionaries it had never happened that the dead arose, the lame walked, and the blind saw; or that people of their own free will threw away their fetishes, or wanted to pray to God. And only then did we the people of Kongo know that God and Jesus remembered us. The grief and suffering of our fathers were heard by God the Father, and the tears of us the black people were wiped away in Kongo.

5.1 *The appearance of the hills of Satan*

With the work of the Lord God revealed by the hand of the Prophet, and the Heavenly Father made known to his people through his Prophet Simon Kimbangu, the hills of Satan ¹²⁾ also were revealed, their eyes fired with jealousy and envy. What kind of hills were these? The prophets of Satan, missionaries, the Belgian government. These hills stood up strongly to fight against the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ on the earth by his Prophet Simon Kimbangu.

5.2 Why were these hills so jealous? They knew that Jesus had given his power to the people of Africa, and that the city the Lord God had hidden, Jerusalem, had descended here in Africa. But they should also know three reasons which show that God and Jesus surely cared for us:

1. When Jesus was born, and Herod wanted to kill him, he went to hide in Egypt (Matthew 2 : 13-15). ¹³⁾
2. When Jesus was being taken to be executed, Simon the African carried his cross (Mark 15 : 21).
3. God loves all peoples, because he made them (Acts 10 : 35).

5.3 When the power of God entered into the prophet, the mis-

¹²⁾ This usage is Biblical, but in traditional symbolism also the hill (*mongo*) is a partly anthropomorphic figure.

¹³⁾ At other places in the text, "Egypt" is the other world, the place of exile and bondage, but here it is "this world," Africa.

sionaries complained to the government that he should be arrested and executed with all his following. So it was arranged that they were arrested. The prophet was sentenced to death, but through the power of God they were unable to execute him. Later they decided he must be sent with his followers to the Upper Congo, among the Bangala, to perish there, that all these things might be forgotten. The government went through the villages, searching repeatedly for the people of the Prophet of God, Simon Kimbangu. Kimbangu himself was sent to the Elisabethville prison for those with indefinite sentences, until he died on 12 October 1951. Although he was in a little cramped cell, in much discomfort, he did not renounce his Lord, Jesus Christ, in the thirty years he was there. Thousands of his followers were scattered in various posts of the Upper Congo.

5.4 By the arrest of the prophet and his followers, the city of Jerusalem was transformed into the city in ruins.

6.1 So you, Mukongo, must consider well all the things I have shown you concerning Old Jerusalem. I have shown eight reasons why Jerusalem was loved, and why the word received from God was to be taught to the children from generation to generation. I have shown why God withdrew his promise that he would cause the New Jerusalem to come down, and I have shown the shame and suffering of the black race.

6.2 As the Jews exceedingly loved Old Jerusalem, so also must we still more love the New Jerusalem, and we should know and understand the reasons for this:

1. It is the city of Simon Kimbangu who was chosen by God.
2. Kimbangu is he alone who was chosen by the Lord Jesus.
3. He it was who asked God for Helpers, just as Jesus sought his disciples to help him.
4. Jerusalem is the city promised by God through the mouth of his prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Revelation of John, Hebrews, and many others who proclaimed that God would cause the New Jerusalem to descend from heaven.
5. Jerusalem is the City of Blessing.
6. Jerusalem includes the pool of Bethesda, to cure our sick when the hope of healing is in them.
7. Jerusalem comes to all peoples of the earth according to their desire.
8. It is in Jerusalem that the power of God is seen, for there many

peoples are to be heard singing songs of praise night and day to the glory of God.

9. Jerusalem is opposed to witches.
10. Jerusalem is the abode of the three children of Simon Kimbangu, the Zimvwala.

6.3 Jesus himself, Lord of Heaven and Earth, honoured Jerusalem, to which he went up for the feasts. We should follow the Scriptures, and the example of Jesus and the first believers, who never forgot that Jerusalem is the Promised City. But now many have bestowed prophet-hood upon themselves, and chosen pools for themselves, and set themselves up as the equals of Simon Kimbangu; and they dissuade others from going to Jerusalem, for they also have their holy cities, and their pools. But where in the Bible do you read about these cities and these pools? These are the Hills jealous of the Hill chosen by God, the New Jerusalem; and you know that God has rejected them.

Why mock ye so, ye high hills? this is God's hill, in which it pleaseth him to dwell; yea, the Lord will abide in it for ever.

COMMENTARY

The most important unstated premise of this text is that the process of events in time is cyclical. The newspaper *Kimbanguisme*, published by the EJCSK, began a front-page account of the return of the body of Kimbangu to Nkamba with the statement, "The works of God are neither old nor new. Whatever things of God were in ancient time, the same are found in the present age (*tandu*) and shall be in the age which is to come." ¹⁴) Kimbanguist informants ¹⁵) of varying degrees of sophistication make it clear that, as they see it, the primary religious phenomena of the present time, and their interrelations, repeat those of earlier times as recorded in the Bible. It is much more than a matter of analogy, or of "history repeating itself." The structure and sequence of modern events are "the same" as those which have gone before and must inevitably recur.

An age consists of four 'generations,' of which the present is the

¹⁴) *Kimbanguisme* 1, 2 (15 May 1960).

¹⁵) Field research in the province of Kongo Central, in the Republic of Congo, was carried out from 1964 to 1966, supported by the Foreign Area Fellowship Program, whose generosity is hereby acknowledged. I wish also to acknowledge the hospitality of M. Dialungana during my visits to Nkamba and the benefit I have derived from cooperating in this research with Dr. John M. Janzen. Responsibility for the research pursued, and the views and findings presented in this report, belong exclusively to the author.

last. This prevalent idea may explain the author's insistence (1.2) on the four names of Jerusalem. In *Studying the Bible* the holy city is built or rebuilt in succession by Solomon, Nehemiah, "the Jews" and, by clear implication, the Bakongo; in other words, the Biblical text is required to produce the other three cities that the pattern requires. Some Kimbanguists speak of a cycle of four kings, but one hears more frequently of the four prophets, Moses, David, Jesus and Kimbangu, each of whom is the herald of a new generation. It would be a mistake to suppose that a single consistent orthodoxy stands behind the different and conflicting versions of religious history which are in circulation, but most of them show a common structure.

In each generation God is represented in human form, the succession of representatives (*mwala* or *ngunza*) being 'the order of Melchizedek.' Support for this interpretation is found in St. Paul's writings, particularly the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which theophanies are pointed out among Old Testament events. Melchizedek, unlike all other men, the children of Noah, honoured God (1.3); moreover he belonged to no clan (*Hebrews 7:3*, 'without descent;' in Kikongo, *wakondwa mwila*) and therefore, by the ordinary criteria of Kongo society, was clearly a visitor from another world. A Kimbanguist informant pointed out that the role corresponds to that of the legendary King of Kongo, who stands in the midst of the twelve clans (*mwila*, or *makanda*, the latter being also the word used for 'tribes' in the Kikongo Bible) but is not part of them. It also recalls Joseph in Egypt, dispensing sustenance to all the nations (*makanda*) of the earth; "and who is Joseph?" rhetorically demanded the informant, leaving me to reply that he is Joseph Diangienda. Melchizedek, standing alone in the midst, was "the kingpost of the whole earth" (*kunzi dya nza yayo*); this expression is also applied to the three sons of Kimbangu.

This interpretation of the Bible explains the emphasis laid (4.2) on the "two astonishing things," the Prophet and his City, whose appearance completes (*lunga*, to complete, as a circle, is the verb used in this context) and sacralizes the present time and place, and moreover fulfils the minimum requirements for a religious configuration in Kongo culture: the sacred individual and the space which he owns or governs, the contained and the container. Kimbangu's demonstration of power, by healing the sick and raising the dead, is unquestioned by most Bakongo, Kimbanguist or not, and taken for proof of a privileged relationship with the Almighty (4.7). The dogmatic importance of the pattern explains the attention paid to an obscure episode in the career

of David, King of Israel; David conquered Jerusalem apparently after (or because) he had demonstrated healing power (1.5, 6).¹⁶

The role of the sons of Kimbangu, the *Zimrwala* (6.2, # 10), is highly ambivalent, and the ambivalence is central to the difficulty the EJCSK is experiencing in developing a formal theology. In the church's statements concerning its structure, all other roles are expressly related to specific responsibilities; the supreme, but undefined, responsibilities of the *Zimrwala* represent, in Weberian terms, the last redoubt of unroutinized charisma. In practice, the oldest son is a successful businessman and politician. The second, M. Dialungana Salomon, is in charge at Nkamba and bears the semi-formal title *Mfummu a Mbanza*, Chief of the City. Some Kimbanguists see significance in his name, Solomon, but in his own speeches he implies a parallel between his role and that of David in Jerusalem. The third son, M. Diangienda, is unequivocally head of the church. I did not see or hear that at the present time he heals the sick, except that he dispenses a blessing to supplicants, but it is dogmatic that in the great days of the movement, in 1959-1960, he healed the sick and raised the dead, and that "whatever he did then he continues to do now."

The *Zimrwala*, and M. Diangienda in particular, are seen historically as the heirs of 'the order of Melchizedek,' and spiritually as the first link in a chain of privileged access to God which is the prime reward of adherence to the church. A petitioner who addressed M. Dialungana as "Heaven's Witness (*Mbangi a Zulu*) who has assumed human shape in order to be with us sinners (*bafunzuka*) to lead us," repeated a theme found in *Studying the Bible*.

A *mwala* (pl. *zi-*), also called *n'kawa*, is the prophetic rod or chiefly staff which is the traditional sign of delegated authority; it literally represents the chief, and so may be used as a personal title. As such it is virtually interchangeable with *ngunza*, usually translated 'prophet,' which also describes a chief's delegate. Bakongo recognize the rod of a Biblical prophet as something familiar to them. All three of the relics put in the Ark by David (2.1 # 3) are similarly "recognizable." The rod of Aaron that budded occurs also in Kongo legends of bygone chiefs; ¹⁷) *matadi ma n'siku* (the stones of the law, or of prohibition, i.e., sacred stones) were important in many rituals, and in some parts of the country still are. The golden pot appears in a Khakist text from

¹⁶) Legendary chiefs had to capture the capital city in order to prove their right to be invested as rulers in it. K. E. Laman, *The Kongo* II, Upsala, 1957, 141.

Pointe-Noire, as follows: "Mfumu S.K. [Simon Kimbangu] is the cup with the oil of blessing . . . that the Lord God has given to the black race." 18)

It would be inappropriate, however, to insist too much on these identities; the one which is really important in Kimbanguist belief involves the coffin of the prophet. The central feature at Nkamba is the mausoleum or temple (*kinlongo*) containing the remains of Kimbangu. Here the faithful repair once a year "to renew their relationship with the prophet," as an official spokesman, speaking French, explains, or "to obtain strength" (*mu baka ngolo*) as the ordinary phrase is. The usual word for coffin, *nkela*, which means box, is the one used in the Bible for the Ark of the Lord. The concluding section of *Studying the Bible* 19) says the return of Kimbangu's body to Nkamba is no vain thing (*mpamba*), since it appears in the Bible in the stories of Jacob and Joseph, whose bodies were returned to the promised land after forty years' exile; "so also it was done for Simon Kimbangu the Prophet." The front-page article cited above (p. 19), which accompanied a photograph of the coffin, captioned "*Nkel'a Lwawawanu*" (The Ark of the Covenant), elaborates the argument. It links the bones of Jacob with the Ark which God commanded Moses to make after the children of Israel had been redeemed out of their suffering in Egypt, and continues:

So also Tata Simon Kimbangu, friend of the suffering, was taken away from the land of his birth and went to spend his exile in another place. Then Tata Simon Kimbangu imposed an oath on his son and said, 'My soul will depart from you, I shall go to the land of the dead in order to obtain the power (*baka lendo*) of those who are there. When God bethinks him of the sufferers, then do you remove my body and preserve it in the country and the village in which I was born.'

'And when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh, saying . . . Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father' (Genesis 50 : 4-5).

Insistence on a pattern at the expense of chronology, and not simple misreading of his Bible, has led the author of *The Beloved City* (1.8) to confound two crossings, of the Red Sea and of Jordan. In Kongo cosmography, a world is separated from its antithesis (its mirror image) by a body of water, called *Kalunga* or *Nzadi*. The other shore

17) As in J. Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*, Bruxelles, 1959, 62-63.

18) Andersson, 195.

19) Repeated as an article in *Kimbanguisme* (1 May, 1960), signed by the *Zimwala* and dated 10 April 1960.

is reached by going through or across this water, which may be identified, in appropriate context, with any physical body of water, including the ocean (*Kalunga*), the Congo River (*Nzadi*) or any other river, certain still and reputedly bottomless pools, and even a bowl of water, or a mirror. All crossings, in a religious context, are analogous and potentially 'the same.' In this case, identity is established between the Ark of the Covenant, which brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, and *Nkel'a Luwawanu*, which brought the exiles back from the Upper Congo and redeemed the Congolese from the bondage of the colonial regime.

The complete text of *Deuteronomy* Ch. 28 (see 2.5) can scarcely be read by a Congolese as anything but an account of his own colonial past, which Kimbanguists equate with the seventy-year exile (2.6). (Kimbangu's exile, from 1921 to 1960, is "forty years in the wilderness," and therefore, according to a number of informants, national independence in 1960 was foreordained.) "Eating people secretly" can only mean witchcraft, above all the witchcraft of kinsmen. Witchcraft results from absence of legitimate authority in the land, or wilful disregard of it; it is a state of disorder, entailing disease and death (cf. 6.2, # 9). The unchecked spread of witchcraft, rather than the direct effect of the colonial régime, is blamed for the population decline which occurred in the Lower Congo. The conclusion of *The Beloved City* draws the inescapable moral. In this generation there is only one prophet, and there can be only one holy hill. But already disorder threatens, and many rival authorities present themselves. The eyes fired with jealousy (5.1) are the red eyes of witchcraft.

Nkamba is a small village, on a hill almost surrounded by water, including the pool, 'Bethesda,' to which Kimbangu in 1921 sent sick persons to bathe. The pool is still reserved for this use. In the village, a small group of Healers, some of them original disciples of the prophet, carry on the work, though not in the spectacular style of 1921 and 1960. At the gates a watch is maintained by guards whom informants compared with the watchmen of Solomon's temple. Elders of the EJCSK assure visitors that according to M. Diangienda, who has been there, the Old Jerusalem looks just like Nkamba.²⁰)

The position of the tomb of the prophet in Nkamba and in the ritual of the EJCSK recalls immediately the cult of the chief's grave (*mbanza*) in traditional religion, and appears to justify the description 'syncretic' so commonly applied to Kimbanguism. But all culture is syncretic, and if the term is to mean anything it must describe some

juxtaposition of traits which are seen as heterogeneous by the people themselves. A correspondence between indigenous and foreign traits, which may have led to the initial adoption of the latter, amounts only to a fortuitous analogy; some effort can be expected tending to segregate or to reconcile the heterogeneous elements. This model situation, which occurs often enough in modern Kongo, is not characteristic of Kimbanguism. The correspondence which Kimbanguists see between the themes of their culture and those they find in the Bible can only be reduced from identity to analogy by ignoring the logical basis and emotional intensity of their faith.

Something of the nature of this faith, best understood at Nkamba itself, comes through in Kikongo texts written during the climactic phase of modern Kimbanguism, 1959-61. To comprehend its integrity one also needs an understanding of the ancestor cult, another aspect of Kongo religion for which the usual European vocabulary is misleading. The ancestor cult is primarily a cult of the Fathers, and its prototypical priest is the Son; the structure of society is matrilineal, but only the children and grandchildren, not the matrilineal descendants, may directly approach an ancestor's grave. The ancestors are no other than human beings who have been translated to another place; expressions such as 'ancestor worship' tend to misrepresent Congolese reality. An indication of the meaning to Bakongo of both the ancestral grave and of Kimbangu as mediator is conveyed by the following Kimbanguist text, whose author intends to refute the charge that Kimbanguists worship Kimbangu rather than God:

Once upon a time, in a village near mine, the people saw that the game were not dying any more in their territory; the hunting-luck of the whole village had died. The people tried every way to get their luck back, but two years passed in which they didn't kill a thing. One day the villagers got together and said, 'Ah! how hard it is in this village, two whole years in which we have not killed so much as a cockroach. We had better go tell the ancestors about it.' So they agreed on this. They arrived at the cemetery, knelt down and said, 'O ancestors, we here are in trouble; the hunting-luck of the whole village is dead, we kill no game any more. Therefore we have come to kneel here to beseech you our ancestors, for you have preceded us into the joy of the Lord (*nkembo a ngudi a nkama*); intercede for us with the Lord, that the game may die.' That day, they got ready and went hunting; they killed five *nkayi*, three *bimboko* and seven *nsizi*.

Now the ancestors are just people, who lived as we do, without any difference whatever. In our custom, it is well known that many people receive

20) A Kimbanguist also has no difficulty in identifying at Nkamba the attributes of Old Jerusalem listed above (2.1). The Healers, who returned from exile in 1959, correspond to the famous prophets of # 8.

good and evil things which they ask of their forebears who preceded them *mu nkembo a ngudi a nkama*. So may we not ask and obtain from Simon Kimbangu the Prophet of God, the Helper of the Spirit of Truth? We do not make him our god, but he is the Spiritual Helper promised by our Lord Jesus. We ask him for whatever we need, and he also asks his Lord, the same who puts our complaints and requests before the Father, the Creator.”²¹)

This description shows us, as in a mirror, the other world reflecting this one; not this world as it is, but as it ought to be, a single ordered hierarchy, a New City.²²) The administrative needs of the church and the spiritual needs of the Kongo nation are parallel.

21) Luzolo K. Pierre, *Mwand'avelela mu Ntumwa Yisu*, Nkamba: EJCSK (1959).

22) An anthropologist summarizing traditional religion writes, “De l'Être Suprême à l'homme, en passant par les Esprits intermédiaires se nouent encore ces liens de *Père à Fils* qui structure la société des hommes.” A. Doutreloux, *L'Ombre des Fétiches: Société et Culture Yombe*, Louvain, 1967, 226.