

# **The Witchdoctor's Craft**

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## **Abstract**

Much confusion over the roles and presence of witchdoctors in Africa is clarified through careful attention to epistemology. Witchdoctor's provide utility, usually deceptively, through arranging for suffering or demise of others on your behalf so as to enable you to feel good. In contexts in which others' feelings hurt you, the witchdoctor's craft may be essential, until Jesus enters the scene. Jesus's Way of Truth brings fulness of Life to believers. Informed etic articulation of traditional African ways of life in this article throws light onto contemporary concerns over fake news.

**Key Words:** Africa, epistemology, Jesus, witchcraft, witchdoctor

## **Introduction: Some Discussion on Epistemology**

A witchdoctor's craft builds on people's innate orientation to outdoing others. Positively this orientation inspires hard work. Negatively, it requires eradication or invalidation of those trying to outdo me or us, one's enemies. Because someone can feel better even should that eradication or invalidation be delusional, witchdoctors can be rewarded for deceiving their customers regarding others' failures. As Helmut Schoeck states,

It must have been one of Christianity's most important, if unintentional, achievements in preparing men for, and rendering them capable of, innovative actions when it provided man for the first time with supernatural beings who, he knew, could neither envy nor ridicule him. By definition the God and saints of Christianity can never be suspected by a believer of countering his good luck or success with envy, or of heaping mockery and derision upon the failure of his sincere efforts (Schoeck, 1969, pp. 91-92).

There is much semantic confusion in English regarding terminology associated with witches. Using native English, reference to witches or witchcraft is usually to outdated practices once engaged by European and American ancestors that are now considered primitive and "unenlightened." English terms about witchcraft are widely used to translate various expressions from a broad variety of African languages. Thus, the term "witchcraft" always means two things at once, that which is European, and that which is African. My focus in this article is on elaborating African understandings. I articulate the witchdoctor's craft, as practiced in Africa, and why it is so widespread. Of course, I do so as someone who is not native to Africa—hence I offer an etic description.

This article is both academic and rooted in experience. As a Brit who has lived and served as a missionary in sub-Saharan Africa for over 37 years, I have acquired much personal experience of the witchdoctor's craft, of the contexts in which witchdoctors do their work, and on how witchdoctors are opposed. This article builds on that experience, interpreted through certain scholarly literature.

This article is not a survey of everything found in the literature about "the witchdoctor's craft." The reason for this limitation is related to epistemology. Western explorers, missionaries, and anthropologists wrote many of the early texts that describe ways of life of people in Africa

“discovered” between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. Etic accounts written by the original Western explorers, missionaries, and anthropologists were, and are, for formal scholarly purposes considered authoritative—foundations on which to build further knowledge.

When Africans themselves began to take on formal scholarly roles, these accounts became required sources of information for them. African scholars looking for recognition are typically forced to use the same languages as had the explorers, missionaries, and anthropologists (Alexander, 1999). (Particularly in focus here is English.) For reasons explained in more detail elsewhere (Harries, 2013), the practice by which Africans use English and imitate etic accounts has frequently resulted in supposed emic accounts being unduly influenced by etic descriptions. The difference between etic and emic accounts becomes highly unclear. Emic accounts must for formal purposes give deference to accounts written by outsiders and in the outsiders’ languages. Outside researchers and writers are required to take emic accounts seriously regardless of whether they match with their own observations. As mentioned, those emic accounts are distorted through having to reflect etic accounts. Thus, everything can be thoroughly distorted. In the view of this author, the confusion between etic and emic accounts has had the serious result of implicit lies and distortions being incorporated into formal scholarship about Africa. The assumption that African scholars should produce output that falls in line with their Western scholarly predecessors and compatriots, and vice versa, has made a mockery of formal scholarship on Africa.

I will endeavour to illustrate the above described “mockery” with reference to witchcraft. A truly emic account of (African terms routinely translated into English as) witchcraft would not take account of native English speakers’ association of witchcraft with prior practices in Europe now considered primitive. Rather, witchcraft, the need to be alert to and to take account of the social workings of envy, would in emic terms be simply a matter of fact, part of interhuman engagements. Yet when emic writers discover that witchcraft is using English understood as primitive, they may well conceal it to avoid shame. Then outsiders who notice rampant witchcraft in Africa will attempt to conceal their observations in order to fall in line with emic descriptions. A widespread and key important phenomenon as a result disappears from view.

I can again illustrate the above-described confusion with a very simple example. A visitor from Europe may find Africa to be hot. Africans do not say their context is “hot.” To them it is “normal.” So, is it “hot” or not? Africans visiting Europe may find Europe to be cold. To Europeans, Europe is not cold but normal. So, is Europe cold, or not? In globalized education—guided from the West using Western languages—the understanding of African insiders has been expected to be the same as that of outsiders. Hence in formal terms, even in discourse led by Africans (emically), Africa is hot, something abnormal that arises through comparison with Europe.

While the necessary scholarly theory to build upon can arise from libraries, provision should also be there for theory to arise from fieldwork and field experience. In this article I prioritize the latter, learning from field experience. Being rooted in long-term field experience, this article draws heavily on learning directly from African people heard in their own contexts expressing themselves in their own languages. The article unapologetically ignores much previous work by Westerners and those Africans who have followed the lead of Westerners if what is stated does not tally with what is locally obvious—for reasons outlined in the above paragraphs. Contemporary scholars often fail to pay sufficient attention to how indigenous African people use their own terms for their own purposes. There is a need for some new beginnings to save descriptions of Africa’s on-the-ground realities from the heavy hand of the politically correct requirement to always build on

previous formal scholarship. There is a need to validate scholarship that draws on local experience, whether emic or etic, without always expecting justification with reference to the “wider literature.”

### **The Basis for the Practice of Witchcraft**

One major insight from an insider’s perspective can help Westerners understand why so-called witchcraft is widespread in Africa. This insight relates to how people perceive their own wellbeing in comparison with that of others. People like to assess themselves relative to others both in Africa and in the West. For example:

- Many people will not think of their car as big or small, but rather as bigger or smaller than other people’s cars.
- People often do not want to know only the percentage their children have achieved in a school exam, but also their position in their class.
- Women evaluate the ways their husbands behave towards them by comparison with what they hear and see as being the behaviour of other women’s husbands.

This complicated relativizing feature of people’s behaviour has many ramifications and may be more worthy of attention than is sometimes considered. The relativizing tendency demonstrates that the short-falls, suffering, or failure of others may add to one’s own contentment, personal satisfaction, or good feeling. Such comprehension of the impact of others’ shortfalls may have an unfortunate outcome: a person may desire—for the sake of their own satisfaction or happiness—that others live problematic lives characterised by failure, poverty, and/or suffering.

Contentment arising from others’ short-falls may be acquired by a group as well as by an individual. The contentedness of a family may increase should they become aware of another family’s shortfalls. The same applies to a wide variety of groups such as schools, sports clubs, clans, countries, genders, age-cohorts, a set of relatives, one’s workforce by comparison with another workforce, one soccer team as against another, and so on.

Making others suffer for one’s own benefit, or rejoicing in others’ problems or shortfalls, is rarely considered virtuous social behaviour. While the implicit desire that others fail is socially undesirable or embarrassing and may not be overtly acknowledged, it may still be a palpable source of perceived thriving and might direct or transform people’s lives. Imagine the effect on a family of discovering that their child, who usually seriously under-performs, has taken first position in their class for all subjects. Imagine a woman being told that a woman she tends to enviously admire is mortally ill, is in pain, or is being abandoned by her husband. Imagine a person being told that someone who has always shown them up in the workforce has been fired for having been found pilfering. How do these circumstances impact someone? Potentially at least, they could give one an invigorating rush of glee, making one feel better than otherwise would have been the case. Life is often unkind. What we have here described can make it more bearable. It provides people with a singular kind of satisfaction and/or happiness. Economists might call this utility (Economics, n.d.).

Existence of the above kinds of acquisition of utility leads to the possibility of the development of a market. One is likely to have people who are ready to sell, and others to purchase, the suffering and loss of others. After all, as they say, “bad news sells.”<sup>1</sup> That there be a market in bad news is not a new phenomenon. People have often rejoiced in those who harm their enemies or those of whom they are envious. Such utility is surely likely to create a market. Perhaps what is new in this

article is a particular way of describing this phenomenon of there being a market for damage done to others, and looking at some implications of the existence of such a market. (The possibility of the existence of such a market was not considered in Foster's classic 1965 article, perhaps a very consequential omission (Foster, 1965, pp. 293–315).)

News one receives does not have to be true in order for it to impact how one feels about oneself. Being told something can have an impact even if it is not true. The utility a person or group gets from bad news seems not to be contingent on the truth of that news. The market of bad news may be one in which what is exchanged are deceptions. Sometimes truths may be mixed with deceptions. Clearly, a deception—to the effect that certain bad things have happened or are the case for someone else or another group—can be of value to the person who is deceived by such a deception. Deceiving someone that other children have flunked their exams, or that their competitor is failing, that a certain person is not as happy as they seem to be, can provide utility—provided, that is, that the deception is in some way concealed so that the deception is taken as truth. While the deception is believed, the person who receives bad news about others is helped to feel better about themselves. They might even thrive on this kind of “bad news.”

This kind of utility that leads to thriving could presumably acquire some kind of financial value. The person receiving the utility may be ready to part with money, cattle, chickens, sexual favours, praise, or other goods in exchange for the utility they are getting. That is to say, a witchdoctor can demand compensation for the utility they offer. The initiator of the deception, provided that it is believed, may well be paid. As already mentioned, deceiving people into an understanding that others are suffering or failing can give individuals (or groups) many of the benefits that would be associated with the actual failure or suffering of others. Potential benefits arising from deceptions makes it likely that certain people would want to take advantage of such means so as to sell, provide, or acquire such benefits. They may seek to make a living by being rewarded by people whom they successfully deceive regarding the failures of others.

We can add a further level to all of the above. Is it possible that an awareness that one is being deceived might not even nullify or reduce the positive impact arising from hearing about someone else's difficult news? While the deception lasts, I seem to do better, I feel better. That deception can be worth propagating even if known to be a deception. Whether originating in oneself or acquired from others, deceptions regarding one's own or one's own group's relative thriving may be important so as to make life bearable or even pleasant.

One might propose that the existence and “use” of such deceptions for the propagation of personal thriving may be needed for the perpetuation of peaceful human co-existence. In other words, perhaps this kind of deception is foundational to the thriving, survival, or at least contentment of many or even all human communities? If this is the case, it could mean that deception lies at the base of all that humankind ever successfully is and does. “The whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

This issue, of the need for others to suffer in order for one to feel good, is not new. But it may be under-recognized or insufficiently acknowledged. It being under-recognised or insufficiently acknowledged in Western-led endeavours at understanding Africa, as seems to be the case, it may be a very important factor to explore. The importance of this market for the suffering of others, whether actual or by way of deception, should it be known by one group such as Africans but not by Western scholars, may point to major foundational inter-cultural misunderstandings. It may be by some people and at times not be perceived at all. Certain members of a population may not be able

to recognize it, while others do. I want to consider the scenario in which a human community, blinkered to its own dependency on receipt of bad news about others, is at the same time dependent on it for its thriving, or even survival. It would not take much for certain people to become operatives, practitioners, experts, professionals, in provision of bad news about others. Those could be people who a community could not do without.

### **The Witchdoctor's Craft**

I believe I have above introduced the reader to the witchdoctor's craft. Witchcraft is widely known to be rooted in deception. That being the case may not in itself make witchcraft either ineffective or unnecessary. A practitioner of witchcraft who realizes that bad news of others is desirable can help an individual or a group to acquire an understanding through which they thrive. Bringing about suffering of the other is not necessarily core to acquisition of utility. Most important in order to have a saleable product that produces utility is to convince a person that the other is suffering or failing, whether this is the case or not. Many witchdoctors pride themselves in being able to make others suffer, or seem to suffer (Cimpric, 2010). Someone feeling inadequate or badly about themselves can get a personal boost by having a witchdoctor appear to bring misfortune on others.

We need to add another related human feature at this point. That is, people do not like to have enemies. Partly at least, a dislike for enemies may be very pragmatic. People do not like to have enemies because those enemies may at some point do them harm, even should that be in a distant future. I believe this desire to not have enemies extends further. In the African communities I am familiar with, a person would not want to upset a man who is at the point of death who, because he is about to die, would not be able to avenge himself about what upset him. That is to say—people try to avoid overt enmity even with people for whom there is no clear mechanism by which they may ever harm one in return. In traditional Africa, human perception includes the possibility that ill-will may translate into harm, even in the absence of a clear mechanism through which that might happen. In other words, the displeasure of others can itself harm someone. Or, one fears the ill-feelings of others. For some, the ill-feelings of others is related to a fear of “spirits” (when the term “spirits” is used as a euphemism for “envies”) (Harries, In Press).

The possibility, or even likelihood, that someone can translate their ill-will in a way that might make someone else suffer or cease to thrive (likely motivated by their own desire to thrive), with or without the use of a “professional” witchdoctor, empowers feelings. That is, a person will know that should someone feel negatively about you, then one way or another that bad feeling can reduce the level of your thriving. The bad feeling that arises from negative comparisons is widely known as envy. It follows that some people believe that the bad feeling of envy toward someone can itself hurt them by bringing about misfortune.

The above-described ability of someone's ill feelings to hurt you in the absence of a clear mechanism through which this happens describes the beliefs of witchcraft—that someone's envy can make the envied person suffer or lose utility (satisfaction, happiness). It follows that someone who suffers or loses out on utility is a victim of someone else's ill feeling or envy, which makes that envious person feel better about themselves. The possibility that someone's envy itself can harm you makes envy into something that should be feared. The knowledge that one's suffering is bringing another person joy means that joy is perceived as a limited good. Someone else having more joy will likely result in your having less of it. It means that it is in everyone's own interests for others to suffer. If it is in your interests for others to suffer, then it is logical to assume that they know that it is in their interests for you to suffer. Thus, others are likely to desire your suffering.

They want the worst for you. Should they suggest the contrary, then such a suggestion is likely to be a deception. Their articulating that they have your best interests at heart, for example, should not be believed. From the above, someone—typically a so-called witchdoctor—who can deceive people into believing that others are suffering makes a contribution to the overall contentment of a human community. He (or she) might at the same time offer to protect you against others' efforts at making you suffer, or cease to thrive.

These days modern people like to point out that witchcraft is not “true” or does not “exist.” Witchcraft may indeed not exist in the modern use of the term “existence.” But pointing out that witchcraft does not exist may be missing the point. The point may be that belief in witchcraft is required for its benefits to accrue. People looking to acquire the benefits want to believe the deception. Removal of the deception can, and perhaps frequently will, make life unlivable. For human societies to thrive may require building on deception, and not on truth (Steiner, 1998, p. 228). To suggest that witchcraft does not exist can be to endeavour to cancel utility acquired from deceptive means that consider others to be failing. For example, imagine that a woman is angry with her neighbour. She is intent on taking a club and beating her neighbour to death. She is determined that the other woman suffer. Physically beating someone to death can have many negative repercussions. The woman may be deterred from approaching her neighbour so as to batter her with a stick, if she can be convinced that a witchdoctor will kill the neighbour. To question the reality of witchcraft can therefore be to promote an orientation to physical violence and aggression. Stated conversely, belief in witchcraft can reduce violence and aggression.

The description of witchcraft given above has parallels with sacrifice. A sacrifice, a drawing of thriving from what is sacrificed, can boost the apparent or actual prosperity of the person or group offering the sacrifice. As above, this may be a deception, i.e., a sacrifice may not be an “actual” sacrifice. Or, performance of a sacrifice may not actually boost your thriving. It can be enough to believe that it has happened even should it not have happened. The feeling derived from the belief that the act of sacrifice has happened is what is important, not the sacrificial act itself.

To sacrifice is to put an animal or person through suffering that may well end in death. The beneficiary of this practice is clearly not the one sacrificed. It is the person who remains alive. The person who remains alive gains utility from the suffering or death, or perceived suffering or death, of another, or of others, who have been sacrificed. Sacrificial practices are therefore a part of the same system whereby people acquire utility from the suffering of others. Sacrificed animals are normally those animals that live close to people. (The killing of a wild animal that lives in a jungle or forest does not qualify to be a “sacrifice.”) Such animals are symbolically taken as extensions of the people they live with—typically their owners. The suffering animal symbolizes a suffering person.

Animal or human sacrifices are often thought to please the gods. Such pleasing of gods makes sense when one realizes the close relationship between “gods” and “spirits” and emotions/feelings. (It has become very clear to me that in indigenous African churches with which I have interacted for many years a successful driving away of spirits results in someone feeling better, i.e., in an improved emotional state for the person concerned.) The practice of sacrifice, as the suffering of another—whether actual or as a deception—is thought to be able to reduce fraught tensions. It brings utility. It can make someone feel better about themselves. It can result in healthy emotions. It is a part of acquiring good mental health.

Until the coming of Christ, the practice of animal or human sacrifice was frequently not optional. It was required to ensure the thriving of human communities. The Old Testament tells of God's discontentedness with sacrifice (see for example Isa. 1:11). Yet up to Jesus's time, God's people the Jews had not managed to put sacrifice aside. They were still practicing sacrifice in the Temple. It took Jesus's self-sacrifice, as alternative sacrifice, to allow human communities to thrive without routine ritual slaughter. So for those who believe in what Jesus did, Jesus's self-sacrifice can render the services of a witchdoctor nullified or superfluous. A focusing on the cross can make both recourse to a witchdoctor and performance of animal or human sacrifice unnecessary.

### **Jesus's Overcoming of Deception**

The term "peace" is sometimes used as an alternative for wellbeing or thriving, as in the title of a book by David Maranz, *Peace is Everything: Worldview of Muslims in the Senegambia* (Maranz, 1993). To live in peace is to have subjugated one's enemy, which is to ensure that, at least according to certain measures, their level of thriving is lower than your own. The Bible hints at another form of peace, a peace that does not arise from someone else's failure or suffering: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27, KJV). It is a peace that comes from Jesus.

That scientific truth arose in contexts dominated by Christianity is widely known (Merton, 1970). That some may think this was a coincidence demonstrates a lack of deep thinking on this theme. Such a person does not realise what Jesus's self-giving on the cross actually achieved. Jesus himself said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV). To reiterate, this biblical passage has a specific meaning; Jesus's *way* brings a singular means to *truth* that in turn enables *life*. We need to consider this reference to truth in the context in which deception was a constant necessity for human thriving guided by witchdoctors. Jesus's act was singularly the truth. The truth brought by Jesus is revolutionary and radically transformative. It is a truth that is intended to penetrate societies previously guided by non-truth, i.e., deceptions regarding the suffering of others, frequently manipulated and propagated by witchdoctors.

In New Testament times, some Jews rejected Jesus, especially according to John's Gospel. (For example, see John 19:7.) They were taken in by the deceptions on which their communities thrived. They considered the deceptions to be true. They believed that sacrifice brought actual thriving by means of a (simple) cause-and-effect. Yet, this failing was not unique to the Jews. If they were in any way more guilty than others, it was because they should have known better. It is not hard to suppose that had Jesus been put on trial by non-Jews they would have been as likely to have wanted to crucify him as were the Jews. The Jews, despite being people of God (and not of gods), can be said to have failed in that they continued to desire the suffering of victims. Jesus is the case in point. Hence the ongoing sacrificial system in the Temple. Those who believed in what Jesus had done, not as a deception but as something singularly true, initiated a revolution that resulted in sacrificial systems and fear of witchcraft being significantly reduced if not abandoned in many parts of the world.

Jesus's self-sacrifice also exposed the fact that sacrifice works by means of a deception. It was commonly supposed that someone sacrificed in some way deserved to die. But Jesus exposed that myth through his own sinless life, death, and resurrection. In every other case apart from that of Christ, sacrificial victims could no longer speak once they had been sacrificed. The utility acquired by, say, the onlookers as Jesus hung on the cross was a result of the above-described self-deceptions.

Unlike other victims, however, Jesus rose from the dead. Following his resurrection, by talking with people who believed, Jesus exposed the error of their ways—God is not in favor of sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22). God wanted people to abandon their prior ways of living based on deception and instead to embrace truth. Thus, Jesus began an enabling of perception of the “real,” as that which is “really true.” This perception of the real acquired by Christians in turn led to the discoveries of modern science and many enabling technologies.

Characteristically, once a person was designated for sacrifice, few if any would stand with them. The person who stood for a sacrificed or to-be sacrificed person would be taken as countering the thriving of the living. Sacrifices happened so that, through means of deception, they could enable thriving of the living. To question the value of sacrifice was to question the foundation of “peaceful” intra-human existence. Such was also the questioning of the role of the witchdoctor. Those who questioned feared for their own lives and prospering. Jesus’s rising again exposed the folly and deception behind the “feel-good” factor associated with others’ sufferings. This feel-good factor associated with others’ sufferings underlies the craft of the witchdoctor. Jesus enables those who take note, and who take him seriously and believe in him to live a uniquely new way of life, a way other than that prescribed by the witchdoctor. A way not of deception, but *truth*, that brings “real” *life*. A way that exposes the witchdoctor.

### **How, Jesus?**

The above does not mean that only “blind faith” will enable us to understand the power of the cross. The resurrection of Jesus was indeed a supernatural occurrence. Yet I do not believe that we necessarily have to attribute its impact entirely to the supernatural. The miracle of the cross is alive and well and found amongst many. It is, I believe—in the sense in which this term is often used—psychological, as something that impacts the human mind and comprehension. I am aware that psychology is often taken to be unfriendly to Christianity, and perhaps rightly so. But it is wrong to consider psychology distinct from faith in Christ. The foundations for the discipline of psychology—as so much that arose from the Enlightenment—are in Christianity. In other words, I do not think it is either erroneous or reductionist to realise that part of the impact of Christianity on people is “psychological.”

Careful believing thought and meditation on the death of Christ, the all-powerful and sinless Son of God, is a part of being saved. Focusing the mind on the act of Jesus’s death on the cross contributes a part of the outworking of salvation. For maximum effect, salvation requires a continual total dedication to Christ. It requires faith that Jesus’s death on the cross happened, that he died for me, that he rose again. It requires a conscious orientation of one’s mind. This would seem to be a psychological act. That orientation should be away from the world’s deception that sacrifices enable utility from others’ sufferings. Instead, faith in Christ orients one to believing that Jesus’s once-for-all sacrifice is sufficient for all of us. Those who are less devoted to Christ are more prone to being in need of others to suffer so that they can thrive.

It should be noted that there are modern forms of sacrifice. The media feeds us with many of them. It brings us images of war, suffering, failure, death. That is a form of sacrifice and encourages searching for personal peace on the back of the sufferings of others. Use of so-called swear words, such as “bloody,” or using Jesus’s name in frustration, can wrongly substitute for a clear positive focus on the cross that should be a hallmark of Christian belief.



Questions are important regarding justification of use of violence to protect one's means of avoiding violence. Using violence to avoid violence at times results in violent responses by Christians to Muslims. Christians like to preserve and share the peace that God gives them. Muhammad has pitched his followers against understandings that are key to Christians' acquisition of peace from and with God. The question of whether, or how, or to what extent, resistance to Muslim's occlusion of truth is justified so as to protect a peaceful way of life is complex. In the long term, action in defense of the way, truth, and life offered by Jesus is justified by its potential for increasing the overall amount of peace. Ascertaining of the preferred nature of that required action in defense of truth is complex. The failure by many to perceive Jesus's bringing of peace distracts from serious engagement with this kind of action in defense of truth. In this sense, contemporary blasé attitudes to what Jesus did (that have contributed to atheism amongst European people) result in siding with the witchdoctor.

The opposition between godliness and witchcraft is not new and should not surprise us. Solving problems using the craft of the witchdoctor has many ramifications. Reducing one's own problems by transferring them to others, or being in favour of others suffering and dying so as to thrive oneself, results in an overall negative impact. Solving one's problems using the craft of the witchdoctor propagates enormous deception and mis-trust. The way of life that results easily produces poverty which brings much suffering in its wake, resulting in high infant mortality, few safety nets, abuses of all kinds, disease, fear, truncated life expectancy, and so forth. This prospect for suffering under the rule of the witchdoctor (as of course also Islam) amounts to a massive justification for faith in Christ.

Jesus as the Word of God can save someone from all of the above ramifications, and many more. If Jesus's death is sufficient, then Christians should have no desire for others to die on their behalf. Instead, they should love their enemies (Matt. 5:44) and rejoice in their enemies' thriving and not in their suffering or death. They should realise that God favours victims. "The age-old mythological drama is presented again: a crowd surrounds an innocent victim and heaps abuse on him. The point of view however has changed; the victim is innocent and vindicated by God as is Jesus" (Peebles, n.d., p. 7). God is not in favour of sacrifice (1 Sam. 13 and 15; Hos. 6:6, Matt. 9:13). God prefers obedience, faith, and love to sacrifice. Within the term sacrifice here I believe we should include witchcraft as described above, which is also a means of endeavoring to improve people's lives by the suffering of others, "real" or imagined.

This article is written from an overtly Christian position. It is written this way because it is Christianity, foreshadowed by Judaism or Old Testament faith, which has enabled perception of the witchdoctor's craft as something which one may be able to elude.

## **Conclusion**

Something of the witchdoctor's craft has been revealed in this article. This revelation is intended to clarify the nature of an area of understanding that is often wrapped in a cloak of mystery. Witchdoctors are revealed to be pragmatic people who take advantage of human traits that are widely seen as negative, to bring utility to individuals or communities. Utility arises from people's tendency to compare themselves with others, and the glee they experience when they find themselves to be ahead of others. Witchdoctors utilize the resultant desire for primacy by bringing suffering and failure to others—whether actually or deceptively. Their apparently competent declarations and use of logic can persuade a gullible person regarding benefits to them of the failure, suffering, or even death of someone they compare themselves with. Witchdoctors often deceive

their clients into believing that the actions they perform on their clients' behalf cause the perceived enemy to suffer. The utility received as a result justifies payments to witchdoctors in exchange for their services.

Witchdoctors engage the power of the contentment acquired by the perceived suffering of another, to manage human feelings in such a way as to enable themselves to make a living, and often make their services essential to a community's thriving.

Brutal killing involving shedding of blood creates a horror in people's minds. That horror acts as a cleansing, essentially from sin. This cleansing can be illustrated by the example of a thief, who after observing a fellow thief being caught stealing and then being brutally killed, may as a result cease from stealing. Witchdoctors who simulate such horror thus cleanse their client, adding to the contentment or "peace" of the client and their community.

The above cleansing mechanisms that are accentuated and rendered clearly visible in Africa may be more widely manipulated by other members of the human race to their own ends. I will not consider more universal patterns of behaviour related to the African witchdoctors' craft in detail in this article, but I suggest that the connection certainly is there. To just mention one example: there is certainly a link between the witchdoctor's craft as here described and contemporary concerns about "fake news." Faked news can be saleable. It brings utility to some at the cost of truth. It bypasses the cross of Christ.

Practice of the witchdoctor's craft has long resulted in much mutual suspicion, leading to lives lived doubting others. Frequent use is often made of animal or human sacrifice as a means of bringing "necessary" utility. This article sets the scene that enables understanding of the widespread and massive impact of faith in Christ on communities bound by witchcraft beliefs. This impact is today seen in many parts of the so-called Global South in which the practice of witchcraft has been prominent but where there has now been a massive uptake of the gospel of Jesus. Belief in Jesus's self-sacrifice on the cross that enables bypassing of the necessity to take advantage of witchdoctors can bring the same utility as did they, but without reproduction of enmity and suspicion that the witchdoctor's craft entails. In Jesus's own words, for those who believe in him: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27, NIV). Thus, Jesus brings healing.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This saying was popularized, if not originated, in 1951 by Billy Wilder, director, *Ace in the Hole* (Paramount Pictures, 1951).