

Jean-Claude Elumba: Ok, so it is a black and white picture on which we see men of a European type, “whites” as we say here in Africa, whites with the colonizer’s helmet, seated on stools and speaking to black men, most of them without clothes. The children are naked, sitting on the floor; a few adults are wearing a loin cloth. I also see a phonogram in front of the whites ...

Gilles Aubry: A phonograph ...

JC: A phonograph. They are under a tent, there are also banana trees next to it, it is a very beautiful picture. Well, it is a historical picture, what can I say ...

Reverend Delphin Kapay: Yes, when one sees the décor, as Jean-Claude said, the presence of the banana trees, what the flora looks like on the picture, this shows that this picture was taken in Africa, and nowhere else. So it is a picture that was taken in Africa, it is first the flora, which makes me say so and then, there is an old drum, on which a child is sitting and this kind of drum is typically African. So this is what confirms that the picture was taken here in Africa.

GA: Other comments?

Sylvain Bongese: Well, if I may describe the picture too, I see the drum, as the pastor just said, maybe not to repeat what he means ... although it is meaningful. As we are describing a bit this picture, I was seeing too, I did some self-examination to reflect on the naked people, so maybe if we are to speak about the current state of affairs, as it is a picture from 1910 ... until today, maybe I can see some evolution. Today, here, compared to the picture and also to the missionaries, they are there, attentive, observing, and I see also the concentration of the African man, attentive to the missionary, they are really attentive, listening, and they focus their eyes, looking at him carefully. I see the place where they are, I wonder whether it is a tent ... It is like a tent made out of two canvas sheets, it is somehow like this.

GA: Is it rather a colonizer's tent or more one from missionaries of that time, or not necessarily, rather from the village?

SB: I do not know whether these missionaries came with it. When I look at the villagers I do not think they could have had such a tent. It seems more as if the missionaries would have taken it with them in order to make the talk easier, the chat with the people; it seems a bit like that. I also notice the kind of hairstyle, I am wondering whether ... the way these kids ... their hairstyle ...

GA: Could you describe it maybe?

DK: For me, this hairstyle also made me wonder because I know that there was a time when human beings used hairstyles as tattoos which were like an ID, so when I saw this hairstyle I also wondered: which ethnic group was it that used to shave their whole head and leave out just a little bit of hair in the middle of the head? So I started wondering to which people would correspond this identity. (...)

GA: From the very few extra information I have, I know that the missionary, Karl Laman, this person sitting more or less in the middle of the picture, spent a lot of time in Bakongo. So it is likely that the picture was taken there. I cannot guarantee though, as it is the only information I have about this picture so far.

DK: Yes, it is very likely because I remember that there are some people in Bakongo who also have a similar hairstyle, so it is very probable that it would be a picture taken

in Bakongo, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, of course.

Bienvenue Nkelani: For me, if I may also do some reading of the picture, I see that it looks like a gathering where people are brought together to listen to a message and we see missionaries recording the message. What touched me most: I see the drum as an instrument of communication in Bakongo, and I see the youngsters being attentive to the message given by the missionaries. It is actually a gathering, a meeting, we do not know what the missionaries were saying, but, looking at the picture, it shows that it is a meeting.

GA: So we can ask ourselves what they might be listening to, because apparently the missionary is broadcasting something ...

BN: Something, and then recording, because here we can see their attention directed to the missionary ...

GA: Ok, so here, to clarify something, with this instrument, the phonograph, it is true that one can use it both to broadcast and to record, but not simultaneously though. In other words one cannot do both at the same time, and I think that here, on this picture, he is rather using it as a means to broadcast ...

BN: As a means to broadcast, because there is something looking similar to what we would call today a speaker, here.

GA: It is a horn ...

DK: A horn is only to carry the sound further. Considering the attention of these

people, it seems as if it is not really directed at the missionary, but more towards the instrument, so it is what makes me believe that the missionary is rather broadcasting an acoustic message and that the people are attentive to this message. That is why the attention concentrates much more on the instrument, which broadcasts sound than on the missionary sitting there, handling the device.

Innocent Kabesha: Personally, when I look at the image, the first thing that comes to my mind is: I see a canvas sheet. I start with the canvas sheet and I am thinking: that was a first beginning, which must be the beginning of a church. I am thinking this must have been an installation made here and it must have been the usual way to gather people, this replaced the setting. I am thinking that the setting, the installation, it must have been the most efficient way – as at that time there was no metal plate – to at least construct an installation which would be reliable. So that the people would gather, one must have needed something like a tent that we see here, above, which replaced already the scenery. I see the pillars that support it, I understand that this frame could not be disassembled. So each time there would be a cult, they must have erected it and people must have gathered there. And then I am thinking it must really have been a church. I am thinking this must have been how a church would start, I can see almost all genders here. I see: somewhere there is a woman, it seems as if it was a woman, and there are some men over there ... it makes me think it is a church already well established. Because when I noticed also the drums, I quickly understood that there were some

rites that there were some singings maybe, dances, concerts, especially because the African man likes dance, he often brings his drum to dance well. Here I understand that they have danced, that they are here to dance, to perform a cult. Now, what also strikes me is ...the problems of civilization. Here I see naked men, half-naked too, under the bad weather that we cannot sense here though, hopefully there was no rain, but actually they are naked and during these years, how could they keep such a good health, this also strikes me, someone who is naked and for all these years, how could he be in such a good health? It makes me think that maybe the food was still ...especially as there were no exportations ...we could eat all that was harvested in the field and which was fresh and contained nutritive elements still. In any case, the picture confirms that they were well fed. When I see the apparatus too, I am thinking, I do not see it speak, it does not open its mouth, I am thinking: was the message already recorded? Does this message come out of the apparatus, because their mouths are closed, none of the three are speaking, their mouths are closed. (...) Finally I can say that the question I asked myself is: how did they invent an apparatus that we cannot find here, because it is not as if they had gotten to this machine right away, they must have started somewhere before reaching this point, there must have been a development, so they developed that ... I see our drum here ... which remains until today the instrument, which diffuses sound but does not capture it, we have not developed it ... that is also what discouraged me a little.

GA: Discouraged? The fact that the drum has not evolved since ...

IK: Yes, it has not evolved. It spreads sounds but does not capture it.

(...)

GA: We can see here, next to Laman, a series of wax-cylinders. We know that they could not have contained more than a few minutes of recording, maybe one or two minutes of message could be broadcasted. So the question remains: what was broadcasted?

DK: We are asking the question of the message, which message were they broadcasting? It is missionaries, usually when they were coming like that they gave God's message of love to the people. (...) I see the number of wax-cylinders and I am wondering: what was the missionary doing? The cylinders must have been encoded, he knew that he had to start with this one, then that one, and then, and then, whilst the people must have been recollecting in their heads the information contained in the cylinders, so they had to follow what they heard, and here rises another question: for a being who discovers such a machine, one that produces human sounds, the first reaction is to think "well, did they take human beings, miniaturized them (if you allow me saying so) and then put them in these machines and that is how they are speaking from in there?". Because the African man at this time did not have the knowledge of recording. He did not know that sound could be conserved. So this understanding escaped him. He had discovered instruments that could produce sound and he had also already discovered instruments which could amplify sound, but to conserve sound and to

listen to it whenever, this very experience, the African man did not have it already. So this picture shows an epoch, during which the African man, for the first time, begins to discover instruments that could keep sound and reproduce it when needed. So the first reaction, as I said, was to think: are there tiny pieces of men inside here who are speaking or, how did one do it, what is this magic? Because magic was the sole explanation for what could not be explained, they were thinking: what is this magic that the white man has brought, one with which he is taking the sound and broadcasting it through this object that he presents to us. So the message, it is a bit difficult to know precisely the message, because the picture remains silent, but looking at the people, as we know they are missionaries, it is likely that it was an anthem or a message of God's love, an evangelic message that they were broadcasting through this instrument. The tension is quite obvious; we see that the people around the missionary listen with great interest.

GA: I am surprised; you had added last time that presumably the broadcasted message must have been recorded in Kikongo language ...

DK: Certainly, because it was one of the objectives of the missionaries, when they were arriving somewhere, they tried to learn the language of the region and check how they could convey the message in this language. Because as we said, what we name the surprise, they played on the surprise effect on the people, on the receiver of the message, the recipient. He receives the message in the language of his heart,

and therefore thinks: so the God who is presented to me by these missionaries is not a stranger like them, they are strangers but their God is not a stranger because he knows me, he knows my language, he is addressing me in my language. So it was really a very important element that all these missionaries who visited us during the epoch of colonialism were playing on. So they managed to broadcast messages in the language that the target population knew, so that it spared them the trouble of having to translate, because they could not find translators everywhere and it allowed them to communicate directly with the people.

GA: Ok, so for informational purposes, this Karl Laman was conducting linguistic researches on the Kikongo language, he is known for having translated I think the Old Testament into Kikongo, the New Testament had already been translated but he reviewed it, and this led to the publication of the first Bible in Kikongo in 1905. Afterwards he also made a French-Kikongo dictionary. So this interest for the language, I did some research on him, was motivated ...

SB: Yes, the French-Kikongo dictionary I have ...

GA: Yes, so from what I have read in the biographies linked to Laman, is that he was very insisting on the fact that it was important to know the culture and the local language of the populations that one wanted to evangelize, so that they could be approached very closely and the message would be conveyed to them in the best way possible. There are different aspects

that I would have liked maybe to discuss in greater details with you, if we consider this picture in terms of power-relations, we already said that there are three white men, these missionaries are seated and therefore they overlook somehow the villagers or the devotees who are gathered around them, so they dominate somewhat by their seated position whilst the others are rather sitting on the floor. I do not know whether we could try to describe the expressions on the faces of these people a bit, do they look more severe or ...

JCE: Indeed, personally, I was reflecting a bit on the shock of civilization, this somehow shock of culture, and I was asking myself about the whites' motivation to come to Africa. They looked a bit like aliens, like gods and in front of a population – let us not be afraid of the words – of a primitive type, without clothes, whereas they were themselves dressed as angels, their faces are very impassive so I am wondering: what prompted them to come to a bush country like that, them who seem like coming from a quite advanced civilization where people are dressed, this is a bit the first shock one has: on the one hand men and women without clothes and on the other these three men dressed as gods. And I am wondering how did these blacks perceive these whites? Did they perceive them as men like them or as aliens or as ghosts? Was their attention more captured by the device that emits these sounds or by these people who use this device? And as in Africa we explain almost everything with magic – magic is the key explanation of all events – maybe they thought they were dealing with spirits, with ghosts, gods and this apparatus

too, one could think it was the deed of some witchery of the whites. I speak a bit like an African and that would be the first remark. But also, observing these naked men, they still had a sense of beauty because they had their fashion trends, their style and their ways of dressing despite having no clothes.

SB: They also did their hair.

JCE: Only by looking at their hairstyle, it was well made, the head is shaved almost everywhere apart from a sort of crest. So they had a notion of aesthetics, of beauty, in their own way.

SB: Despite their condition.

JCE: Despite that they were naked without clothes, but the youngsters especially the younger ones all have very well done hair and I am wondering which kind of instruments they were using to shave their heads like this because at this time I do not think they had any scissors or razors, maybe they used stones, I do not know what they were using. And also they are very much at ease as a naked public, both men and women, it does not embarrass them, even in front of strangers they are not embarrassed, they feel good about themselves. And the missionaries too, it seems as if they were not embarrassed to be all dressed up in front of the naked men and women, that shock of civilization here ... But I think these missionaries must have had a lot of love, because to leave an already advanced civilization where people already have a certain comfort and to come to spend their whole life – some died here in Africa,

some stayed until their death – I think they were true believers. If the message they are broadcasting – for me it is the gospel – then I think they must have been lightened up by a heart who knows the Lord, unless they were like other colonizers motivated solely by the natural resources of Africa rather than by the African man. But I think they are more interested in the salvation of the African man than in the natural resources of Africa. We belong to a school where missionaries are being trained, it really comes as a calling out for me, for this Center for Missiology, to measure a little the risk, all they had to abandon in terms of comfort to come to a rather uncomfortable situation and to share the condition of the African at this time, for me one must be filled with a lot of love. But I would not want to prevent others from speaking too ...

GA: No, but please feel free. We will come back later, if you allow, to the activities of the Center for Missiology. To remain a bit in the past with this picture, I was mentioning power-relations, maybe also some underlying violence, is it ... well, in my opinion, in the expressions of the faces, well it is in fact a bit difficult to read in it a violent or dominating attitude or I do not know, some sort of aggression, which would show that the people were forced into gathering there ... On the other hand, for me, the fact that the drum is lying on the floor and that people are seated on it, in the composition of the picture, it stands still lower than the phonograph and could one maybe think that finally ...? Well this drum lies a bit on the side. I do not know if it is usual to sit on it like this, but nevertheless it does not stand in a very prominent way.

BN: Maybe it had already been used and after the animation its role was over and we would make it fall over on its side and continue with the program.

GA: Ok, so this is not sacrilegious or ...

DK: No, no, no, that is not sacrilegious.

BN: As there was no bench ...

SB: Yes, the other uses the drum as a bench.

IK: He must be a drummer.

DK: Generally it is the drummer himself, the one who manages the drum. It was usual to put the drum like this so it is not necessarily a way to diminish it in comparison to the white man's instrument, it is just the way people put it. It was actually the best position to protect it (as if it remains standing it could fall and then break after it is been played on), sometimes we would put it like this, lying on the side so that it would not fall and break. So, in between the two instruments there is no real power-relation. That is how one would use it. It is true that for the African man, the device brought by the Europeans is subject to a lot of admiration. As I said at the beginning, it is the first time that he hears the human sound, that the African hears human sound, a voice which pronounces clear words, that one can recognize. It is the first time and that is what creates all this admiration, this amazement which accompanies the effect of surprise, one thinks: "Oh well, so one can emit human sound through that instrument" so it does not diminish the role of the drum, the drum keeps its place and this instruments which

emits human sound also has its place. So, concerning the faces of the people, as you also said, it is hard to read power-relation out of it, it is true, but keeping in mind the history of our past, I know that some whites enforced violence in some places and one should also understand that sometimes the whites did not want this violence to be so. There are the ones who did it on purpose and the others who did not. We spoke about a culture shock; one suddenly encounters someone totally different from oneself. We are wondering if the first reaction, as Jean-Claude said, was "is he an alien? Is it not a godly being that is appearing to me?" One must have asked oneself many questions. Some others must have wondered if it was some other kind of animal he had never seen; I have heard in the surroundings of my village that there were some men who had killed the white man and tasted his flesh. Because they were wondering about this type of animal they would see for the first time: is its flesh bitter, is it luscious ... They dared to kill him and taste this type of animal they were encountering for the first time. So you see that the white man, the European, was the victim of this kind of violence too and he could only respond with violence to it, which is totally normal, but there were also areas where the white man started using violence to try to enforce himself on others, especially in areas where men had a tradition of warriors. When you arrive they say no, they refuse everything and therefore the white man dared to make use of violence in these places. But the missionary, when he arrived in these kinds of places, the missionary would first gather information on whether some other whites had been in the area before and how they

had behaved toward the population and vice versa. Hence, when the missionary arrived, he knew how to play, how to behave such that he would not be confused with the colonizer, because from an external point of view the way they looked was similar: they had the same skin color, they dressed in the same way and as Jean-Claude underlined, their hair were done in the same way as the colonizers'. Hence the Africans who hosted them did not know how to distinguish the colonizer from the missionary. It is only through the message, the expressions and the behavior that they could say that "no, the whites I am hosting in my village are different from the ones who visited the village before or who was at the neighbor". So that is how they knew how to distinguish between the colonizer and the missionary. So when we look at the picture, the missionaries are staid, they are calm, they do not have a clenched or closed face showing anger or another way to traumatize the black man, so we realize that they felt accepted by the community to whom they were addressing, so the missionaries felt at ease, they felt accepted by the community, they had nothing to fear because there was a peaceful atmosphere which reigned between the missionaries and the community.

SB: (...) I was thinking to myself, today, maybe since 1910, if the missionaries were alive and entered today in the same places, would they find the people still like that on the picture or would there be a difference? Amongst ourselves we will say that no, we would not find them in this state today, so there has been an evolution, a great change in the way of dressing, there are also schools today

where there was none at the time, there is a progress, a change.

GA: Of course it is obvious, it has been a hundred years that this picture was taken; this maybe allows us to move on to today, to the current situation. I am here, I could somehow be an equivalent of the missionary that we see here on the picture, well I am not myself a missionary, but I also came with some recordings and broadcasting equipment, maybe there will also be a radio show this Saturday organized with Radio Sango Malamu. So if I have the opportunity I will also broadcast some recordings I brought with me, in particular those of Karl Laman which I found in the archives in Berlin, a sound archive, and I thought it could be interesting maybe for the public in Kinshasa to listen to these recordings that are a hundred years old and are difficult to find. I also brought with me some recordings of a Congolese church ceremonial in Berlin where one hears a children chorus who sings sometimes in Lingala and sometimes in German, so it gives the possibility to see how it sounds and how a Congolese cult takes place in Berlin for instance. Yes, so here is my recording equipment, and we are recording our conversation right now: so there are some slight similarities with these missionaries of 1910, only in the fact of going to the same place and saying I would like to record something, to give a testimony of what I am encountering. Laman was in the first place a missionary, but he was also an ethnographer, he used his devices to record languages he would discover and then study them. The sound recording enables to listen again and many times to the same thing, so to really listen to a language in great

details and to write it down, it is a means for linguistic analysis. And equivalently we also have a local population whom you would be the representatives of. And then we meet, and in between the two there is a hundred years of history with all we know and do not know about, the many years of colonialism and then the post-colonialism. Well, you know the story better than I do obviously, and as for me, who comes here to study how some of the churches work, and in particular the charismatic churches, but in fact all the religious groups within the urban space and in particular the use of audio-visual technologies of reproduction and broadcast. Hence, for instance, I am interested on the one hand in the Media, audio-visual ones, the radio stations, the TV, but also in the use of the loudspeakers in public spaces, in markets, for the predication, sometimes even the buses broadcast religious music. There is a great diversity of religious signs like this, which one can identify in the surrounding, and some of them are acoustic. There are also crusades or campaigns of evangelization that take place in the city and that is also what I came to report on ... but with the idea, also, within myself, to learn something and to reflect a bit on my own presence here, what kind of meaning it can have to come here in this culture that I do not really know and finally, what allows me to come here ... and why not, if I find the opportunity to come anyway ...! So, as I am here, in front of you gentlemen who are more or less all part of the University Center for Missiology, which is an organization dedicated to the missionary project, I would be curious to know a bit more about how you understand your situation from a historical perspective, one as this picture gives for

instance. We have the whites who come with a technology, who at the same time import both a religion and a technology and then, today, this has all been appropriated, the locals have appropriated for themselves these tools and this religion to do something personal out of it, and I am curious to know how one can explain this appropriation, what were the important stages of it and how you see things in general.

SB: Ok, on this precisely, I also wanted to mention the missionaries – as I am interrogating myself ... Firstly, to consider their availability, and apart from this availability, also the sacrifices because at that time, in order to reach these areas, I wonder whether there were any roads or how many kilometers they had to walk by foot, as I do not know if there were any available vehicles? Being myself a missionary, I read into the sacrifices and also the availability of these men when they agreed to go to a place where they could be attacked by ferocious animals. However, they accepted to go there, they arrived and they worked and fulfilled their task and all that ... I am thinking, as we are here amongst missionaries, that a re-reading of the sacrifices and the commitment should be done. This is what I see in these missionaries. It is crucial for a missionary to pay attention to all that.

IK: Through what we have said of the picture, I see that this black man is attentive, his attention is not only directed to the message, but also toward the behavior, I also note the external appearance, he can also envy this appearance and think "me too: one day, I will dress like a white man." His intention

is to one day dress like a white man. His intention is also to preach, to speak, to sit like a white man, to stand like him. And all this results in the fact that the black man we see here copies little by little the white man, and here we can also say that he is going to reject his own culture because he wanted to imitate the behavior of the whites and what we live nowadays – because we are really acculturated, I would not say that we live our culture to a 100% – this follows up from a culture which came from somewhere else and came to civilize us. Now what is encouraging to me is that while trying to imitate the white man, the black managed to do what the whites came here to do, we would follow step-by-step the same message that the whites had brought to us. The man that we see here would go with the same message also to Asia, America, Europe and wherever at the white man's place too. That is also what I find encouraging: these men, despite being overwhelmed by great suffering, it was not in vain, they still benefited through it because today there is an expansion of knowledge of the gospel as well as the mission which departs from Africa to reach Europe ... Nevertheless, there was a real transfer of habits, knowledge and all, and today we meet ...

GA: So what happened in between the two? Because it is true that we could think of a picture taken today in a European city where a black pastor would be preaching in front of white devotees, there would also be African compatriots amongst the listeners, but certainly also white ones, so the situation is almost inverted in comparison to this one. How would you interpret what happened in between?





IK: What happened in between the two here is what I said, this black man sitting here, attentive, did not admire only the clothes of the white man but also what was coming out of his mouth. He also admired his behavior, which he had to imitate, follow step-by-step what the white man was doing with the intention of doing it too one day. There is also some kind of revolution because this man sitting, listening to the white man could not do other than to come to a decision, to think that also one day "I will come to his place with the same message", and that is what is happening today.

GA: Yes, but in between there was still a great decrease in the religious practices in Europe, since 1910, so that is also what leads to this situation where from the African point of view, in Europe, there is a lot of work to do because people do not believe anymore. So what happened and how to explain the mechanisms which, during these hundred years, from a religion which was still more or less imposed by the Europeans on the local populations, lead to the fact that today it is the Africans themselves who claim this religion, who feel invested with a mission to propagate it and who use the technology that goes with it, which gives a certain power to it. Personally, that is how I interpret it on the picture: maybe the missionary could have asked someone from the place to read or recite a text in Kikongo to the people, but by the very fact of having a phonograph set on a pedestal and which broadcasts a recorded voice, this shows more prestige, it shows a technological mastery, a kind of power and this is exactly what I also observe here in the churches today: there are big loudspeakers, the media is very present,

there are always teams with video cameras, microphones in the bigger churches, the TV channels are used to spread the messages as well as to show that they have the financial support to pay for all this equipment and knowledge, that they master this technology and that they also show the power given by the watts, the electrical power of amplified sounds. Yes, so I do not know how you understand your situation within this very heritage. Do you recognize yourselves more in the white missionaries here, in the villagers or in a mix of both? I guess ...

JCE: I would like first to say that this is the proof that the message of the gospel is a message that meets a universal need. If today the African has appropriated the message of the gospel, it is because it satisfies a need inherent to all men, may you be white, black, yellow, red, green, the message of the gospel gives an answer to a universal need and if the African has appropriated it, it is because he found satisfaction in it. One has to distinguish between evangelization and civilization, because it is true that civilization has acculturated us, we have lost our values, all that was brought to us was not good. There were some good things, alphabetization, advances in terms of health, writing, opening to the world, there were really good things, but we have also lost in the meanwhile many good cultural values that we had in the past, the knowledge of medicinal plants for instance. Today we have lost all that, while for millenaries the black man was healing himself with plants. That is on the side of civilization, civilization has not brought necessarily always advances in all areas, but the gospel yes, the gospel

is a factor of integral development, it has brought a certain satisfaction to the spiritual problems of man, may he be black or white. Second, the evangelization has also brought a progress on a social level; the gospel is an instrument of progress. This is what surprises us: that the white man today is very advanced in terms of technology, economy etc. and nevertheless he undergoes a certain decline on the spiritual level. There is a spiritual crisis and that is felt generally, the families are dismembered, the family is not what it used to be anymore, there are many suicides, despite the abundance, the material prosperity, but people are not happy, they do not have the peace of heart. This is what motivates us because it is precisely the gospel that supports us, despite our misery. Because here, in the current African situation – the African suffering with its difficulties concerning food, 95% of the people unemployed, children having troubles to study, the dictatorship, the social injustices and all that – what enables us not to loose ground is precisely the gospel. We believe that is the gospel the white man brought to us that can solve the current European crisis too and make the white man happy. Some tell the anecdote that they have taken all the parameters of the Congolese life, put them in a computer and it answered that life is impossible in Congo. And when the whites come over to Congo they find people smiling here! And what is it that makes us smile while we live in misery? It is the gospel that gives us hope. The white man is like someone who has no compass, he is disoriented. The gospel is the compass.

DK: (...) I am thinking that the gospel has found in Africa a very fertile land due to

the mere fact that the African man is religious by nature. If, for instance, each one of us considered at times witchery to be the way to answer most questions that cannot be answered otherwise, it is because the African man is religious by nature. So when there is such a situation, he tries to see how he could transcend it to solve it by using purely religious proceedings and in this context, to speak about the gospel, to speak about Jesus, liberates, saves, it responds to the needs, it is an actualized echo – if one needs to say so – of what the African man wanted and what he looked for. That is what made the African man appropriate the message of the gospel and he is now also spreading it to other places. We have mentioned this great regress of the religious in the West, myself, I would rather speak about a change in the polarity, and here I am taking it from a purely theological angle, I am thinking that the Europeans just left the right religion for another one, which is not the right one. Because we know that in Europe nowadays witchcraft is also record-breaking in certain cities, there is also the Freemasonry and ...

JCE: The New Age ...

DK: And other religious philosophies which are developing very rapidly, despite the fact that the pure gospel, which the white man brought to us in Africa, is losing grounds in these regions. A fear I have for the African man is that when he appropriated the sound devices, it was not actually that easy and was a struggle for a hundred years, a war. Should we accept everything that the white man brings while he at the same time refuses our musical instruments in the church?

So it was a struggle and finally we understood that the white man who had denied us to play the drum, was a man who had not understood the drum properly, he only saw it from the perspective of witchery, but when the other white man came he understood that the drum is only an instrument of music, of communication, and hence it can be accepted. That is what made the black man think that if he accepts our instrument, it means that the one he brought to us was not simply a magic to dominate us, so can I understand his instrument too and see how it works, can I also use it?... On the other hand, there was also on the side of the church, many churches that indulged in the usage of these instruments, carrying a voice to a greater distance. There were official churches using it too, it depended on the size of the room, the size of the audience, so from the beginning, even at the time of colonization, there were microphones, loudspeakers were used, but we would then adjust the volume in such a way that it would not be too loud for the ones in the room, as if it was just a natural voice simply moved closer. So it was really well organized like that. Today no one checks up to how many decibels the devices are adjusted and this starts scaring me. Because today you can see in a very small church a sound system that reaches to a hundred kilometers away and no one wonders whether the fact that this voice, set on so many decibels, has effects on the ears and the consciousness. Because even in a place where there is too much noise, it still creates an overload on the psychological level, on the mental level. So the African man has appropriated instruments but he has not really thought of how they should be used because he has

not learnt how to properly manage sound. He discovers a device and uses it so. In the countryside, in open-air, this is justified because we need the voice to reach far away, but when we are in a small room of 10 times 18 meters for instance, to put the full volume, we wonder what is the goal, what is wanted. Is it used, as I heard someone mentioning, as a substitute to the bell that was removed? Because, the bell, we said "ok that is imposed by the church – allow me to name – the Catholic Church, so we thought it's the Catholic and Protestant church that brought to us the bell, we are neither Catholic nor Protestant, we are Charismatics, and we do not want the bell." So for the people to know that the church is here, its place, we put the amplified sound so that the people say "ah this is the right direction" and they can come to church. If such is the case, then I think they won. But do they reflect on the effects of the strong amplified sound on the human being? That is the negative aspect of this appropriation of the technology by the black man today.

GA : I just want to make a small remark here because it is true that the bell had rather an informing purpose, everyone knew where the church was and it announced certain precise events like a wedding etc. I would say that in the Charismatic churches, what I have observed in terms of use of electric amplification, is that it is not only to indicate the presence or the beginning of a ceremony, but it is rather used throughout the whole ceremony. So there is indeed the experience for the audience of an amplified voice, that of the pastor on the one hand, maybe also musicians, singers, at a rather high volume indeed, often the public

also sings, everyone participates and this very high volume does give a quite bodily dimension to the religious practice – notably through dance but also with the sound which embraces one's whole body and the whole group itself ... it is a group practice, people pray together. I have the feeling that there is also a dimension of trance that comes into play. I mean that this particularly high volume overexcites a bit the consciousness and the intensity of the situation and this has sometimes a releasing effect, sometimes a jubilating one, but sometimes also a hindering one, one might think "this seems too loud to me, I cannot really get into it". So it really depends on whether we manage to get into it or not. But I really have the feeling that the religious service acquires another dimension through the use of this technology. It is a bit like a rock concert sometimes ...

DK: Yes, you have mentioned the rock concert. To me, my concern, I am not against the fact of amplifying voice, but I am thinking that if it is in a closed room, the sound technician who is adjusting the device, he should also take into account that there are negative effects on the human body. For example, for the person who is always at the same spot – because we know in our churches that there are some people who never change their place, every Sunday when they come you know where they will sit. So, try to picture a man who always sits next to the speaker and who receives that sound directly in his ear, you can imagine what this sound will cause as consequences after a certain period of time. Hence, this person will not be able to hear a voice, a sound with a low frequency:

because his ear will have been damaged by being exposed to a loud voice. For the trance aspect, I was reflecting on this too because I know a church – which name I would rather not mention – that plays on this very aspect. So, to myself I tried to think about it. I wondered why people go there. There are even intellectuals in this church and when I tried to listen to their report on it. I realized that people are very cunning because they play with the sound devices. They put a very high sound and they maintain it on for some time, so you cannot think, at a certain point you cannot think anymore, you are just accepting everything you are told because there exists this form of ecstasy where the human memory stops because of the noise, it cannot think properly and then people are just recording everything they are told without thinking and when they will come out they will have become mere "wax-cylinders". So they can only reproduce the sound they have recorded without having had time to think. Yet, the Christian Faith is not about that, the Christian Faith is one that leaves all consciousness and freedom up to man, because we speak about free will in Christianity, so the human being is free to think and to chose what he wants and what he does not want. There is some slyness taking place through the use of the sound devices, we bring the human to its limit, we limit his mental abilities, it is like an unconscious constraint on these humans, it is as if faith was enforced on him and yet the Christian faith cannot be enforced, it is a faith which can only be passed on in freedom. So it is only with this very aspect, negative, that I am personally disagreeing. For the rest, the sounding equipment helps, I agree, by allowing people to use sound

system as they should, i.e. to carry the voice very far because there are also people who are very far and still listen to us, they do not want to come to our church, they do not want to enter, but they listen to the message from far away. So if this amplification of sound allows that we can be listened to at a very large distance, then on this side too we have achieved something. (...)

GA: If the contiguous church uses itself a high amplification of sound, does not it naturally create a competitive atmosphere?

DK: Sometimes yes!

JCE: Without denying what my colleague Delphin has said, it is true that it really is a danger for the good health of the ears, but we are also a culture who likes noise, since the ancient times we like noise, the African does not really have a quiet culture, in our way of speaking we have a tendency to scream, even in the celebrations of the village there is noise, so it does find a fertile ground in Africa. However we have to take into account this aspect of danger for the health. But what strikes me here is that the drum was fought against by the colonization, by the white civilization, it was excluded from the church. But the drum is very resistant. Today the drum has come back on the foreground since the 70s, may it be in Catholic, Protestant and more particularly in Charismatic churches. In spite of the modern instruments, the synthesizers, the electric guitars, all of these have entered the churches but the drum is still always present. The sound of the drum plays a great role, it has a driving effect on praise. The African man cannot worship or praise

without drum and nothing can replace the drum, even the modern drum set cannot replace it, the guitar, the piano ... This very sound of the drum is so much in the heart of the African that this instrument can simply not disappear. The white missionaries had demonized the drum but since the 70s we witness the reemergence of the drum, it takes part in all demonstrations, may it be for grieving or for birth ceremonies, when there is a birth of twins the drum is there, in parties the drum is there, in the church ... the drum is everywhere: the drum resists. Someone said that he regretted that there had been no technological evolution of the drum, indeed, but that is what is beautiful about it: it is an instrument which has remained primitive, natural, which does not necessitate much effort to be carried somewhere, no electricity to be played, it is adaptable to all possible rhythms, one can play it according to its own culture (a Senegalese will play as a Senegalese, a French as the French do, the Chinese as the Chinese do ...) it is really the base of instruments, the instrument per se. Here we have at least two or three instruments, there is the drum, the hand clap and also the maracas. These three are always present and they resist, they survived through centuries, they are millenniums old. It is also the particularity of the African drum: it is an instrument of communication: before there were telephones etc., we would announce news like that. There was a way to play, which announced a death, one which announced joy and today there is a way to worship the Lord, to dance and all that. It is an instrument that keeps on having its role, even in the church. It is not a demonic instrument; the inspiration to create it came

from God. So it is not incompatible with the gospel and we can export it under other skies. Today in all the different music in the world there is a percussion instrument, it is always there. So this is what strikes me when I saw the picture, the evolution through time, a century later, because this picture is now a hundred years old.

BN: I wanted to add an important aspect. It used to be the white man who concerned himself with the evangelization of Africa and nowadays it is the African who feels concerned with the evangelization of Europe. Once was said that it is Africa who will re-evangelize the world and now we begin to see the effect of Africa starting to do this work of evangelization. There are men and women who go everywhere in the world to bring the gospel of Christ. Because we noticed that in Europe there is a great crisis on the evangelical level whilst the African man has maintained it for himself. Now we see the African man going to Europe and the will to evangelize is in him. You see, there are men and women who are educated in the University Center for Missiology (UCM) and everywhere else, and they have at heart the evangelization of Europe. One finds churches in Europe where there are black men, in Belgium, in France, in Germany, in Holland ..., that is all according to this will. Do the pastors in Europe try to reach over to the white men? That is also a question to ask, because if we go there for the re-evangelization of Europe, we also need to hit the mark. It is still a problem; we find now churches of black men in Europe who are trying to pursue the work of evangelization. That is what I would like to add.

GA: How do you define the missionary project of the UCM today? Briefly?

JCE: To make all nations disciples. That is roughly what it consists in. We want to make all nations, all ethnies of the world disciples of Jesus Christ. That is the project of the UCM, the gospel for all human beings, no matter his ethnies, his race, his origins, his evolution, his social situation: we want to reach men because humanity as a whole carries a common denominator, we have the same problem, and that is the problem of sin. Shall we be black or white, we have a same problem, it is the problem of sin and that prevents us to find peace in our hearts. In every crisis we know, the wars, the social injustice, the massacres, terrorisms, dictatorship, imperialism, that is all the problem of sin and the gospel is the answer to the problem of humanity. The problem of humanity is sin because man is disconnected from his creator God and therefore he is in crisis. We cannot live without God, without being in contact with God. And the fact of not living in intimacy with God: that is what the Bible calls sinning.

GA: You were saying yourself at the beginning that these individuals on the picture who lived for years without this God seemed not to be doing so bad, they were even beautiful, we might say of a primitive beauty, but how ...

JCE: Yes, actually the Africans knew about God: in all the languages in Africa there is a word for God. But the problem is how to come into contact with this specific God. That is where we were on the wrong path

because the African thinks that God has created the universe and that God then did not care about the situation of man anymore. He had given all responsibility to the ancients, to the dead. And yet this is a lie: those who are dead are dead, they cannot do anything for us. This is what the gospel came to correct, to restore the truth, because the ancestors they cannot do anything for us, the only mediator between God and men is Jesus Christ. This very correction of our belief brought us peace and joy of living. It is true that we knew God but we were worshiping him in the wrong way, it was idolatry, we worshiped the dead, statues, spirits, and that is what the Bible calls demons. But there is a word "God" in all African languages, in Lingala he is called "Nzambe", in Kikongo "Nzakomba", in Kimbuza "Akongo", etc ... In all languages there is a name for God but the way to celebrate his name, the way to communicate with Him, on that we were on the wrong path. Now the gospel came to bring us back to the right path. Since then we know the gospel and we have found peace. It solved many problems, among other things the problem of witchery, the belief and the practice of witchery, which is a great problem preventing development in Africa. Witchery is a prison ...

GA: Civilization is still one of your priorities?

JCE: Yes, obviously because the missionaries made some mistakes. Because while bringing the gospel they also imposed their civilization on us: this is a mistake in the missionary project ...

GA: Your project is different ...

JCE: Yes, one has to distinguish between evangelization and ... As of myself, if I go to France, I should not turn the French into Congolese, no, the French should remain French but accept the gospel. However, they brought the gospel here themselves but at the same time wanted to make us whites with a black skin. They have put a mask on us that does not fit our ways and as a result we are disoriented, us, the youngsters of post-colonialism for instance, we are a bit acculturated, we do not really know if we are Africans, if we are whites ... We are a bit of a hybrid culture. This is the mistake; one should not change the civilization of someone else but rather bring the gospel in a given cultural context. Culture is neither good nor bad, a culture is a culture, the person should keep her culture, her cultural values, but this person should be able to accept the gospel. The gospel is what will cleanse what is bad in a culture. For instance, we just spoke about the drum: they demonized the drum, they demonized our statuettes. There was this Congolese musician who had written a song in the 70s in which he was asking the question of the black man, he says "I am wondering where the black man comes from" because in the catholic church, at that time, they represented the devil as a black with horns and a tail while all the saints were white. So he asked the question: "when we go to church all the saints are white and the devil is black, our statuettes are being demonized but when we go to church we find many statuettes of whites. God, tell us where do we come from? Who is the black man, who is his ancestor? Are you really the God of the blacks, are you a universal God or are you only the God of the whites?" It is a song that

people still meditate on today; of course, it is a real question ...

GA: What is the name of the artist?

JCE: Verckys.

GA: And the song, could you remind me of the title?

JCE: Nakomitunaka, it means "I wonder", [he sings] "Nzambe Nakomitunaka ..." he addresses God, it is a kind of prayer, "God, I am wondering, who is the black man?" because at church there is a contradiction, we are told that the devil is black, our statuettes are rejected but at the church we find the other statuettes. There is a contradiction between the message that is preached and the practice. That is a bit the difficulty that the missionaries encountered. They had to distinguish, because they started with the idea that the black man was not civilized, and yet the black man had his own civilization, which should have been preserved. To bring the gospel and to introduce it in a culture, that is what requires what we call the contextualization. This is somehow the mistake of the past that we want to correct when we go on a mission; we want to respect the culture of the native while bringing him the Good News of Salvation in Jesus Christ.

GA: I want to thank you very much; we are going to stop now. Gentlemen thank you very much for your participation. I hope you also benefited from this and I will let you know if this recording is broadcasted.

All: Thanks a lot.

The document presented here is the result of an informal meeting that took place on July 13 2011 in the library of the University Center for Missiology (UCM) in Kinshasa. Participants were: Gilles Aubry (artist and originator of the meeting), the Pastor Sylvain Bongese (librarian of the UCM), the Reverend Delphin Kapay (Assistant Professor at the UCM), Jean-Claude Elumba (chaplain of the UCM), Innocent Kabesha (PhD student of the UCM) and Bienvenue Nkelani (writer and alumni of the UCM). The purpose of the meeting was to initiate a discussion around a picture from 1910, which represents three Swedish missionaries (C.W. Linström, P.A. Westlind and K.E. Laman) showing a phonograph to a group of African villagers. Presumably, the picture was taken in the southern part of the current Democratic Republic of Congo – at that time Belgian Congo. The English version presented here is almost in its entirety; solely certain short passages were omitted in order to avoid repetitions. These passages are indicated by (...). The original audio recording of the discussion and the French transcription are available on the following website: www.soundimplant.com/laman-encounter

IMPRINT

This booklet is published in the occasion of the exhibition
The Urban Cultures of Global Prayers
NGBK – Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin
November 12 2011 – January 8 2012

The picture "K.E. Laman (around 1910)" belongs to the collection of the Svenska Missionskyrkans Arkiv, Stockholm. It is reproduced here from the catalog of the exhibition "La mémoire du Congo. Le temps colonial.", of the Musée Royal de l'Afrique centrale, Tervuren.

Translation: Claire Perryman-Holt
Design: Raphaël Cuomo, Maria Iorio
Proof reading: Katja Reichard, Claus Bech-Hansen
Print: Laserline, Berlin

This project has been generously supported by:
Canton du Jura, Switzerland.

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The Laman Encounter

Gilles Aubry, October 2011