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## Zaire: The Positive Role of Religion in Nation Building

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# Zaire: The Positive Role of Religion in Nation Building

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Catholic church has played a prominent role in every stage of Zairian maturation since the late 15th Century. A thorough analysis of the relationship between church and state in Zaire affirms the premise that religion plays a constructive role in the development and independence of colonies, curtailment of oppressive regimes, and rebirth of nations.

This comment examines the historic and current role of the Catholic church in Zaire. For background purposes, part II of this comment sets forth a brief secular and religious history of the Congo. Parts III, IV, and V examine the role of the church in the colonial period, during the movement towards independence, and in opposing President Mobutu's government, respectively. Finally, part VI explores the potential role of the church in rebuilding Zaire.

## II. SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE CONGO

### A. *The Colonization of the Congo*

As with many former European colonies, Zaire's first exposure to the West arose through evangelization. In 1482, the Portuguese explorer Diego Cão discovered the Congo River and established the first Western contact with the people of the Congo.<sup>1</sup> Predictably, missionaries soon followed. The first boats arrived in 1491 carrying "Fransicans, Dominicans, Canons of St. John the Evangelist, and secular priests."<sup>2</sup> Early proselytism efforts were extremely successful: the missionaries bap-

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1. WINSOME J. LESLIE, *ZAIRE: CONTINUITY AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN AN OPPRESSIVE STATE* 5 (1993). At that time, the Congo encompassed the area stretching from northern Angola to the north bank of the Congo River. *Id.*

Note that while the spelling "Kongo" is sometimes used prior to the establishment of the Belgian colony, this comment employs the spelling "Congo" throughout.

2. *Zaire*, *WORLD CHRISTIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA* 758 (David B. Barrett ed., 1982).

tized the Congolese ruler and constructed a large stone church in the capital city.<sup>3</sup>

Portugal's evangelical triumphs in the region continued into the sixteenth century under the reign of King Afonso I, described as "one of the most remarkable Christians of African history."<sup>4</sup> Afonso's son Henry, who studied in Portugal, in 1518 became the first Black African to be appointed as bishop in the Catholic church.<sup>5</sup> After Henry died in 1534, Afonso hoped that a second Congolese would assume Henry's position and that Congo's capital city would be designated episcopal see for Guinea. In lieu of another native bishop, however, Henry was replaced by the Portuguese dean of the royal chapel in Lisbon and the island of São Tomé was selected as the see for the region encompassing Guinea, Congo, and the southwestern coast of Africa extending to the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>6</sup>

Portugal's diplomatic relations with the Congo kingdom were further arrested by the flourishing European slave trade. Portugal's interest in the region extended beyond the spiritual and slaves were exported to nearby Portuguese islands and subsequently, to the Americas.<sup>7</sup> The number of slaves increased exponentially so that by the early 1850s, approximately 150,000 natives were shipped from the region per annum.<sup>8</sup>

The Portuguese colonies eventually expanded southward into present-day Angola, leaving Zaire virtually unattended. Henry Morton Stanley, a journalist for the *New York Herald*, voyaged from East Africa to the mouth of the Congo River from 1874-1877.<sup>9</sup> His accounts reached King Leopold II of Belgium who, recognizing the area's potential value, commissioned Stanley to further explore the region.<sup>10</sup> In 19th century European

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.*

5. *Id.*

6. *Id.*

7. LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 6.

8. JEFFREY M. ELLIOT & MERVYN M. DYMALLY, VOICES OF ZAIRE: RHETORIC OR REALITY 1 (1990). The Portuguese were not the only foreign participants in the Zairian slave trade. The Arabs traded slaves in the northern part of the region even after Leopold's acquisition of the colony. *Id.*

9. *Id.*

10. This was an extremely ambitious undertaking. Belgium, more than eighty times smaller than Zaire, had previously been unsuccessful in establishing colonies elsewhere. One author who attended a history class in Brussels writes that his professor described Leopold II as "a Napoleon chained to a small, provincial country." DONALD A. MCGAVRAN & NORMAN RIDDLE, ZAIRE: MIDDAY IN MISSIONS 51 (1979). The instructor hypothesized that "if Leopold had been king of a large and

thought, it was widely assumed that African territory was freely annexable, provided a certain number of chiefs consented to colonization.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, Stanley negotiated treaties with local chiefs on Leopold's behalf and in 1885, the Berlin Conference approved Leopold's claim to the greater part of the Zaire Basin. Thus, the International Congo Association (later the Congo Free State) was founded.<sup>12</sup>

*B. Influence (and Resurgence?) of Christianity During the Colonial Period*

The Catholic church enjoyed privileged status throughout the colonial period. Leopold persuaded the Vatican that the evangelization of the Congo should remain a Belgian affair and that only "Belgian national missions" should be involved. Leopold himself controlled the placement of missionaries. In return for this power, Leopold granted the church large tracts of land, subsidies, the right to fulfill certain state functions, and a virtual monopoly over education and medical service.<sup>13</sup>

The pervasive influence of the church in colonial affairs resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of Christians in the Congo. In 1900, there were 124,650 Christians, a mere 1.4% of the population but by 1970, those professing devotion to Christianity totalled nearly 20 million, over 90% of the population.<sup>14</sup> The number of tribal religionists declined in a reciprocally dramatic fashion. While 98% of the people practiced the religion of their respective tribe in 1900, by 1970 those numbers had dwindled to 7.7% of the population.<sup>15</sup>

John Mbiti explains that one reason for this apparent defection from tribal religion is that Christianity parallels African traditional beliefs in several respects.<sup>16</sup> For example,

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powerful country, he might have tried to conquer the world." *Id.*

11. LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 8.

12. ELLIOT & DYMALLY, *supra* note 8, at 1-2. The Congo Free State remained Leopold's personal possession until he ceded it to Belgium in 1908. Thereafter, it was renamed the Belgian Congo. *Id.*

13. WORLD CHRISTIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA, *supra* note 2, at 758. "Belgian national missions" signified "those having their headquarters in Belgium, directed by Belgians and counting a fixed number of Belgians among their missionaries to Congo." *Id.*

14. *Id.* at Table I. The Belgian Congo gained independence in 1960. See *infra* part IV.A. The proximity of time between independence and the figures appearing above suggests that the majority of conversions to Christianity occurred during the colonial period.

15. *Id.*

16. JOHN S. MBITI, INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN RELIGION 189-90 (2d rev. ed.

The Church is the Christian family, in which all are related to one another through faith and baptism in Jesus Christ. The Church also includes those who have died and those who still live. This is similar to the African view of the family of both the living and the departed.<sup>17</sup>

Mbiti further argues that conversion to Christianity is in actuality a return to early African faith. Egyptians believe that Christianity originally reached Africa through the Biblical author St. Mark in the year 42 A.D.<sup>18</sup> The religion spread rapidly and perhaps one-third of the African continent followed Christianity by the beginning of the seventh century.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Mbiti concludes that

Christianity is not a European or American religion. It came to Africa before it reached Europe; and it was already in Africa long before European and American missionaries began to preach it in other parts of the continent. So Africa has as much right to Christianity as Europe and America, if not more.<sup>20</sup>

### III. THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

An empirical evaluation of the church's response to each of the deleterious effects of colonization is not feasible within the confines of this comment. However, this comment will address two significant, adverse consequences of colonization and the corresponding *positive* role the church played in improving the situation: first, the physical burdens imposed on natives and second, the dissolution of traditional African society.<sup>21</sup>

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1991).

17. *Id.* at 190.

18. *Id.* at 180. See also DAVID LIVINGSTONE, *OUT OF AFRICA* (1967) (concurring in Mbiti's view that African Christianity dates from Biblical times).

19. MBITI, *supra* note 16, at 180. Although in this instance Mbiti is referring primarily to North Africans, he later writes that there is evidence of Christian martyrs in southern Africa as early as the second and third centuries, thus indicating that Christianity had spread beyond Northern Africa. *Id.* at 182.

20. *Id.* at 182.

21. Some may take issue with the decision to limit the scope of this comment to the *positive* contributions of the church during colonialism. While it is true that the church's influence was certainly a factor in "legitimizing" the state, i.e., preserving its existence, this comment posits that religion plays a propitious role in nation building. For analytical reasons, this query necessitates a sharp division between church and state. While the separation may not have been pronounced as the following pages suggest, there was in fact a division. Compare Malula's state-

### A. *The Role of the Church in Easing Physical Burdens*

Colonial authority was initially allocated among a "trinity of power" which consisted of local administration, missions, and the business world. Leopold's commercial objectives, however, soon resulted in severe disequilibrium in the system. The desire to produce a lucrative colony became the controlling factor in all aspects of the colonial experience.<sup>22</sup>

Leopold gradually ceded the right of private exploitation to individually run companies. The corporate officers were designated *chefs de poste* (state agents) and in return for exorbitant tax payments, were given monopolies over the resources of vast properties. To meet their tax requirements, corporations conscripted locals from their native villages and forced them to work for seven-year periods under the supervision of *capitas* (headmen) from various tribes. When the Congolese failed to attain their assigned quotas, the *capitas* utilized a broad range of savage coercion.<sup>23</sup>

As the colony remained under Leopold's exclusive control at the time, these barbaric acts were hidden from the Belgian Parliament. Without internal pressure to cease the torture, the practice of physical punishment as justification for raising the necessary tax revenue could have continued indefinitely. However, news of the natives' plight reached Europe through Belgian missionaries and growing criticism forced Leopold to appoint a commission of inquiry in 1904.<sup>24</sup> The commission's findings resulted in the enactment of limited reforms in 1906. By this time censure in the international arena had increased and because the Free State had become extremely lucrative,

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ment at part IV with Mobutu's program of "authenticity" at part V.B.2.

22. "The focus was on the extraction of resources, the unification of the territory through military conquest, and the economic destruction of pre-existing kingdoms." LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 8. This policy necessarily restricted the influence of the missions and local administrations in the Congo. Note also that Leopold had previously attempted to limit the role of the church in the Congo by prohibiting evangelists originating from non-Belgian missions from proselyting. See *supra* note 13 and accompanying text.

23. Flogging, torture, and execution were among the methods used by the *capitas*. Leslie writes that the "[c]apitas were often required by their supervisors to produce the right hands of individuals they had killed as proof that they had administered the appropriate punishment." LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 9-10.

24. *Id.* at 10. Commercial agents also relayed accounts of the atrocities to Europe. *Id.* at 9.

Leopold encountered domestic pressure to release his personal control over the region.<sup>25</sup>

*B. The Role of the Church in Assisting the Congolese to Cope with Colonialism*

Under Belgian colonial rule, the African way of life, which had continued relatively unchanged for millennia, was irreversibly altered in a matter of decades. The African perception of life is inseparably connected to oral tradition and myth, yet the mythical offered little explanation to the harsh realities of Belgian rule. Colonization even went so far as to disturb the African concepts of being and time: "[T]he cyclic time of the myth gives way to lineal time of conscious and planned progress. The stability and perennity of mythical life, in which the individual was perfectly and harmoniously integrated with his physical and social surrounding, disappears."<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the Congolese were forced to embrace

the modernizing features of monetized economy and its implications: individualism and economic and status competition; urbanization and the relatively permanent physical and psychological movement of people from their places of birth and nurturing, to new centres of population aggregation; secondary relations becoming dominant as an imperative of bureaucracy; new patterns of social stratification, . . . etc.<sup>27</sup>

Traditional African religion was impotent in the face of this sweeping societal transformation. Mbiti explains that African religion

is simply the religious system which Africans developed in response to their life's situations. Up to a point it gave them satisfactory answers to their problems, quenched their religious thirst, and helped them to find an integrated and meaningful interpretation and understanding of the universe. But these problems are not static, and the need for understanding the universe is not static.<sup>28</sup>

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25. Leopold formally ceded his "Free State" to Belgium in 1908. *Id.*

26. Max Assimeng, *Crisis, Identity and Integration in African Religion*, in *IDENTITY AND RELIGION* 107 (Hans Mol ed., 1978) (quoting Edward A. Ruch, *Philosophy of African History*, 32 *AFR. STUD.* 116 (1973)).

27. *Id.* at 106-07.

28. MBITI, *supra* note 16, at 193.

Consequently, the migration towards Western Christianity was the inevitable result of colonization and its accompanying annihilation of traditional African society and culture. Yet this conversion by necessity does not detract from the generally positive role of Christian religion during the colonial period. While some argue that Africa should not have been colonized at all, once colonization did occur, the natives required assistance to comprehend the severe social upheaval. As an institution existing largely outside of Belgian influence, the church provided the Congolese with ability to cope with colonization and its accompanying debauchery.

It would be inaccurate to claim that the church did not exacerbate the confusion in colonialism. For example, the church remained somewhat intolerant of "traditional African rituals, especially those of offerings in connection with the departed, African initiation rites, marriage customs, the place of sorcery, evil magic and witchcraft in African life, and methods of dealing with disease, misfortune and suffering."<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, when tribal religion no longer served as an effective pedagogical device in explaining daily life, religious schools established by European missionaries filled the void.

Western education was primarily limited to Bible lecture, a pedagogical device which served to explain the Western concept of progress "towards a future which could be different from the past contrasted with the traditional conservative and repetitive society, and permitted the notion of national development and improvement."<sup>30</sup> The Bible also proved to be instrumental in bridging African and Western society and culture.

In reading some parts of the Bible, African Christians find many aspects of ancient Jewish life which are similar to their traditional life. This makes it easy for them to feel that the Bible belongs to them and that they belong to the Bible. At the same time there are new ideas in the Bible which enrich the people's understanding of the world as interpreted through the Bible and Christian teaching.<sup>31</sup>

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29. *Id.* at 190. In fact, because the church was so critical of tribal customs, the locals often perceived Western religion as just another aspect of Belgian rule. See *infra* Malula's statement at Part IV.

30. K. GORDON MOLYNEUX, *AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY: THE QUEST FOR SELFHOOD* 27 (1993).

31. MBITI, *supra* note 16, at 190.



Hence, besides playing a fundamental role in allaying the physical burdens imposed on the natives, the church assisted the Congolese in comprehending the social disorientation resulting from colonialism.

#### IV. THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

"Christian evangelization . . . was accompanied by a whole network of new cultural baggage,"<sup>32</sup> hence, it is not surprising that locals initially perceived religion as a supplemental component to Belgian rule.<sup>33</sup> Cardinal Joseph Malula understood that this association would significantly impede the church's growth after independence. He wrote in 1958:

At the beginning of the evangelization, Church and State walked together. From their collaboration came this abundant harvest. . . . There also resulted from it a disastrous confusion between the two powers. For our people, the Church was the State and the State was the Church. They considered religion as a matter for the Whites. . . . The two powers are indistinctly accused of colonialism, of wanting to perpetuate their paternalism to maintain Blacks under their dependence. It is time to break those ties.<sup>34</sup>

However, for the Congolese who had succeeded in obtaining a secondary education, those ties had been broken years earlier. Mission schools afforded *évolués* (literally, "evolved" or civilized individuals) the opportunity to obtain an education more commensurate with that of their Belgian contemporaries. Following World War II, a full six-year secondary program was instituted.<sup>35</sup> While the educational program was originally segregated between Whites and Blacks and between higher and technical education, the divided system ended in 1958 following the *évolués'* demands that they have access to the same opportunities as the Belgians.<sup>36</sup>

32. Assimeng, *supra* note 26, at 106.

33. "The Catholic church was certainly the state's premier ideological apparatus, and helped insure the long-term efficacy of the entire colonial system." MICHAEL G. SCHATZBERG, *THE DIALECTICS OF OPPRESSION IN ZAIRE* 117 (1988).

34. *Id.* (quoting Joseph Malula, *L'âme bantoue face à l'Evangile*, 198 VIVANTE AFRIQUE 1, 12-13 (1958)).

35. LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 16.

36. *Id.*

Prior to this time, missions were not permitted to send their students abroad to complete their education. Beginning in the 1950s, a few students were allowed to attend L'Université de Louvain in Brussels.<sup>37</sup> Then, at the continued insistence of Catholic missionaries, the University of Lovanium was founded in 1954 at Kimuenza, followed by the University of Elisabethville in 1956.<sup>38</sup> The church-run universities witnessed steady growth so that by December 1958, there were 248 Congolese at Lovanium and 42 Congolese at Elisabethville.<sup>39</sup>

The évolués who had previously been sent to Belgium initiated the movement towards independence. In 1955, a Belgian law professor by the name of A. A. J. Van Bilsen published a thirty-year plan which outlined the steps for the emancipation of Belgian Africa.<sup>40</sup> His blueprint for freedom appeared in the Congo's *Conscience Africaine* and was subsequently incorporated in the first Congolese political manifesto.<sup>41</sup> The political barriers thus removed, Belgian political parties created "amicales (fraternal organizations) in the Congo with membership open to" both évolués and Europeans.<sup>42</sup>

Increased political awareness among the Congolese resulted in the dissolution of the balance between the colonial triumvirate of state, church, and large companies. The church distanced itself from the state by appointing an increased number of Africans as clergy and even "firmly support[ing] Congolese independence in order to preserve and expand the presence of the church in the Congo."<sup>43</sup>

While the évolués who had been sent to Europe initiated the movement towards independence, had there not been a following in the Congo their pleas would have fallen on deaf ears. Therefore, the battle for independence was fought on two fronts, one in Belgium and the other in the Congo. The church,

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37. *Id.*

38. *Id.* This educational system is not representative of Africa generally. "Zaire is one of the few African countries in which university education was started by the church." *Id.* at 16-18.

39. *Id.* at 18.

40. *Id.*

41. *Id.*

42. *Id.*

43. *Id.* at 19. Apparently the business sector was not as certain of the colony's independence. The companies did not burn any bridges by "supporting state policies on the independence issue, on the one hand, and making financial contributions to Congolese political organizations, on the other." *Id.*

although perhaps unwittingly, played a significant role in both aspects of the movement. The envoys it had sent abroad provided the spark while the locals who had been educated in the local, church-maintained universities provided the fuel, and the flames of independence eventually engulfed the Congo.

## V. THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN OPPOSING MOBUTU'S CENTRALIZED GOVERNMENT

### A. *Background*

While an explanation of how Joseph Mobutu assumed control of Zaire is necessary at this point, the focus of this comment is to evaluate the role of religion as a vehicle of positive change. As a detailed description may detract from this focus, the events leading to the independence of Zaire appear below in outline form only.<sup>44</sup>

#### 1. 1958-60

General Charles de Gaulle offers French African colonies a choice between complete and partial independence. From that moment forward, rioting and demonstrations in Congo's capital city becomes more severe. Unable to establish order, Belgium formally grants complete independence to the Congolese on June 30, 1960.

#### 2. 1960

The first elections are held. Patrice Lumumba, an anti-imperialist, is elected premier and after much debate, Joseph Kasavubu is named president. The national army mutinies less than a week after obtaining its independence, forcing Belgian troops to intervene.

Following the deterioration of Lumumba's relations with the United Nations, he is dismissed by President Kasavubu. Colonel Joseph Mobutu assumes control of the government and expels Soviet and communist-bloc diplomats who had been called in by Lumumba. Mobutu returns the reins of government to "the people" under Kasavubu. However, there are still four groups, including the officially-recognized government under Kasavubu, who continue to jockey for power.

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44. For a more complete version of this time line, see ELLIOT & DYMALLY, *supra* note 8, at 1-17.

### 3. 1961-1964

Rebellion by the dissenting groups continues. In July 1964, Tshombe, a former leader of a disparate group, is appointed prime minister. The central government gradually reclaims control over most of the rebel-held areas. On August 1, the new constitution, which provides for a tenuous division of executive power between the president and prime minister, is adopted.

### 4. 1965

President Kasavubu dismisses Prime Minister Tshombe and requests Evariste Kimba to form a new government. Brief political fighting ensues, ending when Lieutenant General Mobutu, now commander-in-chief of the national army, seizes control of the government on November 24 and cancels the election. Mobutu continues to centralize the government. Although he originally vowed to relinquish control of Zaire after five years, Mobutu remains in power today.

## *B. The Church and Mobutu's Government*

Soon after Mobutu assumed control of the government, it became apparent that he was intent on remaining in power. He has since used the church as a tool in ensuring his own political stability. In true Machiavellian fashion, his attitude towards the church has evolved over three distinct time periods: (1) the early years, during which church backing was required to unify the nation; (2) the period of *authenticité*, during which Mobutu attempted to subvert the church's influence by centralizing authority; and (3) the modern era, which has witnessed a reluctant cooperation between church and state.

### 1. *The early years*

Immediately following independence, the church emerged as an innate participant in Zairian politics.<sup>45</sup> Cardinal Malula's epistles indicate that the church intended to support Mobutu's new government.

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45. Religious overtones surfaced in early Zairian political speeches. "Political discourse between 1960 and 1965 featured a plethora of religious imagery, symbols and motifs, a trend doubtlessly aided by the education of many first-generation Zairian politicians in Catholic schools and seminaries." Schatzberg's statement is based on a linguistic study of political speeches. SCHATZBERG, *supra* note 33, at 118 (citation omitted).

It is a comfort to us that our government associates itself with us to bend its knees with us before God. . . . Mr. President, the Church recognizes your authority, for authority comes from God. We will loyally apply the laws that you establish. You can count on us in your work of restoring the peace toward which all so ardently aspire.<sup>46</sup>

This apparently cooperative relationship was endured more out of necessity than through free choice. The state and the church were both relatively feeble and each depended on the other to preserve the young nation. This reluctant relationship of convenience does not mean that there were not occasional conflicts between the two institutions. For example, the state attempted to reclaim control over education soon after obtaining independence. A coordinated church/state convention developed two distinct branches—one secular, one religious—in the educational network. The secular branch directly paid all teachers and personnel in both branches, in return for which it required national examinations for all students and assurance that the schools within the religious branch were open to students irrespective of faith.<sup>47</sup>

Although the church initially supported the new state, Mobutu nevertheless remained uneasy. The church possessed substantial funds and membership, consequently, it represented the only organization capable of impeding or even openly opposing "Mobutuism."<sup>48</sup> The self-positioned ruler soon recognized his impotence before the church and thereafter engaged in a program of "authenticity" to further tighten his hold on Zairian politics.

## 2. *Authenticité*

As mentioned previously, the state was the church and the church was the state to the Congolese under Belgian rule. Mobutu used this association to commence a neocolonial campaign of "re-Africanizing" Zaire. He explained, "We are now embarking on our cultural liberation, . . . the reconquest of our

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46. *Id.* (quoting J. GÉRARD-LIBOIS & JEAN VAN LIERDE, CONGO 1965 449 (1966)).

47. SCHATZBERG, *supra* note 33, at 117-18.

48. Mobutuism is "an official state and party ideology encompassing and glorifying the thoughts, visions, and policies of Mobutu." FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION, ZAIRE: A COUNTRY STUDY (Sandra W. Meditz & Tim Merrill eds., 1994) [hereinafter ZAIRE: A COUNTRY STUDY].

African, Zairian soul. We men of black skin have had imposed on us the mentality of quite a different race. We must become once more authentic Africans, authentic blacks, authentic Zairians."<sup>49</sup>

Mobutu's campaign of authenticity attempted to consolidate power in one centralized regime, devoid of any "unauthentic" influence. The movement significantly impacted the Catholic church.<sup>50</sup> By 1973, Catholics accounted for approximately 47% of the Zairian population.<sup>51</sup> In 1971, there were significantly more pupils enrolled in church schools than in the state network.<sup>52</sup> The Catholic church also owned and controlled a significant number of hospitals, clinics, and social programs.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the Catholic church in Zaire possessed substantial economic power. For example in 1974, the Diocese of Lisala spent \$175,000 against an intake of \$208,000<sup>54</sup>—rather astounding figures for a country in which the 1977 average annual family income measured \$617 U.S. dollars.<sup>55</sup> "The role of the church thus was pervasive, and its moral authority made it an uncomfortable competitor for the comprehensive allegiances that Mobutu sought."<sup>56</sup>

It should be remembered that the Catholic church initially acted as "a reliable ally" to Mobutu's regime.<sup>57</sup> Mobutu's jealous quest for power, however, prompted a conference of bishops to privately note "dictatorial tendencies" in the government in 1969.<sup>58</sup> One year later, during a mass commemorating the

49. President Joseph Mobutu, Speech of 19 August 1973, *quoted in* ADRIAN HASTINGS, *A HISTORY OF AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY 1950-75* 191 (1979).

50. The focus on Catholicism is clearly attributable to its sheer power. Yet Mobutu maintained that the movement concentrated on the church because its dependence on the Vatican "introduced an inauthentic element into the country: 'I have never had trouble with the [other officially recognized churches] because they never received directives from abroad.'" President Joseph Mobutu, Speech of 6 April 1973, *quoted in id.* These other churches generally supported authenticity because in restricting the influence of the Catholic church, Mobutu "gave the organizations far more status than they had previously enjoyed." *ZAIRE: A COUNTRY STUDY*, *supra* note 48, at 245.

51. *WORLD CHRISTIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA*, *supra* note 2, at 759.

52. There were 1,849,484 students in the church's primary schools as compared to 414,602 pupils in state schools. *HASTINGS*, *supra* note 49, at 192.

53. *SCHATZBERG*, *supra* note 33, at 116.

54. *Id.* at 116-17.

55. *WORLD CHRISTIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA*, *supra* note 2, at 758.

56. *ZAIRE: A COUNTRY STUDY*, *supra* note 48, at 241.

57. *Id.* at 114.

58. *Id.* at 241.

tenth anniversary of independence, Cardinal Malula publicly voiced his apprehensions.<sup>59</sup>

In 1972, the state attempted to restrict the church's influence by introducing the youth section of Mobutu's political party into all educational establishments, including "private institutions which exist for the religious training of church personnel."<sup>60</sup> The government then announced that state functions would no longer incorporate religious services.<sup>61</sup> The program of authenticity further mandated rejection of Christian names, thus Joseph Desire Mobutu became Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga.<sup>62</sup> When the Catholic journal *Afrique Chrétienne* questioned this policy, the regime suspended this "subversive" publication for six months.<sup>63</sup> Thereafter, Mobutu banned all religious radio and television broadcasts.<sup>64</sup> A boycott of the publication, sale, and distribution of thirty-one religious publications soon followed.<sup>65</sup> Final-

59. *Id.*

60. Ngindu Mushete, *Authenticity and Christianity in Zaire*, in CHRISTIANITY IN INDEPENDENT AFRICA 228, 232 (Edwin Fasholé-Luke et al. eds., 1978). In 1967, Mobutu abolished the several hundred existing political organizations through the establishment of a single political party, the MPR (*Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution*, or Popular Movement of the Revolution), to which all Zairians automatically belong at birth. LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 33; ZAIRE: A COUNTRY STUDY, *supra* note 48, at 91. The JMPR (*Jeunesse du Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution*, or Youth of the Popular Movement of the Revolution), an organization designed specifically for Zairian youth, is an appendage to the MPR. LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 48-49.

61. LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 51.

62. "None of my ancestors had these sonorous first names," said President Mobutu, "I admire those who love and fear God; not the God of the Westerners, but the Supreme Being revealed to us through our traditions." Mushete, *supra* note 60, at 233 (citation omitted).

63. LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 51. The editor "noted that what is at stake is 'our greatness and dignity as a free people,' but that there can be no question of 'disinterring from the night of the past an original African philosophy which, if it ever existed, can have been no more than the expression of a social situation, now completely out of date.'" Ngindu Mushete, *supra* note 60, at 233 (citation omitted).

64. The religious programs were replaced by songs such as the following which was played on Radio-Kinshasa in 1972.

I ask myself: where does the black man come from? Jesus, the Son of God is white. Adam and Eve are white. My God, I ask myself: why are all the angels white? And why is the devil black? The colonialists deceived us. Where are our ancestors? Africa sees clearly now and will never again retreat.

MAURICE A. GLÉLÉ, RELIGION, CULTURE ET POLITIQUE EN AFRIQUE NOIRE 34 (1981) (English translation by the author).

65. LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 51.

ly, an order in late 1972 required all religious groups to publish detailed membership information.<sup>66</sup>

The movement towards authenticity also involved a personal conflict between President Mobutu and Cardinal Malula. Mobutu denounced Malula as a "renegade of the revolution" when the latter refused to adapt "hymns and prayers to praise the president."<sup>67</sup> The JMPR subsequently assumed control of Malula's official residence, forcing him to leave the country for several months.<sup>68</sup>

The church/state confrontation momentarily lapsed in 1974 when the president permitted Malula to present a memorandum on the position of the leaders of the church to various prominent government officials. The church leaders vowed to accept all that had been imposed on them and began "to redirect their work within the new cultural and institutional context of authenticity."<sup>69</sup> The respite was short lived, however, and the government mounted fresh attacks later that same year. In June 1974, the government announced that Christmas would no longer be celebrated; instead, June 25 was celebrated as a non-denominational national holiday.<sup>70</sup> Next, crucifixes and religious symbols were removed from all public places, including church-maintained schools and hospitals.<sup>71</sup> Finally, religious school networks were nationalized and all courses of religious instruction, excepting the course on "Mobutuism," were to cease.<sup>72</sup> The government's belligerent attitude towards Christianity is further evidenced by the following two statements:

The missionaries, who came in the name of a certain Jewish child in order to make known a God who was no different from the one taught to us by our ancestors, have refused to recognise our right to teach God in the name of a son of our country (Mobutu) sent to us by our ancestors.<sup>73</sup>

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66. *Id.*

67. *Id.*

68. The pope was ultimately required to intervene in order to protect Malula from arrest and trial. *Id.*

69. HASTINGS, *supra* note 49, at 192.

70. *Id.* at 193.

71. ZAIRE: A COUNTRY STUDY, *supra* note 48, at 114. "[T]he removed items were replaced by pictures of President Mobutu." *Id.*

72. *Id.* "Students in the former church schools found themselves participating in daily rallies led by JMPR members, during which they were obliged to chant 'Mobutu awa, Mobutu kuna, Mobutu partout' (Mobutu here, Mobutu there, Mobutu everywhere)." *Id.* at 115. For a definition of "Mobutuism," see *supra* note 48.

73. Telegram of State Commissioner of Political Affairs, 6 November 1974, re-



God has sent us a great prophet, our wondrous Mobutu Sese Seko. This prophet is shaking us out of our torpor. He has delivered us from our mental alienation. He is teaching us how to love each other. This prophet is our liberator, our messiah, the one who has come to make all things new in Zaire. Jesus is the prophet of the Hebrews. He is dead. Christ is no longer alive. He called himself God. Mobutu is not a god and he does not call himself God. He too will die but he is leading his people towards a better life. How can honour and veneration be refused to the one who has founded the new Church of Zaire? Our church is the Popular Movement of the Revolution.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, the state's attempts to enact broad institutional transformations belied its managerial capabilities. Eighteen months after its attempt to nationalize the schools, the state was forced to relinquish control to the church.<sup>75</sup> As the economic power of the state disintegrated, the church gradually resumed its prior privileged status. The church sensed the state's declining prestige and demanded approval of a new educational convention.<sup>76</sup> The state eventually ceded the right to broadcast religious programs on national radio.<sup>77</sup> However, the church overstepped its bounds when in 1981, the bishops published an episcopal letter which "severely criticized the government's corruption, brutality, mismanagement, and lack of respect for human dignity."<sup>78</sup> Mobutu responded by warning the Catholic hierarchy not to meddle in politics and ordered the JMPR stationed in places of worship to ensure that the clergy

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printed in HASTINGS, *supra* note 49, at 193.

74. Address by the State Commissioner of Political Affairs, 4 December 1974, reprinted in *id.* The Commissioner has accurately portrayed the Zairian concept of Mobutuism:

Mobutuism, as originally conceived, is based on the teachings, declarations, and thoughts of the president found scattered in various speeches. After the formation of the MPR, Mobutu moved swiftly to create a cult of personality, resurrecting precolonial concepts of patriarchal authority to portray himself as the 'Father' of the nation and Zairians as his 'children.' Mobutu designates the Zairian leader as the one chosen by God and the ancestors to lead the state. As such, he has unlimited power and, being above the law, has no accountability.

LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 34-35.

75. LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 51.

76. SCHATZBERG, *supra* note 33, at 119-20.

77. *Id.*

78. *Id.*

confined their discussion to religious and "presumably, apolitical topics."<sup>79</sup>

### 3. *Current church/state relations*

The current relationship between church and state in Zaire is somewhat ambiguous. On one hand, the church appears to be extremely active in demanding reform in the wake of oppression. For example, in early 1983 three steel workers from Maluku were arrested following allegations that one of them had stolen an electric generator. They were subject to brutal torture and one of the men consequently died. When the news of the murder reached the decedent's fellow workers, the workers retaliated through open riot. The government police arrested and imprisoned fourteen other employees and entered the homes of additional "suspects," demanding substantial bribes from each. The local curé responded by writing letters of protest to the governor of Kinshasa.<sup>80</sup> The curé responded similarly during a women's tax revolt in eastern Zaire, in which they presented the women's objections to the regional governor.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, when the government began extracting resources directly from the populace, several clergy published "scathing pastoral letter[s] denouncing the regime's injustice and corruption."<sup>82</sup> Today, through "sermons and pamphlets, the bishops, though they dare not name names, provide the public with the opportunity to say the unsayable."<sup>83</sup>

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79. *Id.*

80. The following is indicative of the tone of the letters:

In conclusion, I would like to express the wish that the authorities watch over peoples' dignity. In effect, it is a secret to no one at Maluku, that the practice of torture is done at the military inspectorate as well as at the local gendarmerie. It is always civilians who are the victims of it. We have seen the visible part of the "iceberg" [English in original]; the largest part being beneath the water. The pesterings and tortures [led to] . . . the . . . explosion during the events cited, but the ill is more profound.

Letter from Curé Father Jansen to the Governor of Kinshasa, 11 February 1983, quoted in SCHATZBERG, *supra* note 33, at 59.

81. Info Zaire Flash, n. 38-1, cited in SCHATZBERG, *supra* note 33, at 121.

82. SCHATZBERG, *supra* note 33, at 59 (quoting letter from Curé Father Jansen to the Governor of Kinshasa, 11 February 1983).

83. Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion, Class and Social Pluralism in Zaire*, in RELIGION, STATE AND SOCIETY IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA 133, 147 (Austin M. Ahanotu ed., 1992) (citation omitted).

Despite these active measures, other commentators criticize the church's current contribution to curbing injustice. For example:

[T]he church had become rather reticent by the early 1980s. Some felt that the church had succumbed to the system of corruption, paying necessary bribes to conduct its business and obtain foreign exchange rather than be frustrated by bureaucratic red tape. In addition, critics charged that some local bishops had allowed themselves to be co-opted into Mobutu's system by accepting presidential largesse, albeit for conducting the church's social work.<sup>84</sup>

While the church has recently engaged in only passive resistance to the Zairian state, the fact that it exists independent of Mobutu's authoritarian and heavily centralized regime is inspirational in and of itself.

[T]he church's independent existence as an important locus of social, educational, economic, and ideological power makes the Zairian state feel insecure. What lies at the heart of the conflict is not so much what the church says or does but, rather, that the church simply exists and has the capacity, within limits, to resist and oppose. Even if this capacity remains unused, it constitutes a significant latent threat to an insecure state.<sup>85</sup>

#### VI. THE POSSIBLE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN REBUILDING ZAIRE

The situation in Zaire has deteriorated rapidly. As one journalist recently reported:

The institutions that once defined the Zairian state have all ceased to function. Civil servants and teachers are not paid, roads and bridges are left in disrepair, public hospitals are not supplied, the public telephone system has disintegrated. Child malnutrition is on the rise, and the country is ravaged by AIDS and a rebirth of sleeping sickness that has caused entire villages simply to lie down and die.<sup>86</sup>

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84. LESLIE, *supra* note 1, at 51 (citation omitted).

85. HASTINGS, *supra* note 49, at 122.

86. Keith B. Richburg, *An African Giant Falls Under Its Own Weight; Years of Greed Make Zaire Chaotic State*, WASH. POST, July 10, 1994, at A1 and A24.

While the precise cause of the dissolution of the Zairian state is uncertain, it is widely believed that Mobutu is at the heart of the problem. In practice, however, removing a man who has been a political fixture for the entire period of Zaire's independence has not been facile. For example, in 1992 a national conference composed of politicians, intellectuals, and clerics voted to replace the Mobutu-dominated parliament as the supreme lawmaking body. The conference imposed strict limitations on Mobutu's power, appointed Mobutu's rival Étienne Tshiesekedi as prime minister, and changed the country's name back to Congo.<sup>87</sup> Mobutu simply ignored their edicts and presently remains in power.

While the government, hospitals, schools, and transportation systems are dysfunctional, the church apparently continues to operate effectively. If anything, the role of the church has expanded since the early trinity of power.

In . . . eastern Zaire, local businessmen make sure they stay on personally warm terms with the local clergy, regardless of their own faith. . . . [T]he church . . . provide[s] certain facilities, credit, advice, and equipment which are simply unavailable from any other source, including the state. Local entrepreneurs also know the church represents a moral and political influence on consumers and, as businessmen, they have to consider such factors. People in this area also recognize that in the present context the church stands apart as an island of integrity in a sea of corruption and, in consequence, they have far more confidence in it than they do in the state.<sup>88</sup>

It has been said that while "[n]o church can wholly escape a political dimension to its behaviour[,] . . . for few churches are politics a primary concern. It is far more in terms of prayer that they understand themselves, hold the loyalty of their members and discover a future laced with hope."<sup>89</sup> The experience of the Zairian Catholic church supports this statement. While modern church leaders appear to be primarily concerned with the "Africanization of Christianity in Zaire,"<sup>90</sup> the church

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87. *Id.* at A24.

88. SCHATZBERG, *supra* note 33, at 122.

89. HASTINGS, *supra* note 49, at 265.

90. Mushete, *supra* note 60, at 241. According to Cardinal Malula, "Eight tenths of the life of our people is governed by the belief in witchcraft, divination and dreams. This is a fact. After 80 years of evangelization, and despite all the condemnations of our 'civilizing masters,' this sole fact should give us pause."

can hardly be characterized as apolitical.

As a result of the close association between church and state, the Catholic church was initially viewed as an appendage to the state during the colonial era. Because the church has been active in every stage of Zairian development, the church continues to occupy a prominent position in national politics. The church generally improved the adverse effects of colonization by easing physical burdens and providing means for the Congolese to comprehend the partial dissolution of traditional society. It initiated the movement towards independence by providing education both in the Congo and in Europe. The church successfully thwarted Mobutu's attempts to consolidate power under the guise of authenticity. Today, the Catholic church is the largest functioning organization in Zaire. Yet despite these institutional triumphs, the Zairian state is progressively degenerating.

As a secondary player in the political arena, the church's influence is necessarily limited. The church has consistently *reacted* against secular despots. The current absence of a governmental strongman necessarily renders a reactionary political stance ineffectual. Rather than assume the role of secular opponent, the church must strive to magnify its position in the world *not* governed by politics. In the words of a Zairian scholar,

The church's task is not to develop its own design for society, a Catholic design. On the other hand, the church in Zaire can collaborate actively in the development of this country by producing a change of mentality, for it can give a solid foundation to human experience, and a real meaning to progress; and it cultivates and encourages the virtues necessary for development: a sense of justice and human fraternity.<sup>91</sup>

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MacGaffey, *supra* note 83, at 140 (quoting Cardinal Malula, preface to LUFULUABO MIZEKA, *L'ANTI-SORCIER FACE À LA SCIENCE* (1977)). This complaint dates from the colonial period. See *supra* note 29 and accompanying text.

91. Mushete, *supra* note 60, at 240-41.