

# **TANGAZA COLLEGE**

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### **TITLE**

**WITCHCRAFT BELIEF AND CHRISTIAN FAITH  
AMONG THE TIV PEOPLE OF NIGERIA**

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UGBUDU MARK TIZA, CSSp.

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My people, the Tiv of Nigeria has a proverb that, “ *a tree does not make a forest*”. And left for me alone, I do not believe this work should have been what it is. And it is in this regard that my sincere gratitude goes to my Parents Mr and Mrs Ayom Ugbudu and my entire family members, for posting to me most of the books I needed for this work.

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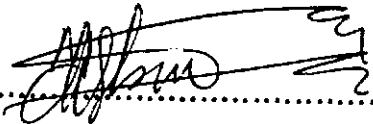
Finally, with immense gratitude, I thank God for the good health, special grace and inspiration he has given me to work on this project.

## **DEDICATION**

**I dedicated this thesis to all missionaries, priests and religious; and to my family members; and to all those who work for the welfare of humanity.**

## STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this project is my original work, produced from my personal reading and reflection. It has not been presented in any way to any university or college for academic credit. All information from other sources, and works consulted have been duly acknowledged.

Signed..........

UGBUDU MARK TIZA.

Date.....

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## INTRODUCTION

Belief in witchcraft is one of the major challenges the Church in Africa is facing in evangelizing the Africans. This was evident during the African Synod when it was said “...some Christians pray rosary in the morning and take to witchcraft in the afternoon”.<sup>1</sup> And the Church in Tivland of Nigeria is not an exception. This is one of the major challenges it is facing in its process of evangelizing the Tiv people.

So in this paper, is my attempt to try and see the way this belief in witchcraft does influence the Tiv people and their way of accepting and living their Christian life and worship. And then finally suggest the ways I feel these people could be helped to accept and live an authentic Christian life.

In chapter one my aim is to give a general introduction of who the Tiv people are, their concept of Tar (the land) and of a human person. In chapter two, I will be looking at the universal concept of witchcraft in order to help me understand the concept of witchcraft among the Tivs well. And so in chapter three I will focus on the belief and practices of witchcraft in Tiv. In chapter four, I will be seeing the morality of witchcraft according to the Christian point of view and also look at witchcraft mentality and Christian faith: how Christian faith challenged witchcraft belief and how witchcraft belief challenged Christian faith with special reference to the Tiv people. And then finally bring my personal view and suggestions especially how I feel the Tivs could be best helped to live an authentic Christian life in my conclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> AMECEA, The African Synod Comes Home, A Simplified Text, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995) p.25.

## 1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Tiv People strongly believe and acknowledge one Deity who is supreme. The majority of them are Christians. About 65 percent of them are Christians. But it is also amazing how their strong belief in witchcraft also does influence their whole way of life even most of them who called themselves Christians. Almost all of them see witchcraft to be an explanatory principle of evil around them. They strongly believe that there is harmony existing between nature and human beings. And so they do see things like droughts, death, diseases, misfortune and even disasters as the results of other people using their witchcraft potential for evil intentions. For they strongly believe that nothing happens without a cause. As one of their proverbs goes “Mngerem ma gbe human ga saa kwagh a kpe shimin”, that is, “water does not just smell unless something will die in it”. With this belief, anything that happened contrary to the forces of nature or extraordinary is believed to be caused by someone or group of people who are using their witchcraft potentialities.

In this paper, is my desire to bring out these problems this belief in witchcraft among the Tiv people has caused and is still causing especially to the Tiv Christians: they prefer to run to the witch-doctors to find the cause of their problems rather than coming to God in prayer and trusting in him. Some who are not deep rooted in their Christian faith do easily fall back to their ancestral worship. Whenever one is sick, he or she prefers to go for the traditional medicine and only come for modern medicine as the last resort. Moreover even Christians turn to accuse their fellow Christians of bewitching them or their relatives.

Therefore, is my wish in this paper to show how these beliefs go along influencing their way of living especially their Christian life and worship, And also is my wish that this will help missionaries to see why some Tiv Christians prefer to go to the witch-doctors when things seem not to be going on well with him or her to know who or what is causing the

problem(s) rather than seeking help from God through prayers and trust, and why those Tiv converts who are not strongly rooted in Christianity easily turn back to their ancestral worship which they see or get easy solutions for their problems at hand. And so develop new and suitable methodologies in evangelising the Tiv people. Also in the area of medicine to help doctors to know why the Tiv people even some Christians prefer the traditional medicine and only come to modern medicine as the last resort. Sociologists to see the other aspect of witchcraft that is the social control it renders to the elders and how witchcraft within certain relationships. Finally, it is my desire also that this work should be in position to offer people of all works of life who would be interested to understand or know the Tiv world-view.

## 1.2 WHO ARE THE TIVS?

The Tivs are the prominent peasant tribe of central Nigeria. They are well known in music, brass casting and wood carving. They are subsistence farmers, who cultivate yams, millet, sorghums, which they eat all as staple porridge with sauces and stews consisting of meat, oil and vegetables. Their main great ambition in life is as Akiga puts it, "*is to fill their yam stores and granaries with food, and their homes with Children*".<sup>2</sup> Their pride is in the number of wives and Children they have. One's greatness is seen in the number of wives and Children he has and is able to take good care of them. They are independent people who never felt any need for cohesion or obedience to a central authority and little respect for princes.

They look cheerful and contented and not afraid of tangible foes or misfortunes, but always on their alert against the great unseen army of evil forces and occult machinations of their fellow men. They were known by their neighbouring tribes of fulanis and Hausas as Munshi.

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<sup>2</sup> Rupert East, Akiga's Story, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965) p.13.

They were numbered about four million according to 1963 population census. According to the current Nigerian population census of 1993, they were numbered about six million. This shows that their population has grown up in thirty years time by two million. But this figure is disputed. Their language is believed to have belong to the central branch of the Niger- Congo language family which has usually been called "Semi-Bantu", or more recently, "Classifying Sudanic". Despite their big number, the Tivs still understand each other very well irrespective of the place one is from and the regional dialectical differences. Dr Werner also has the opinion that the Tiv language is of Bantu family when she points out that, "*Comparison of vocabularies seems to us Bantu stems in process of being worn down, and a consequent production of words having the same form, but different meanings, which therefore have to be distinguished by tone. One would hazard the conjecture that the Tiv are originally Bantu-speaking tribe, who penetrated so far to the west as to become cut off from the main body and isolated among Sudanic speaking tribes.*"<sup>3</sup>

Before colonial rule, the tribal groups lived in protected settlements because of the uncertainties of the times when groups of armies of slave gatherers and other warlike parties threatened. Hunting and forest foraging parties moved in large groups of armed men. Individuals were discouraged going on journeys which were far from the neighbourhood of their homes. Peaceful contact with peoples of other tribes was rare. The group acted in all ways a unit, but it had special alliances with other units with which marriages were arranged mainly on an exchange basis. This complex practice of exchange marriage was outlawed in 1927 and replaced by marriage with bride wealth.

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<sup>3</sup> Captain R.C. Abraham, The Tiv People, (second edition), (London: Crown Agents, 1940) P.x.

Presently, the Tiv people live in small family households on or near their farms in the surrounding district of their paternal family group (ityo). The individual Tiv people are now allowed to travel and have contact with people of other groups. Also the intermarriage between a Tiv woman or man with other tribes which was unthinkable before at any rate is now tolerated by some Tiv groups. But most families are still objecting to it.

Education, travel and the infiltration of new ideas seems to have had effect of reducing the absolute control of the family group as a unit, the influence of the elders and perhaps of the ancestral sanctions. This also seems to bring a certain confusion of thought. Attention is now focus on doing evil activities of the Mbastay (witchcraft) to others and so the place of the family authorities is down graded and their beneficial functions obscured. But we can not deny that though changes in thought and perhaps, attitude to life are taking place, the past is not dead or not gone completely. It has a very strong influence on the emotions of the people as the popular saying goes, "the past controls the present and the present the future". From the past comes the emotions, the hidden sources of imaginative creation, its active embodiment.

### 1.3 THEIR POLITICAL INSTITUTION

Initially the Tiv people have no indigenous state organization, but form a series of territorially based lineages organised on the principle of segmented opposition. They saw this system in terms of an agnatic genealogy running back about seventeen (17) generations, The descendants through males of each person in the genealogy of whatever generation constitute both a territorial group and a kinship group. The balance of power between equivalent segments in this system provides the basis for carrying out the political activities of law enforcement and military protection.

As I have mentioned before, before the colonial rule, the tribal groups lived in protected settlements because of the uncertainties. So their society was mainly agrarian.

Within a milieu of a low level of social economic and political activities as compared to the present moment, there was no need for an individual to be entrusted with so much power in his hands. Their system of production was based of course mostly on the family labour. The head of the family was its supreme leader. But when the colonial masters arrived in Tiv land they forced the Tiv people to have someone who will represent them all at the government level. What met a lot of opposition in the early years for it could not work. It could not work because almost all those who were chosen to represent the Tiv people were the young people who were not seen as respected elders among the Tiv people but because most of these young men knew how to speak English language, the colonial masters chose them mainly for their convenient sake. Moreover, this was a strange system to the Tiv people and so they found it difficult to embrace it. There was also the peeling off of family units. As one of their proverbs goes, "*when ants put on wings they fly.*" That is when Sons and daughters are of age, they should fend for themselves. The sons in most cases when married they were expected to start their own farms but occasionally coming to help their parents from time to time. But sometimes the extended family still stayed on the same piece of land sharing meals and helping each other. Eugene Rubingh is right when he said, "*The peeling off of the family groups in the expanding Tiv society, actually enhanced the authority of the local family head and the immediate social control of the compound. Tiv egalitarianism wanted no one man to assume exceptional power and where this occurred new compounds were likely to split off from those already established. Tiv society was thus structured so that none of its members would be lost in a faceless city.*"<sup>4</sup>

According to Luga and Tortema, the Tiv traditional set-up had about four political institutions. The first being compound head known as Orya. He was expected to have tsa

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<sup>4</sup> Eugene Rubingh, The Sons of Tiv, (Michigan: Baker Books House Co., 1969) P.87.

(witchcraft) or magical powers apart from being the eldest male member of the Ya (compound). All the elders of a group of ya formed what we can call the ya council. These compound heads (Mbayaav) as they were called occasionally met to discuss and settle issues that were affecting their various compounds. Some of their duties included decisions to move to new settlements, allocation of farm land, marriages, divorce cases and also looking for peaceful ways of settling conflicts with their neighbours. In case the head of the compound could not attend meeting or occasion because of illness or any other factor, he usually delegated his power to someone else to assist him.

The second was the Iye-ingyor (ward) council. This particular council used to comprise the elders of several compounds whose membership depended almost entirely on close blood relationships. They usually discussed angor cases (ward affairs), farm land disputes and children's deaths etc.

The third was Ityo (clan) council. This was probably the oldest and most effective quasi-government in existence in any clan in the nineteenth century. It was composed of the representatives from different Iye-Ingyor (ward) groups. And this was the most significant body of government in Tiv land at that time. It was presided by a very respectable elder.

The last was the Tar (Tiv traditional ) council. This was the highest decision making body of elders in Tiv-land. But due to its size ( it embraced the entire Tiv-land) communication problems and general lack of security at that time, it did not meet very frequently, It did meet only when major issues such as warfare involving other groups and the initiation of a person into lbyamegh (the highest rite in Tiv Religion) and burial ceremonies of prominent men. Later it was also in charge of appointing Ator Agbande (the drum chiefs). These were the war leaders of their clan. Looking at the description above, we can see how there was only small authority distributed here and there without a central government.

#### 1.4 THE TIV CONCEPT OF TAR (THE LAND)

The Tar (the land) for a Tiv is not just his country, but rather everything that is around him, both physical and spiritual, dual and indivisible entities as well as both animate and inanimate entities that exist for human benefit and the motive powers, the forces of nature that are influenced in many ways by actions of man through his or her own tsav (witchcraft). Captain Downes described the Tiv conception of Tar as “ *the complete world; it is the body and soul, the substance and essence, the past and present, the people with their customs, habits, built-in traditions of the ancestors, all other forms of life and the land on which they live, and also the replica of this with the spirits of ancestors and others in the shadows. It is in fact, the organic unity of human society with the whole of nature.*”<sup>5</sup> With this conception, Tiv man or woman sees any unusual trend as a sign of something going wrong and turning the spiritual forces of nature against mankind. Also a Tiv person is not to abuse his fellow man or woman as well as nature in any way. If the person does so, he or she will be yihin Tar (spoiling the land). And this will demand the person to repair (sor tar) the land. What demands also a lot of rituals and sacrifices.

Their conception of the tar is symbolically. They expressed it metaphorically as a man lying or bending down. They described the rising sun as the ityough ki tar (the head of the land). From this ityough ki tar, they orientated their movements. So going to the easterly direction for them is ‘going up’ (sha) as they call it and going in the opposite direction is “going down” (shin). Going west is going to its fundament (Ityo tar), and to the north and south, the left and right flanks respectively (imbusu tar imese and iyan).

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<sup>5</sup> Captain R.M. Downes, Tiv Religion, (Ibadan: Ibadan university Press, 1971) P.20

## 1.5 THE TIV CONCEPTION OF A HUMAN PERSON

Generally, west Africans had a view that a human person is a composite of material and immaterial substances. That is body and spirit (soul). The body is visible while the spirit is invisible and intangible. The Tivs also followed this view. A person for them is a composite of two major aspects; material and immaterial substances.

The material comprises; Iyol (flesh) and Awambe (blood). These are tangible, visible part of a person. These can be touched and die. The iyol can be nourished and abused after death, it goes to the earth from where it believed to have come from. They also believed that this material aspect of human person has influence on the immaterial and vice versa. So for a person to be healthy, his body and soul must be in good condition.

In the aspect of immaterial, we have Humbe (breath) which is believed to come from Aondo (God) direct to man. And it is this Aondo's Humbe that gives Uma (life) to a person. When a person died, the Tiv for example do say, "Aondo too uma na" (God has taken his life). This shows clearly that the people believed that it is God who gives a human person his life. So the uma which comes in form of Humbe (breath) is part of God in a human person. When someone dies, the Humbe returns back to Aondo who is the giver of it and continues to live. It is also their believe that the uma of every person will render an account to Aondo on how it spent its life. They called this Jjiir. On this particular point it is not clear whether the Tiv people got the idea from the early missionaries or it was their original believe from the beginning.

The material part of the person the body has this section called Vangher or Ishim (chest or heart). For the Tiv people, these words are used interchangeably. The word Ishim (heart) can be use to replace Vangher (chest) and vice versa. For example, a Tiv person can say, "wan ngu a ishima / mba tsaav or wan ngu a vangher u mba tsaav." Which means the

same thing. That is (this boy is having a witch heart or a witch chest). These sentences are understood in the same sense.

This *vangher* or *ishima* is the most important part of a human person in that it is seen as the seat of intelligence and not only that it is the house of the *Humbe* or *Uma* (life) which is given to a person by *Aondo* (God). It rules, controls and guides the activities of a person. They believe that this can leave the body during sleep and wander about in the night. It has power to do good and evil. If one is using his *vangher* to do evil and extra ordinary things, he or she is seen to be a witch. And it in this sense that a Tiv man will say, "*wan ne ngu a vangher o ishima l mba tsaav.*" That is this boy or girl is having a witch heart or chest which they mean the same thing. When one is doing good and normal things, he is said to have soft vangher or ishima, that is he is not a witch. But when he is doing evil and extra ordinary things he is said to have hard or strong vangher or ishima, that is he is a witch.

In this chapter, what came up clearly in the Tiv world view is the idea of harmony. As we saw it in their concept of a human person as a composite of material and immaterial substances, in their idea of Tar (the land) as an organic universe and also in their belief that what is truth is that which maintains harmony. And for they believe that Aondo (God) who created the whole world, made it to be in harmony and so they can not blame Him for disharmony which is the result of sickness, death, drought etc. but instead blame other people of using their witchcraft potentialities which they believe everyone has for evil intentions for selfish reasons rather than for the goodness of the whole community. Due to this their beliefs everyone's daily activities are directly or indirectly affected for better or worse. And for many Tiv Christians, the problems I mentioned in the section of the statement of the problem is a reality they are facing in living their Christian life because of this belief in witchcraft. So other to understand the Tiv concept of witchcraft well, in the next chapter we shall see the concept of witchcraft in general before going to the Tiv concept of witchcraft.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.1 WHAT IS WITCHCRAFT/ CLASSIFICATION OF TERMS.

The difference between witchcraft and sorcery is a very difficult one to make. However, such distinctions are necessary to make. It is difficult to say exactly what witchcraft is because it touches all man's dimensions. Judith Mbula says, Most Africans believed that witchcraft is spiritual and touches the human mind, also it is a mystical power which is granted to some individuals which helps them to inflict harm on other people.<sup>6</sup> Basil Davidson says *"witchcraft is believed to be the 'natural exercise of evil' by persons who are possessed by a malevolent but innate power automatically, as it were: merely by feeling anger or annoyance or even without being conscious of the harm they do."*<sup>7</sup> Father Shorter will define witchcraft as the inherent or inborn preternatural power to harm secretly<sup>8</sup>. Sorcery on the other hand is what is done by techniques deliberately by the sorcerer to hurt somebody else or his/her property. It involves the use of poisonous mixtures. The mystical powers of witchcraft also can be found in sorcery. Basil Davidson also defined sorcery as *"unnatural exercise of evil by anyone who may wish to draw upon the power of evil, through the use of appropriate instruments and processes, so as to damage an enemy or rival."*<sup>9</sup> One practices sorcery as an ordinary person and not as a witch. One does not him/her self possesses malevolent power: I or she does or has to acquire it.

It is important to note that the word 'witches' is mostly believed to be women but the word can be equally well served for men. As the Oxford Dictionary allows the title "witch"

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<sup>6</sup> Judith M Bahemuka, Our Religious Heritage, (Ikeja, Lagos: Thomas Nelson (Nigeria) Ltd, 1982) P.105.

<sup>7</sup> Basil Davidson, The Africans, An entry to Cultural History, (London: Longmans. Green and Co. Ltd, 1969) P.128.

<sup>8</sup> Aylward Shorter, African Culture, An Overview, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998) P.67.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. P.128-129.

reserved for both men and women who are accused of nocturnal preying on human souls. Moreover, The Tiv People of Nigeria called witchcraft (Tsav), and Mbatsav for both men and women who possess the craft. So throughout this paper I will be using the word Witch or witches when referring to both men and women who possess the craft.

## MAGIC

According to Encyclopedia Britannica , the term magic refers to as: "*human actions, that are believed to influence human or natural events through supernatural power. For anthropologists, it is a neutral term though actions involved may be classified as productive, protective, or destructive. Sorcery clearly belongs to the category of destructive magic (e.g. property protecting or anti-adultery) are not considered sorcery. Sorcery then is destructive magic that is regarded as anti-social and illegitimate*"<sup>10</sup> . Personally, I differ with this above definition. I will not see magic as human actions that are believed to influence human or natural events through supernatural Power, but rather as Father Shorter saw it as through preternatural power. Since I feel supernatural can only be referred to God. Others saw magic as earlier primitive form of both Religion and science, which is often based on excellent observation of natural phenomena and involves a theory of causality. For example, Frazer believed that there was a fundamental similarity between magic and science. According to him the only difference was for variety of reasons the mistaken assumptions and erroneous conclusions of magic were veiled from observer and did not shake his or her belief.<sup>11</sup> Frazer also said that magic has two basic principles. And these were: "*the law of similarity and the law of contagion. According to the first principle like produces like, so that sticking pins into a doll is like sticking arrows into the enemy; and according to the law of contagion*

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<sup>10</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica : Macropedia, Vol.19, (New York: Macmillan Co. 1979) P.895.

<sup>11</sup> International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Vol.9, (New York: Macmillan Co. 1972) P.521.

*can be treated as if they represented him.*"<sup>12</sup>

From the above, we could see that witchcraft is a preternatural potential which works by obscure compulsion while sorcery is simply destructive magic. These two are geared towards evil. While magic on the other hand is the use of preternatural powers to influence the actions of people for good or bad.

These three terms; witchcraft, sorcery and good magic are understood differently by African societies. For example, the Tiv of Nigeria know that there are various ways by which one can use to harm others but they do not differentiate the terms to describe them. When a Tiv man talked of Tsav (Witchcraft), he includes all these three terms we have talked about. And this seems to be the common thing with most African societies. Mbiti confirms this by saying, "*African societies do not often draw the rather academic distinction between witchcraft, sorcery, evil magic, evil eye and other ways of employing mystical power to harm someone or his belongings. Generally the same word is used for all these English terms; and the same person is accused or suspected of employing one or more of these ways of hurting members of his community.*"<sup>13</sup>

Making all these distinctions, one can still conclude that witchcraft is a broad popular term that is used to describe all sorts of evil employment of mystical power generally in a secret fashion. That is witchcraft employed to designate the harmful employment of mystical power in all its different manifestations. So after seen what witchcraft is, let us now see how real is witchcraft in African societies.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> John Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1969) P.264.

## 2.2 REALITY OF WITCHCRAFT BELIEF.

Historically, witchcraft is known universally. Parrinder has written that *“witchcraft has appeared in many parts of the world, in one form or another. It becomes particularly prominent and developed in Europe in the later middle ages and Renaissance periods, still in modern Africa belief in witchcraft is a great tyranny spreading panic and death.”*<sup>14</sup> Basil Davidson, in his book, *“The Africans”*, he quoted The Times Newspaper of 19 January, 1968 where twelve men and three women have been found guilty at fort Victoria of opening up a grave and eaten an African Baby. According to him, the people admitted to the police that *“we are witches and this is the food of witches.”*<sup>15</sup> Recently in Kenyan Newspapers, The *“Daily Nation”* and *“The Standard”*, there were these burning issues about witchcraft. The Daily Nation of Friday, September 4, 1998, there was this head line, **“Witchcraft charges for 5”**, at its back cover. In that column, there were these people: Mr. Sakawa Aloice, His wife Nyakara Aloice, Ms Elizabeth Moraa, Ms Bosibori Monyanda and Christopher Moriba. They were charged with keeping charms for the purpose of causing fear, annoyance or injury to others and property. Also, the Prosecuting chief inspector Benson Ndombi said the suspects kidnapped the schoolboy and allegedly used their charms to cast a spell on him and later released him but the boy became dumb. But because the boy was able to write, he wrote down the names of his “captors” who were immediately tracked down and arrested by villagers and the Local chief. The Prosecutor said, when the villagers forced the suspects to reverse the spell, the first accused spat on the boy and he regained his speech. During the court sitting Sakawa and Elizabeth Moraa pleaded guilty to the charge. So the chief magistrate William jailed Sakawa for a year but acquitted Moraa because of her advanced age. While the other

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<sup>14</sup> Byang H Kato, Theological Pitfalls in Africa, (Kisumu :Evangel Publishing House, 1975) P.22.

<sup>15</sup> Basil Davidson, Op. Cit., P.121.

denied the charge and were remanded until September 17, when their cases will be mentioned. Also in these papers one often see headlines like, "*Ten Witchcraft suspects Lynched*" (Sunday Standard of September 6, 1998) P1, "*Witchcraft Lynching: Residents hampering arrests*" (Daily Nation of Wednesday, September 9, 1998)P32, "*Shock lingers after witch hunt*", "*Practices rooted in a dark, fearful past*", and "*witchcraft is illegal in Kenya*" (East African Standard of Thursday, September 17, 1998) P16. And to prove that witchcraft is a problem in African Societies, here in Kenya, the Government of Kenya has an Act which was instituted in 1925, to deal with witches. According to the Act, "*the penalties for any of these range from a fine of between Sh500 and 1,000 or jail terms of one to ten years.*" (East African Standard of Thursday, September 17, 1998).

Such confessions are no rarity in the African courts. Although they by no means prove that such actions confessed were actually committed, rather I see them to point to strong and profound beliefs in witchcraft. For Mbiti, "*This mystical power is not fiction: whatever it is a reality, and one with which African Peoples have to reckon. Everyone is directly or indirectly affected, for better or worse, by beliefs and activities connected with this power, particularly in its manifestation as magic, sorcery and witchcraft.*"<sup>16</sup>

Also voluntary confessions mostly from worried men and women have been common. And these also reinforced the reality of witchcraft. For example, a Fanti witch explained an examination that she Kept a snake in her vagina that was powerful in witchcraft. '*If I want to go out to a witch meeting at night*', she explained, '*I leave it behind to make my husband sleep soundly till I return. When my husband wants to have sexual intercourse with me I take the snake out of my vagina and hide it and return it when my husband has finished*'.<sup>17</sup> John Mbiti also quoted J.H. Neal in his book, Juju in my life, (1966), where Neal an English Man,

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<sup>16</sup> John Mbiti, Op. Cit., P.198.

<sup>17</sup> Basil Davidson, Op. Cit., P. 126.

narrated his own experience of witchcraft in Ghana, where he was working as chief investigation officer until 1962. He narrated how he saw, met, tested and fought against these powers until finally he ended up taking refuge under the same powers.<sup>18</sup> Some times ago, also here in Kenya, the president of Kenya had to intervene and urged a crowd of 40,000 Kenyans to give up witchcraft.(1953).<sup>19</sup> All over Africa there are people who claimed they are witches and sometimes also claim guilty for the crimes of witchcraft. Such claims and confessions made it difficult for someone to just dismiss the reality of it.

The Akans of Ghana have also these proverbs to express how real witchcraft is are: "*Efie a wisie firi mu biara hayie wo mu.*" Meaning in every house there is smoke, there is witchcraft. This means then that for the Akans, witches are all around us. Yet it is generally believed that witchcraft is by nature evil.<sup>20</sup> When people talk of witchcraft as being 'good', they do so in selfish terms because if a witch is protecting his /her family from danger, they do at expenses of other people's children. One literal phrase which is common among the Tiv people and most Africans which expresses also their strong belief in witchcraft is "*somebody or someone is doing me*". Or to be more specific, one can accuse the other that, "*You are doing me*". All what these expressed is that, for everything that happens, there should be a cause or someone responsible. As we saw in the first chapter, the Tiv people do believe that there is harmony existing between people and the rest of all the universe. So any extra -ordinary happening or disharmony are due to someone's evil action. As we also saw one of their Proverbs "*Mngerem ma ghe human ga saa kwagh akpe shimin*". Meaning water can not just smell unless something will die inside. This implies that the universe which God made to be in harmony

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<sup>18</sup> John Mbiti, *Op. Cit.*, P.195.

<sup>19</sup> Judith M Bahemuka, *Op. Cit.*, P.118.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Sarpong, *Gnana in Retrospect*, (Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974) P.45.

can not experience disharmony in any way unless someone will caused it by his or her evil intention.

Looking at what we have mentioned above, one can see that to the outsiders, they may sound more or less like fiction than reality. But for the Africans, the whole psychic atmosphere of African village life is filled with belief in witchcraft. There is no African society which does not hold belief in mystical power of one type or another. It shows itself or is experienced in various ways. And for the Tiv people, as far as the presence of evil, death, calamities, diseases in the world is a reality, no one can dare to convince them to deny the reality of witchcraft.

The Zande people also have a phrase which is "It is witchcraft" may often be translated as "It is bad." Get rid of witches, and evil once more be put to sleep or expelled. Man, with the fallen Angels, will be able to climb back to heaven.<sup>21</sup> After seeing how Africans see witchcraft as a reality, it is good to see who is a witch and activities of witches.

### 2.3 WHO IS A WITCH?

A witch is a living human being who possesses or rather is supposed to possess witchcraft substances. A witch may be conscious that he is a witch or he may not be conscious at all. So not everybody who is unaware that he is a witch is therefore not a witch. It is possible that an unborn baby still in the womb can be a witch. Since it is a general belief that unconscious witches do get their power from their parents or some close relatives, or at times from strangers.

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<sup>21</sup> Basil Davidson, Op. Cit., P.131.

As we saw before, by nature a witch is evil. There is no good witch. At his best, a witch may use his witchcraft for selfish motives such as getting children, money, good crops or to be old. At worst, he employs it to cause harm to others or damage their belongings or make others children sick or kill and eat them etc. Therefore, a witch is seen as a social menace and so it is a crime to call or accuse someone of being a witch without being able to prove it. Since doing so implies accusing one of witchcraft. With this definition of who a witch is, it is good to see who are accused or likely to be accused of witchcraft in African societies.

## 2.4 ACCUSATION OF WITCHES

As we have seen before, belief in witchcraft in the African societies is so real that people are always on the look out for those who bewitch them or their relatives. However, people are not easily accused of witchcraft unless there are enough evidences and concrete proofs. What are these concrete proofs? Usually, when someone is sick and also excessive loss of weight requires a thorough investigation. Also, when evil such as sudden death of a young childless person who is at the age of giving birth occurs, the elders of the societies and for that matter the custodians of the traditions of elders go for consultation and someone is pointed out as the one responsible for the said evil. In that case the person is asked to say what he or she knows about the case. Very often, the accused person admits that he or she is responsible. There are also cases where the very closer relatives are taken to fetish shrine where they are made to drink some herbs which induces the one responsible for the said evil to confess. This is done because of the belief that only one's close relatives can bewitch him or her. This procedure of drinking the herbs among the Tiv of Nigeria is called "*Kor uman*", among the Akan of Ghana, it is called, "*Abosomnon*" Literally means, drinking a fetish.

Other things that make people sense that they are being hunted by witches are dreams. There are certain types of dreams that are associated with witch hunting. Examples of such

dreams are: If one constantly dreams that *"he/she is being chased by a cow, is a clear indication that witches are after you"*.<sup>22</sup> Also, if one dreams constantly and or she is flying, it is a witch case. Frequent wet dreams in the case of young girls and boys is also a case to be investigated. Other external signs which can provoke suspicion that one is a witch are: quarrelsome people, those who have greed for meat, women with beards, old women in the lineage, especially the senile aunt who has lost all teeth except three or two. Such old women are accused of witchcraft because of their age. People do wonder why they live for so long. The Yoruba people of Nigeria for example have a belief that old people rejuvenate themselves with the souls of young children. Old women are also suspected if they are keeping black cats with them. Queer ugly people especially those who are socially handicapped, men with glottal abnormalities people are likely to be accused of witchcraft because people believe that they have come to that position as a divine punishment for their wickedness. The type of belief which is also found in most of the old testament texts. The notion of retribution which Job and Qoheleth fought against. Jesus also refuted such beliefs when his disciples asked him, *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?"*. Jesus answered, *"Neither he nor his Parents, ..."* (John 9: 1-3)

## 2.5 ACTIVITIES AND ASSEMBLY OF WITCHES.

It is widely believed that witches are active in all aspects of life. They can do or perform evil in every part of social life. They can cause relationships among friends to turn sourer. In other words, they can do anything. Yet areas where they frequently interfere are: making people

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Sarpong, *Op. Cit.*, P.47.

childless, causing sickness, accidents, causing crops failure, causing bad luck to others, and premature deaths. These activities of witches take place in a kind of association which they form. It is believe that the membership of this association is known only to the members. Their meetings take place at night and the basic thing they do is enjoying themselves. They make provisions for these parties by supplying human flesh in turns. *"At one meeting, it is decided who should feed the group of witches at the next. He then chooses his/her victim and the witches begin to eat away his "vital force" until he dies."*<sup>23</sup> Witches are said to play all sorts of tricks with their victims. They are said to play football games with their victim's head. They can also chop meat from their legs. Why, otherwise, do some people have chronic ulcers on their legs, which heal up one time only to fester again after a few weeks, and so forth. Among the Akans of Ghana, it is a well known fact that some people can be very strong walking and doing their duties while their flesh is shared by witches already. In most African Societies, this witches association is known to be a mixed group, that is, both male and female coming together.

To conclude this chapter, I will say that, it is very difficult as we have seen to just deny the reality of witchcraft itself in the African societies. Since there are many reasons for them to hold on to its belief and reality. And it seems that it is there in every African community but no community likes it or feels comfortable with it. And so each community has develop ways of fighting it or living with it, which in most cases demands rather making those who want to fight it taking refuge under such powers as we saw in the case of J H Neal in Ghana.

But what I want to make clear in this chapter to my readers is, not to prove how real is witchcraft in African Societies. But to show how real belief in witchcraft is a problem in African Societies. That is, the problems witchcraft belief does cause to the African Societies are so real that one can not dare to deny it. Since it does bring real enmity among brothers and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. P.46.

makers, it brings mistrust, fear, suspicion, in a society and even among Christians. It also makes people even Christians whose faith is not yet deep rooted to either become non-believers or doubt the almighty power of God. These are happening daily even in our modern African Societies. So we can not deny that witchcraft is a real problem to the Africans.

Seeing what witchcraft is and the problems its belief does cause in our society, we shall be seeing in our next chapter witchcraft beliefs and practices among the Tiv people of Nigeria in particular.

## CHAPTER THREE.

### WITCHCRAFT IN TIV

#### 3.1 BELIEF AND PRACTICES.

To be able to understand the Tiv concept of witchcraft, three terms come to mind: tsav (witchcraft potential), Mbatsav (those intimately involved in the practice of tsav and Akombo (magical emblems or cult emblems). But what we have to still bear in mind is that, there is no clear difference between witchcraft in anthropological sense and sorcery and or magic as we have seen before. The difference is between social approval and disapproval.

#### TSAV

For the Tivs, Tsav (witchcraft), is a complex factor in religion of the Tiv. Their life and religion centres round a vital and this mysterious power force called tsav. Many expatriates translated it in various ways. But the closest English approximation will be “witchcraft potential”. But one should not take most of the ominous overtones of that phrase into consideration. Tsav may be used malevolently by malevolent people, but its genius is not vicious.<sup>24</sup> To a Tiv person, Tsav is a cosmic potential found in all people and this constitutes part of their personality. It exists in its active form in some people and its potential is present in all people. That is why whenever there is a need or an occasion to identify a particular witch responsible for any evil in the society, their usual question is Ka an nan lu duun tsav henen? (who is using his or her witchcraft potential here?), that is instead of asking who is a witch they usually ask who is using his or her witchcraft potential. They believed that tsav does grow on ones heart and this could be verified by a post-mortem operation. An operation

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<sup>24</sup> Eugene Rubingh, Op. Cit., P.73.

which in some cases was necessary to determine or find out whether death had been caused by cosmic retribution against the evil use of tsav or whether the victim was the object of foul play.

According to Akiga, the Tiv people were using this operation before the coming of the whites in Tiv land. According to him, if one died, his age mates used to cut open his chest and examined his internal organs. If he had the serrated type of tsav, they said that he had brought about his own death, for with this kind of tsav he would not fail to be eater of people. But if after opening the person's chest and it was found that it is only the rounded type of tsav, he had been killed out of malice, and that they (his age-mates) would not let the matter rest. Because of this, they usually used to consult a diviner to know who is responsible. After knowing who it was that killed their age-mate, they called together all members of their grade and subject the man named to justice. The knife which was used in cutting open the body of the dead man was stuck into a tree by the side of a path along which many people would pass. Every one who saw it expressed his approval. So-and -so belonged to a fine age-grade; they said, 'his death is not being left to go unavenged. His age-mates have cut him open to examine him, and though he is dead they are fighting his battles.'<sup>25</sup> What this very story by Akiga revealed to us is that, there were a lot of people who were victimised in the society. Once one is suspected of killing someone, whether it is true or not, everybody in the society will hear of him or her and the person's personality will be tarnished. Moreover, the age-mates of the dead person will be looking for the ways of revenging either by trying to kill the suspects, or exclude him from their activities or by trying to kill the suspect's children. And these sorts of attitudes bring a lot of suspicion, hatred, and disunity in the society.

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<sup>25</sup> Rupert East, *Op. Cit.*, p.241.

The Tiv as I mentioned before, believed that tsav could be use for good or evil but its genus has nothing to do with evil. Tsav that is concentrated on a thing's excellence can follow: "farming efforts can result in prolific crops, hunting can be successful, craftsmen and artists in wood, brass, or mud can do good work or a drummer or dancer can win renown. It is also the function of the elders, the leaders of the family, to use their tsav, the accumulated tsav of the tar (the land), to put the land right (sor tar) , so that the society will prosper and also guard against evils that may be a danger, to drive them out if they should come in. On the other hand, tsav can be used to harm people, their families, crops or their work; it can also impel them to evil actions

### MBATSAV

In the first chapter, we saw how in traditional Tiv set up, there are two categories of people. The first class being those who are believed to be using their Ishima (heart) or vangher (chest) to do evil and extra ordinary things, such people are believed to be having witch's hearts or chests and so they are called Mbatsav. The second class are those who are believed to be using their vangher (chest) or Ishima (heart) to do good and normal things , these are believed to having soft hearts or chests, so they are said not to be witches. This shows clearly that in Tiv traditional set up, we have two categories :- those who intimately involved in the practice of witchcraft are called the Mbatsav, while the rest of the people are referred to as the empty-chested (mba lun vangher gbilin). The mbatsav are usually people of high recognition in the Tiv society: they are elders who most of them have a lot of wealth. That is they have many wives and children, large farm land and many domestic animals. Since in Tiv traditional set up, one is considered to be wealthy basing on the number of wives he has and the number of children he has, and is able to feed them without begging others to help him feed his wives

and children. But those who are not called mbatsav are mostly children who are not acquainted with the art of witchcraft.

It is due to this that the political power are placed in the hands of the elders with tsav, the compound heads, (mbayaav) personalities got an aura that makes the younger generation to obey them. It is a common belief that, their blessings and curses are so effective that once they cast their spell on someone, he or she is automatically affected. They are also able to detect malice brought on their family members and themselves. It is also believed that in the earliest time of the Tiv people, the mbatsav were a beneficent group who were entrusted with physical and spiritual welfare of the community. And even at this time, there were some who were using their powers for evil ends. Their ritual required a sacrifice of human life. Since the Tivs upheld that it was not morally wrong killing a person in order to save the whole community. But killing someone out of selfish reason or private malice was seen as evil. As Eugene puts it, *"The sacrifice of a human life to "repair the tar" was not unknown to the Tiv... and to the Tiv this work of the mbatsav was not malicious, but done in the interest of the group. Now, however, the deaths of more and more people were being required and not directly to "repair the tar," but as the price of approval and respect from the elders. This ominous round of flesh-debts designed to enhance individual prestige was a development quite out of line with the ancient conception of the role of the Mbastav".*<sup>26</sup> In order to have a continuous supply of human beings for the sacrifice, there exist the flesh-debt. And this demands that each member of the mbastav who takes part in the sacrifice of others must also provides a victim in turns. What made the debtors to be always on the look out for a victim to compensate or his or her life will be held at ransom. The mbastav people do kill differently from the way the people of the Day do. Whenever a victim is handed over to them, for some purpose, they kill him in that

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<sup>26</sup> Eugene Rubingh, Op. Cit., P.143.

night and afterwards treat him in a special way that he comes back to life and seems perfectly well again. But at the same time they doom him or her to some fate, whenever the time comes, the victim must die. No remedy on earth can save the person . In such cases people do say, "*it is an old wound which has opened*".

### AKOMBO ( MAGICAL OR CULT EMBLEMS).

It is not easy to translate the word Akombo into English as Paul and Laura Bohannan has said , it can not be said to be "juju" because according to them, this will carry a kind of internal insult. Translating the word as "fetish" also will immediately creates a lot of unnecessary problems and even worse referring to it as superstition. And so they defined the word Akombo as : "*a natural force that can set off, something like a trap, by an unwary person who "pierces" it or which can be used as an offensive weapon by the mbatsav, working in some mysterious way, at night.*"<sup>27</sup> Looking at this their definition, it seems that it is not only a witch who can exercise or use Akombo, but any other person who has access to the Akombo can use it.

The origin of the Akombo practices in Tiv is of very old, but it is said that only three were really of their own in the beginning. These were; "*the Twel, the Ihambe-icigh, and the Ilyum whenever they had obtained a wife by exchange, it was the Twel and Ihambe-icigh that they set up at the door of her house, and performed the rites over them. But those who did this were very few. Sometimes there would be only one in a whole clan who had power over the Akombo and could perform the rites. This man was called master of the Twel, because the*

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<sup>27</sup> Laura, and Paul Bohannan, A Source Notebook in Tiv Religion, Vol. III, ( New Haven: Human Rel. Area Files Inc., 1969) P.291.

twel was the greatest of the Akombo".<sup>28</sup> Why there were only few people to perform these rites was that, before one becomes an initiate and perform the rites he had to reach a position of high seniority, an old man, filled with tsav, and held in great respect. Before, if a man is still young, he would not dare to be initiated and to perform the akombo ceremonies as people do nowadays, however rich he might be.

According to the anthropologists conception, witchcraft is mainly for evil. But for the Tivs, according to their cosmology, witchcraft is not exclusively for evil as we have seen before. Since they see it as cosmic potency in man and form part of one's personality. It sorely depends on the possessor to use it for evil or good ends. The Tivs have no equivalent word for sorcery. They have one word only that refers to bringing about of an evil either by a sorcerer or witch. This word is TAMBE, that is, to "bewitch". Consequently, in Tiv cosmology the difference between witchcraft and sorcery is breached because the witch can use physical objects and rituals when bringing about a particular evil. But I will not say that the Tiv concept of witchcraft is completely different from that concept of the anthropologists. Since anthropologists concede that the concept of witchcraft and sorcery, though distinct, may overlap in practice. So it is my believe that one can be both a witch and a sorcerer as the argument above shows.

It will be clear to a certain extent if one is to translate akombo as magical or cult emblems because according to the English definition, the word magic is use to refer to human actions that are believed to influence human or natural events through supernatural power. It is a neutral term though actions involved may be seen as productive, protective, or destructive. Akombo also involves human actions, physical objects, rituals which are believed to influence human and natural events through supernatural power. Akombo are also neutral, the actions

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<sup>28</sup> Rupert East, Op. Cit. P.183.

involved and the end result can be seen as productive, curing diseases, bringing disaster on a community, preventing harm to be done by other evil forces. Mbastav effectiveness is based on the akombo. To accomplish the task of preservation of the land and the revitalisation of the people the mbastav do employ akombo emblems with their concomitant ceremonies. Eugene puts this in this way, *“Here the personalised potency of tsav met the impersonal, abstract, hovering forces symbolized by the akombo emblems, and they so manipulated the emblems and people that cosmic disharmony was corrected and the vulnerability to calamity was erased.”*<sup>29</sup>

With the combination of tsav and akombo, the beneficent side of tsav power is traced. According to Paul and Laura Bohannon, an akombo can be outlined in five ways: Firstly, it is a protective symbol which is hung or planted or otherwise erected on fields or on other property to assure that the property will not be tampered with.

Secondly, there are details of acquiring this akombo which are unique to it. The acquiring here means to the rituals involved in its acquisition. In most cases, the cult master demands a goat or chicken. But there are also cases whereby some demand money.

Thirdly, there are disease related with the akombo. Each akombo has laws and taboos which prohibit the possessor from doing certain things like eating certain kinds of food, from touching the symbols or from relating with other people of different sexes at some particular moments. In some cases seeing them by the initiated is a taboo. The consequences follow immediately. These penalties are in a form of a disease. In other cases where someone can become a victim of the diseases related with a certain akombo is when the mbastav or any other person who has the akombo in his or her bin “pierces” it against his target. “Piercing” here means “bewitching”.

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<sup>29</sup> Eugene Rubingh, Op. Cit., P.75.

Fourthly, there are symbols of the akombo which are used either in acquiring or seizing it, repairing it (refers to the undoing of the harm caused by certain akombo) or “keeping” it which is equally as “storing” it. The Tivs called these symbols Itine of the akombo. That is the “roots” of or the “source” of that particular akombo’s power.

Fifthly, there are details of repairing the akombo which are unique to it. The medicine involved, the rituals and the animal sacrifices.<sup>30</sup>

Here is a good example of an akombo to make what we have seen above more clear. Let say one enters or goes to a Tiv person’s farm. Supposing it is a yam farm. He may discover that certain people do protect their yams against thieves by using one of the cult emblems. For example, they use symbols like a broken pot or calabashes. This symbols are hung in an obvious place so that any one passing there will see it and know that the owner of the farm has protected his or her farm so that no body can molest it. But if someone saw it and still decides to go in and harvest some of the yams, he or she will suffer the disease related to that particular cult emblem (akombo). The common diseases that are associated to such akombo are, swollen stomach, swollen legs, severe headache, impotency and even death in some particular ones. This is just one of the ways that one can transgress an akombo. For the higher Akombo, sometimes people can go against them by mere looking or touching the bin where they are stored. The akombo have laws which are to be observed by the cult master as well as by any other person. Some cult are not to eat certain foods or to involve themselves in immoral behaviours.

In cases where the victims want to be healed from their infirmities, they have to go to one of the cult masters who is a custodian of that cult emblem. At times they are asked to make their sacrifice in money rather than giving an animal depending on the particular cult emblem

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<sup>30</sup> Laura, and Paul Bohannan, *Op Cit*, P 294.

they have transgressed. Most of these cult emblems have their medicine which are usually made from animal parts or plants parts or both. Sometimes they are made from non living things.

For one to be able to use any of the cult emblems, for example to protect him/her self or crops or anything, he or her must have obtained it from one of the cult masters either as a gift or by buying it. The possession of such akombo goes along with some physical symbols like presenting a pot or a skin of an animal or some herbs to someone by the cult master. In cases of higher akombo or cult emblems, sometimes human skull or certain human bones are required.

There are different kinds of akombo and these permeate all aspects of life. Some of them are double-edged swords; in the hands of mbastav , they can be used to cause chaos or diseases while in the hands of the cult masters they can serve as instruments of curing diseases and repairing the tar (the land). By the fact that the mbatsav by using these cults emblems can control the behaviour in every realm of life lead to their being respected and feared in the society by the rest of the population. And this is why in the Tivland the mbatsav people are seen as the custodians of the moral laws.

### 3.2 SOURCES OF POWER.

As we saw before, the Tiv people believed that, everybody has the witchcraft potential. But it is active only in some people. This means that, one of the sources of witchcraft is inborn. People are born with it. They also believed that it can be given or pass to others as or through a gifts. Some people do inherit it from their parents when their parents die. It is also a common believe that people can also buy it from cult masters.

### 3.3 SOCIAL STATUS OF WITCHES BEFORE AND AFTER THEIR DEATH.

Concerning the status of witches, there are two diverse opinions among the Africans. The first is that majority of people try in all ways possible to avoid contact with such people. Children are advised not to eat from them, accept gifts from them or even go on errands for them. However, among the Tivs of Nigeria, the attitudes towards witches is very different, as long as the witch lives, he or she enjoys a considerable amount of social recognition. They are to be treated the way they were before their accusation for the simple reason that if the gods had not betrayed them, they, the people would not have known. Also, it is strongly believed that anybody who ill-treats a witch after his or her accusations, incurs the wrath of the gods. Even though this is done more out of fear than out of love for the witches, people still do their best to continue good relations with them. However, even with the Tiv people when a witch dies, the treatment is no more a good one, a lot of things go on. No matter how old or prominent these people may be once they die they are not given proper burial. In fact it is well known in Africa that the burial and funeral given to a person tells the importance of that person to the society. And so since even the Tiv people deny this right, we can say that the status given to witches is just an outward one done out of fear rather than love. For others, only to accuse someone of witchcraft is to destroy or kill him or her as Father Shorter puts it, "*To accuse people of witchcraft practices is to destroy their social personality if not to condemn them to a more merciful death.*"<sup>31</sup> Some of the things done to witches after their death which show how much the Tiv society hates them are: they are buried naked, most of the time their graves are not dug deep enough. People are not to mourn for them as they would mourn for others. The reason being that an enemy of the society is dead so why should we mourn! The typical

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<sup>31</sup> Aylward Shorter, Jesus and the Witchdoctor, An Approach to Healing and Wholeness, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985) P.97.

example of this is what I myself witnessed in my home town called Vandeikya, back in Nigeria. There was this woman Mbanor\*, who was well known as a witch. When she was alive, she was living near the bridge of River Aya. And almost every year people will get drown in that River. And she was believed to be the one killing people in this River every year to get some human parts to use for her Akombo and also to drink their blood. The worst of all, this woman had a wound on one of her legs which was longer than the other, and the wound never healed till she died. And the story about her wound which never healed and one of her legs being longer than the other was that, she used to go out in the night to another man whose name was Ijov\* who was having a wound on one of his legs, so this woman used to remove the leg of Ijov which was having a wound on it and leave hers with him for sometime and takes his and hit against a tree every night so that this wound will not heal. Whenever she feels satisfied hitting it against the tree, she brings it back to Ijov and takes her while he is still sleeping. So one day Ijov went to a Diviner to find out why his wound was not healing, So the Diviner told him that it is because of this woman and the diviner gave some medicine to him to use while sleeping. But this woman did not know that Ijov went to a diviner, so she removed Ijov's leg and left hers with him. She went and hit the leg with the wound against the tree when she came back to take hers she could not see Ijov . And so she remained with the leg until the day she died with it. So I was lucky to be in Vandeikya when she died, She was taken to her village for her burial, but her village refused her body. So she was brought back and taken to a place where common people are buried and she was buried without a coffin or even clothes around her. The worst of all no body shed tears for her rather people felt relieved of her death. Such people, few days after their burials, all their belongings are expected to be sent to the fetish shrine for purification. Before the purification the fetish in his possessed state

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\* Mbanor and Ijov are not their real names.

selects the things which were very close to the deceased and can harm people. But it is interesting to note that usually valuable things are not selected. Usually it is the pillow, lantern or old clothing that are taken. The selected things however are not to be used by anybody.

To conclude this section, I will say that even though the Tiv people are not at home with witches but because they are afraid of what the gods might do to them, or what the witches themselves if they know that they are against them, they (witches) might look for a way of harming them. Therefore, as far as the witch is still alive, they do try to still relate with him or her well just because of fear of what the witch might do to them. Until the person dies. What looks like contradiction in the way they see witches and the way they treat them when the witches are alive.

In this chapter as a whole, we have seen the belief and practices of witchcraft among the Tiv of Nigeria in particular and sources by which witches get their power and finally their social status before and after their death. In the following chapter is my desire to see the morality of witchcraft from Christian point of view.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.1 MORALITY OF WITCHCRAFT ACCORDING TO CHRISTIAN POINT OF VIEW.

The distinction between witchcraft and sorcery is a very difficult one to make and so if we understood them in the same sense, then we can say that Christianity morally condemned witchcraft and sorcery. Traditionally, evil magic, or sorcery and witchcraft, are seen to have some positive aspects about them. For example, belief in witchcraft has a moral aspect of helping people to find explanations for things that go wrong. For people are not content only to know how misfortunes occur or how diseases are caused, but are interested also in knowing who caused them to happen. By giving the blame to someone in the community, people are able to reach an answer which appears to them satisfactory. Another positive aspect of witchcraft traditionally is once people fear that one of their neighbours or relatives is able to apply magic or use witchcraft against them, they are likely to refrain from doing things that can offend others such as stealing or rudeness etc. In this sense, the belief becomes a factor of stabilising relations among relatives, neighbours, and members of the community. Also their attribution of evil to human origin as Father Shorter puts it, “*To see all misfortune, especially the more dramatic disasters, as eventually traceable to human cause is intellectually satisfying*”.<sup>32</sup>

But looking at the above positive aspect of witchcraft, we should bear in mind that, if we go deep in examining these positive aspects, we could easily find out that, they are not genuine. For example, as I have already mentioned in the section of social status of witches, people are afraid of these people or doing bad things against them not because of their free

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. P.95.

will or love. But just because of the harm they are afraid these people (witches) could inflict on them. So if we consider this fear as a fear of what might happened to them, we can say witchcraft here has no positive aspect. Moreover, as I quoted Bishop Sarpong in the second chapter as saying, witchcraft is believed to be by its nature to be evil. And when people talk of witchcraft as being 'good', they do so in selfish terms because if a witch is protecting his/her family or property, they do at expenses of other people's children. Since in protecting their family or property they inflict harm on others and their property. Moreover, Christians should not look for protection from other things but should place their trust in God that he will protect them. As the Psalmist says, "*With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can man do to me?...It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in man,*" (Psalm 118:6-8). Worst of all, when people want to know how misfortunes occur or diseases are caused, and also to know who caused them to happen and by putting blame on the practice of witchcraft by someone in the community, they are not doing this mainly to help them solve the problem or cure the disease. But they are doing it mainly to help them know someone and retaliate or revenge against the person's evil deeds. Among those who have belief in witchcraft, this type of revenge is what must take place, whether during the suspect's life time or during his/her death. This can be clearly seen even in the case of the woman in my village whom everybody was afraid of her because she was suspected to be a witch. But when she died, they revenged by giving her a horrible burial. Where there is a strong witchcraft belief, people are always pointing fingers to one another in such a way that everyone becomes a suspect. What can bring hatred in the whole village or family. Mbiti puts it in this way, "*those who may be suspected of working witchcraft or sorcery or magic against others have their problems and that things also go wrong for them. They too, find scapegoats in their communities. The whole problem becomes a vicious circle, and almost everyone is a suspect in the eyes of other*

people".<sup>33</sup> Such accusations do not only bring hatred but also it brings a spirit of distrust among people and thus people end up living very artificially without genuine love or trust of one another and the worst thing is that it does not leave room for forgiveness or reconciliation. It is after retaliation or revenge. This is what Father Shorter also said, "*Belief in witchcraft encourages gratuitous exculpation and mutual enmity. It strengthens the sense of helplessness in front of evil and acceptance of moral dualism. The only defence is retaliation and this strengthens enmity and fear even further. Witchcraft beliefs form an intellectual fabric or theory which cries out for verification though accusation and conviction...The theory presupposes a strong metaphysical dualism, in which good and evil are mutually exclusive categories. The belief is that there is an organized cosmic conspiracy of evil and a secret presence of enemies in the midst of the community...Witchcraft beliefs are a collective nightmare, systematically contradicting all the positive values of society.*"<sup>34</sup>

It is due to these above reasons that, Christianity which is based on the principles of Love, forgiveness, and reconciliation does condemn witchcraft morally. According to the Christian point of view, witchcraft belief is morally evil because of its belief in approved killing, eating of human flesh, causing of harm on others and worst of all it denies basic principles of Love, forgiveness, and does not give room for reconciliation. The three principles which Jesus Christ who founded Christianity emphasised as the pillars of the religion. Thus belief in witchcraft is challenged by Christian faith, as The Mahatma Gandhi echoed Christ's teaching in his own way: "*If everyone took an eye for an eye, the whole world would become blind*". *Eye for eye - this is the peculiar blindness of witchcraft theory and the fears it generates. True Religion calls for repentance as far as the past is concerned and*

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<sup>33</sup> John Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, ( London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1975) P.169.

<sup>34</sup> Aylward Shorter, African Culture, An Overview, P.67.

*amendment for the future, but witchcraft theory has no faith in convertibility of man. Once witch, always a witch. True Religion calls for healing, reconciliation mutual services, not preoccupation with searching out and exterminating (or at last ostracising ) the alleged human causes of misfortune".<sup>35</sup>*

In the Scripture, especially in the old testament, the law giver commanded that all sorcerers and witches be destroyed as a way of condemning witchcraft and sorcery (Exodus 22:18). Also, looking at witchcraft belief, it violates the first commandment which says, "thou shalt not have other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image...You shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Exodus 20:2-5, Deuteronomy 6:4; 6:13-14; 5:6-9). People who believe in witchcraft are always looking for a solution to their problems from diviners or witchdoctors, instead of carrying their problems to the Lord in faith and trust, that he has power to solve their problems and heal their diseases, bearing in mind that He the Lord is the almighty and has power over everything . Jesus himself said, " *come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*" (Matthew 11:28-30 ). In the New testament, explicit mention is made of sorcery as being bad . And references are: Revelation 21:8 and Galatians 5:20.

So to conclude this sub-topic, we can say according to the Christian point of view, witchcraft belief is morally evil. Since it advocates a strict justice that demands revenge, retaliation, killing and does not grant room for repentance and reconciliation or forgiveness. Looking at these facts, it is clear that it does not respect the great commandment of Jesus to all humanity, " *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have*

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<sup>35</sup> Aylward Shorter, Jesus and the Witchdoctor, An Approach to Healing and Wholeness, P.101.

...and you, that you also love one another", (John 13: 34). In brief, witchcraft belief opposes the Christian view of charity which calls for love of ones enemy and advocated for retaliation.

In the next sub-topic, I will be dealing with witchcraft mentality and Christian faith and then my personal view and then conclude.

#### 4.2 WITCHCRAFT MENTALITY AND CHRISTIAN FAITH.

Witchcraft is not only known to the Africans, it is a universal belief. As far back to the time of the Israelites in Egypt, the lawgiver commanded that all sorcerers and witches be destroyed. "You shall not permit a sorcerer to live" (Exodus 22:18). The first time witchcraft is mentioned in the Bible. Every old civilization contained witchcraft and more or less violently fought with them. A fairly early but characteristic European example occurred in A.D 1080, when king Herald of Denmark was told by Pope Gregory VII that, "*he must no longer tolerate among his people the gruesome superstition according to which Christian priests or wicked women are held answerable for bad weather, storms, ...or outbreaks of plague.*"<sup>36</sup> But king Herald tolerated it because many people continued to believe it for centuries. There were even cases whereby Black masses were said to be have been offered in order that good can by inversion be turned to evil.<sup>37</sup>

Also, as Father Shorter wrote, "*In early pagan Europe there was a generalized belief in witches and "capulating demons", but no witch-craze. Christians began by teaching that only infidels believed in witches (Canon Episcopi, c 900). By the 11<sup>th</sup> century, economic, social and nationalistic conflicts were taking place. Also Christian heresies and Islam posed a threat...Heresy was demonized...By the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries Church and state authorities had come to accept the popular fantasy. Learned theologians, like St. Thomas Aquinas,*

<sup>36</sup> Basil Davidson, Op Cit, P.22

<sup>37</sup> Paul Bohannan, African Outline, A General Introduction, (London: Penguin Books, 1964) P.214.

rationalized the fantasy (*Summa*, 1.51.3 ad 6; *Supp.* 58.2). Popes wrote letters alerting people to the danger of witchcraft, ... Canon lawyers wrote manuals on how to extract witchcraft confession through torture and exorcism. The most notorious of such manuals was the *Malleus Maleficarum* ("Hammer of witches") 1486, by two Dominicans, Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer.<sup>38</sup> Superstitions of this sort bothered the Church in Europe. Since the Church is responsible for the social welfare of her faithful and the welfare of all humanity, it bothered her not only where witchcraft belief directly affects her members but also where this belief has affected anybody in the society.

In Scripture as we have seen earlier in this chapter, some passages condemned witchcraft. Christianity also condemned witchcraft morally. However, these condemnations are not seen as strong as the traditional sanctions against witches. It is therefore not surprising to hear the traditional people complaining that Christianity is sheltering witches of the society with its doctrine of LOVE. For example, "*persons found guilty of witchcraft in thirteenth century Germany were sometimes burned to death by the civil authorities, the Church itself approved only of disciplinary punishments against these offences and expulsion of the offenders from the communion of the church, and refrained in this early period from calling in the arms of secular justice for the bodily chastisement of those accused of sorcery.*"<sup>39</sup> Here Christian faith seems to be challenged with its doctrine of Love. Since for people who believe in witchcraft Christianity is opposed to justice. At the same time, belief in witchcraft has been challenged by the Christian faith, as we saw The Mahatma Gandhi echoed Christ's teaching refusing an eye for an eye and tooth for tooth. Since this strict justice which witchcraft belief advocates can only make the whole world blind and will make all people become toothless. Worst of all let us imagine the amount of hatred that will exist among families in this world.

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<sup>38</sup> Aylward Shorter, *African Culture, An Overview*, P.68-69.

<sup>39</sup> Basil Davidson, *Op. Cit.*, P.122.

One thing that is very common among the Tiv people of Nigeria and most Africans in general is that those who have embraced Christianity still find themselves caught up with issues of witchcraft. For example, the tenacity of the hold of the traditional and world-view on the Tiv showed itself in paucity of converts to Christian faith during the first decades of missionaries' settlement in Tivland. Since their message meant rejection of the Akombo and witchcraft practices. What involved the entire pattern of Tiv life in a vigorous opposition to the alien theory, and the tribal social controls went into effect. It was obvious that the Christian system would disrupt the Tiv life through its denial of manipulation of the mystical forces Akombo rites. What means that if one is to belong to this new faith (Christianity) he/she has to reject Akombo taboos or professed immunity to Mbatsav (witches). And this will mean excluding oneself from the entire belief of the community. With this, three points became evident as Eugene Rubingh points them out, "1) *The individual could not propose to reject only certain elements of the tribal religion and imagine that he could participate in both the traditional system and Christian worship. All of the religious system of the Tiv was bound up together; this is seen especially in the dependence of the Akombo (magical or cult emblems) system on the mbatsav (witches) system.* 2) *The community itself was closely knit, and great social pressure could be placed on anyone who departed from the established mold. The non-conformist endangered not only himself, but the functioning of the whole community, for the cosmic retribution might be general as well as specific.* 3) *Change was itself viewed with great suspicion. The life of the tribe was oriented to the past, for there the ways of harmonious existence in an easily disturbed universe had been established. For example, should a compound head agree to allow one of his children to attend the missionary's school and learn his religion, the child's mother would be terrified. Her child would be changed, would wear strange clothes, speak a strange language, flaunt the akombo, would in fact be*

*scarcely be recognizable to her as her son.*"<sup>40</sup> This is a big Challenge witchcraft has posed for the Christian faith because people are afraid of leaving their traditional ways of doing things and their traditional beliefs which they are used to and has become part of their lives, the Christian faith which seems to contradict their beliefs and still they see it to be having something also to offer them. So with this dilemma, it is a common thing to see some Christians playing a double standard. Whenever some of them are in serious trouble or sick because of the fear that they might be seen, they usually send their relatives who are not Christians to go and find out what their fate is like, or to know who is 'DOING THEM' as they normally put it. Also, some, instead of going to hospitals to find out what disease they are suffering from, they prefer going to witchdoctors and only come to modern hospitals as their last resort of which in most cases it is too late to save their lives. For some, they are good Christians when things are going on well but as soon as life becomes tough and a bit strange for them, they forget their Christianity and rush to their traditional practices to find a solution to their problems. This reality is such that some priests, Religious and even Bishops do not know where they stand when it comes to issues of witchcraft. Christians are on the move everywhere to find protection against witchcraft. As it is evident in the way the African Bishops at the African synod described the African Christians by saying, "*They are like frogs who have two legs on land and two in the water- when there is a disturbance in the water they jump on to dry land and when there is trouble on the land they rush into the water. Or again some Christians pray the rosary in the morning and take to witchcraft in the afternoon.*" I think this is the best way of describing some of the Tiv Christians also. Even some Bishops (Church Leaders), seem to believe in witchcraft in Africa. For example, Father Shorter says *In many third world countries today health and health behaviour are linked to fears about*

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<sup>40</sup> Eugene Rubingh, *Op. Cit.*, P.105-106.

<sup>41</sup> AMECEA, *Op. Cit.*, P.25.

witchcraft and sorcery. One even encounters Church leaders who privately support such an explanation of misfortune", he continued that, "An African Bishop once told me, that attributed the deaths of three of his priests to witchcraft. Another Bishop asked me to investigate a witchcraft case concerning a prominent member of the diocese, who since he believed he was under a spell."<sup>42</sup> This shows how influential the witchcraft mentality is in the Christian faith. So the question that comes to mind then is, what are we to do? Should we accept the open solution that people are to be left to be 'African Christians', with rich parents present to manage and a future to prepare for? In the next chapter, this will be the question I will be answering according to my own personal view and be showing how I feel the people could be best helped to become good Christians rather than behaving like from what African Bishops may describe them. And then finally bring my own conclusion.

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<sup>42</sup> Aylward Shorter, Jesus and the Witchdoctor, An Approach to Healing and Wholeness, P. 101.

## CONCLUSION.

After reading much about witchcraft in general and its concept among the Tiv people of Nigeria and comparing it to what I do hear and see the Tiv people say or do, I have come to a strong conviction that there is nothing so illusory in Tiv society as Tsav(witchcraft). I have come to know that there is no reality in it whatever, nor in any of the ideas attached to it; and yet discovered that, tsav is of all things the one in which almost all the Tiv people place the most implicit belief. This belief lies at the very root of the Tiv's life, and is bound up with all their activities. Because right from the time a Tiv child begins to understand what is said, he does listen to people around him talking about witches. They continually hear about them till they themselves are old enough to talk, and start going about with other children telling them about the witches in the way they have heard from their elders. Because of this, fear of witches has taken hold on the people like a persistent and incurable disease. Even educated people who have travelled overseas, have not learnt enough to show them that witchcraft is nothing; because all their thought and learning are on the surface, and cannot teach them the clear difference between what is real and what is not. Their education gives them material wealth but does not penetrate to their immortal souls.

So looking at the question I have carried over from the last chapter, 'should we accept the open solution that people are to be left to be "African Christians" in a syncretistic sense, with a rich past, a present to manage and a future to prepare for?' This sounds very nice but it has other implications which make us feel that all we have as Africans should be accepted wholesale into Christianity. So what Christianity needs to do is to do more in studying the Tiv traditional religion and see the good aspects of this religion and make use of them to help change the Tiv world-view. Especially concerning the way they look at the presence of evil

which they do come in contact with daily. Since it appears that as long as the whys of evil happenings are not adequately found or explained in Christianity, belief in witchcraft will persist for ages in Tivland. For they saw witchcraft as an explanatory principle for evil. The problem this belief is posing for Christianity in Tivland is apostasy. The fact is that Bishops and priests are struggling with what to do with people who either openly confess to being fetish priests, to being witches, or those who openly go to look for protection against the witches powers. One solution which is been used in most places is that, those involved are suspended from Christian practices for some time. But does this help remedy the solution? I am afraid, I do not think so because it is still happening. So what can we do? Some people argued that unless Christianity finds a satisfactory answer to the problem of evil. If not, witchcraft belief will continue to persist.

Personally, I think it is not easy and possible for Christianity to find a satisfactory answer to the problem of evil. And I am quite sure that even those who believe in witchcraft, can rightly agree with me that witchcraft which they see as an explanatory principle for evil does not explain satisfactory the presence of evil. But just because it gives ready made answers to the question at hand, they embraced it. I rather saw it to encourage more evil such as envy, hatred, distrust and enmity among the people. Moreover, even those who are seen as witches (who are said to be responsible for the evil in the society) also do experience misfortunes from time to time and also do die. And so they do not even have power over evil. Therefore, I strongly feel that what we have to do is to help the Tiv people become convinced and discover self-confidence through a stronger faith and trust in God and in each other than the fear of evil. This itself is not easy and needs time. But I see it to be very possible and it has to start somewhere. So it must begin now.

They should also be made to accept reality and understand that even death which they see as the worst evil is not what they think. They should not see it first of all as the end of human

life but as a transition to a more perfect stage, being with the Lord, as Saint Paul tells us (1 Thess 4:17). Moreover, they have to be evangelized or re-evangelized so that they will not see every sufferings as what they have to avoid at the expense of their neighbours. But learn to see some sufferings as blessing as Jesus himself said in his sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:3-10). Since these are the attitudes that make witchcraft fears flourish and prevent people from loving their neighbours. So with this, I believe with Father Shorter, it is by helping the Tiv people to change their practical attitude and placing their trust and faith in God Only that will help them overcome the fear of witchcraft and will discredit the social institutions through which it operates. Since they will no longer be relevant because God's victory over evil will generate greater trust and confidence in them.<sup>43</sup> This will also help them not to look for confidence or protection from other things or people but only from God almighty. If they are able to gain this confidence in God, I strongly believe that their behaviour will change and they will no longer live like 'frogs' but develop a solid Christian faith. They will no longer go to diviners or witchdoctors in times of trouble or sickness to find their fate or who is 'doing them', but will firmly placed their trust and hope in God that he grant them protection and healing. And their fears will be the fears of God who has power over death and evil and will no longer be the fear of evil. As Jesus warned us, "*I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear : fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; ...*" (Luke 12:4ff).

So to conclude, I will say that the issue that is nailing people down to the witchcraft mentality is the problem of evil in society. The Tiv people, Like all Africans think nothing happens without a cause and so one of the easy ways of solving the problems of life which are very difficult is to say that, it is someone who is 'doing me'. What I see therefore is that the

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<sup>43</sup> Aylward Shorter, Jesus and the Witchdoctor, An approach to Healing and Wholeness, P.104.

only way Christianity can help solve the problem of witchcraft among the Tiv people is to have an insider's view of the whole problem. A view that is sensitive to the feelings of the people and evaluative of their thinking. A view that will help them develop a strong faith and trust in God than the fear of evil. That will influence their thinking, way of life and beliefs. If not, I still believe the Tiv Christians and pagans alike will continue to believe in witchcraft. Therefore, my last suggestion is , if the Christian faith is really to penetrate the Tivs, instead of talking about liberation theology in terms liberating them from poverty, oppression from tyrannical governments, Christianity has to first talk about liberation theology in terms of liberating them from this fear of witchcraft and of evil spirits. Since this liberation from the fear of witchcraft will free them and enable them to embrace the other aspects of life.

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