MIKAILALSYS
Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences

e-ISSN : 2987-2286
p-ISSN : 2987-3924

Index: Harvard, Boston, Sydney, Copernicus, Sinta 4, Scilit, Semantic, Google, etc

https://doi.org/10.58578/mikailalsys.v4i2.10076

Manifestations of Dual Religiosity among Bemba Catholics: Beliefs and Practices within Indigenous Supernatural Cosmology in Muchinga Province, Zambia

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Article Info:

Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Apr 7, 2026	May 5, 2026	May 17, 2026	May 22, 2026

Abstract

Although dual religiosity has received increasing scholarly attention, its implications for religious identity and practice among Catholics in contemporary Zambia remain insufficiently understood. This study examines the manifestation of dual religiosity among Bemba Catholics in Muchinga Province, Zambia, with particular attention to beliefs and practices shaped by African Indigenous Religion (AIR) cosmology of supernatural powers and Catholicism. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, data were collected from 20 Bemba Catholics and four Catholic priests through interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. The findings indicate that dual religiosity among Bemba Catholics is reflected both in belief systems and in the performance of religious duties, particularly through interpretations shaped by AIR spiritual, supernatural, and magical worldviews. Participants maintained belief in God and spiritual intermediaries, viewed divine punishment as a consequence of wrongdoing, and recognised oaths, vows, and covenants as binding religious and moral commitments. The findings also show deep reverence for ancestors alongside continued engagement with practices associated with witchcraft, sorcery, magic, divination, witch-hunting,

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traditional healing, and the use of traditional medicines. The study concludes that African traditional beliefs continue to influence the religious practices of African Christians, shaping how Catholic identity is understood and enacted in local contexts. Its contribution lies in clarifying how dual religiosity operates within Bemba Catholic communities and in highlighting the need for church leaders to develop context-sensitive pastoral assistance programmes for Catholics who negotiate multiple religious commitments. The study further encourages ecclesial dialogue on the integration of cultural practices with conversion approaches that respect local traditions while addressing the pastoral challenges of dual religiosity.

Keywords: African Indigenous Religion; Dual Religiosity; Catholicism; Supernatural Cosmology; Bemba Catholics

INTRODUCTION

The continuing existence of indigenous African cosmological beliefs among African Christians demonstrates that African religious practices develop through two distinct faith traditions, which people maintain through their ongoing contact with mystical and supernatural elements. African cosmology presents supernatural, mystical, or magical powers as universal forces that control both good and bad human actions. The powers behind magic and witchcraft, the evil eye, traditional medicines, vows and other powers constitute these mystical forces. African believers who have formally converted to Christianity maintain their traditional beliefs about supernatural powers, which they practice together with Christian rituals.

Asian Context

Jacoba (2025) established that indigenous peoples from the Philippines connected deeply with their ancestral lands, and syncretism enabled them to create a new belief system which blended their Indigenous faiths with Christianity. For instance, the Pesaguan Dayak community uses funeral rituals to create unity through a mix of traditional customs and Catholic practices, which connect their Kanjan Serayong culture with their Catholic faith (Endi et al., 2024). Adopting indigenous culture can be beneficial, as established by Ajisuksmo's (2023) research, that Catholic youth must honour indigenous cultural heritage while they learn native environmental knowledge, which creates a need to develop better methods for integrating these two areas into sustainable living. Del Castillo's (2022) studies

how faith and culture connect for indigenous Christian youth in the Philippines. Furthermore, Layugan (2024) states that indigenous communities build their cultural identity through their religious beliefs and practices, which should be understood because they matter beyond Christian beliefs. These studies demonstrate different levels of Christian and indigenous cultural merging, with some communities choosing to adopt syncretic customs while others experience cultural conflict as they experience dual religiosity.

African Context

Some religious groups create ongoing conflicts because their practices contradict each other, while other groups practice syncretism, as observed with the Pentecostal movements in Zimbabwe and Zambia, which have adopted traditional African religious practices (Manyonganise, 2024; Kaunda Chammah, 2023). In Ghana, the neo-prophetic movements employ rituals and artefacts that directly reflect traditional Akan spiritual cosmology to demonstrate the strong cultural connections between these practices and the indigenous beliefs about evil spirits that shape modern Christian prophetism (Yeboah et al., 2024). African Christians continue to hold strong beliefs in mystical causes of diseases, while they also practice traditional healing methods, which include witchcraft and sorcery and violating sacred taboos as part of their native belief system, which they accept as essential for their health management (Anizoba et al., 2021).

Empirical studies show that people engage with mystical elements by using mystical recipes and charms to gain control over supernatural powers they believe extend beyond healing. The Igbo people coexist with spiritual flexibility, which enables them to accept Christianity while practising their traditional spiritual beliefs, as both groups hold that traditional practices deliver practical and spiritual advantages to their community (Nweke et al., 2023). Indigenous people use this flexible system to transition between their native beliefs and Christian teachings, allowing them to experience both belief systems without internal conflict (Nweke, 2023). African Christianity experiences internal conflict through its syncretic tendency, given its origins in Western and European sources. The Europeanised account of African Christianity, which Asamoah & Kpalam (2023) criticise, needs to acknowledge indigenous African culture, as authentic religious expression requires a connection to native African traditions and mystical powers. The absence of indigenous African cultural elements in Christian worship leads to a fractured faith experience,

restricting Christians' access to the full cultural value of their religious practices in Africa. Some Christian churches create a conflict between Christian beliefs and traditional medicine by discouraging members from practising traditional medicine, which includes indigenous cosmological beliefs about medicinal plants (Mokhoathi, 2020). Believers unite these elements through the belief that God and the Holy Spirit protect them from cosmic forces while they build community through divine support, which transcends all cultural boundaries (Resane, 2024; Mokhoathi, 2024).

Zambian Context

African Indigenous Religions (AIR) present a comprehensive system of supernatural powers, including ancestral worship, divination, witchcraft and traditional healing as core elements of their beliefs. African Catholics demonstrate dual religious practice because their ongoing traditional beliefs conflict with their Christian beliefs, while they practise both traditions concurrently (Benedict XVI, 2011). The debate around ancestor veneration stems from its historical role in safeguarding communities and enforcing moral behaviour. To preserve their community values, Bemba Catholics traditionally combine Christian and native beliefs (Kaunda (2023). Pope Benedict XVI (2011) expressed concern that African faith experiences degradation during conversion, calling for genuine transformation that eliminates traditional spirits and customs while recognising the ongoing struggle between authentic Christian monotheism and native mystical beliefs.

The study by Kaunda (2023) shows that Bemba women from Zambia used native beads to signal their marital status and express their sexual power before Christian missionaries arrived to establish their religious beliefs, which modified these native practices through Christian teachings. Kaunda (2023) documented that missionaries "were consistently and insistently invading the space of *imbusa*" (Bemba women's indigenous marriage teachings), portraying indigenous practices as "demonic" and pressuring Bemba women to abandon them for "Christian ways of marriage." The evidence shows that indigenous traditions faced institutional pressure that halted their development into syncretic religious forms. Christian teachings shaped a set of daily practices that Bemba women followed within their Catholic community, but they did not engage with indigenous beliefs (Musiol, 2023). Musiol (2023) investigated Bemba Catholics living in Luapula Province, Zambia, and observed that Christianity takes various forms, leading people to

express their religious beliefs through different dress styles, women's responsibilities, and marriage customs. Nonetheless, the return of African Christians to traditional beliefs highlighted the gap left by tradition that the Christian faith had failed to fill (Udelhoven, 2022).

Bemba Catholics practice their religious beliefs through cultural traditions, including traditional spiritual practices that contradict Christian religious teachings. Chanda & Cheyeka (2024b) report that Bemba Catholics face a major belief problem about the effects of spirit-world beliefs on their religious faith and their actions. Believers view all forms of suffering, sickness, death and evil as the result of evil magical forces which exist in the world. Bemba Catholics hold the belief that God heals through natural elements and herbal remedies from traditional medicine, which creates conflict between Christian beliefs and native African worldviews. Their selection of mysticism shapes their understanding of the essential elements of life, which include wealth, fertility and safety from danger. Historically, missionaries viewed *Ngulu* [spirit possession] practices as diabolical and superstitious, so churches refused to admit those who worked with spirits and served as healers. According to Mbiti (1999), people who practise witchcraft continue to demonstrate their mystical abilities, which they show through various practices like divination, witch-hunting, traditional medicine, charms and sorcery.

Bemba Catholics believe these particular beliefs require them to seek help from diviners whenever they experience ongoing medical problems and unexpected health problems, which people believe to be caused by witchcraft or other magical forces (Chanda & Cheyeka, 2024a). The believers of this faith encounter a major conflict because they attempt to follow Catholicism, which forbids traditional spiritual practices, while they seek protection through native rituals. Individuals who adhere to conventional customs perceive their actions as divine remedies that they believe were established by God through mystical abilities to address life's difficulties (Chanda & Cheyeka, 2024b). Bemba people believe that all healing methods and charms come from God, who uses them to create useful magical powers which people can use to prosper in their health, marriage, and wealth. Bemba Catholics who practise traditional healing, either openly or secretly, violate Catholic teachings, which require all believers to follow only the gospel instructions (Hinfelaar, 2017).

The church observes that Catholics must live their faith through their everyday actions, which should reflect the principles of the gospel to show others God's authority and not practise indigenous spiritual beliefs. Bemba Catholics who practise their religion develop a fear of witchcraft, which makes them use charms and protective rituals, and automatic divination methods. Bemba Catholics turn to charms and witch doctor services when they feel afraid due to threats from sorcery and wizardry (Chanda & Cheyeka, 2024b). According to Fuller (2001), traditional African beliefs pervade Christian communities, resulting in a Christian practice that bridges both traditional African beliefs and Christian faith. For instance, the family funerals present people with two opposing forces between life and death as they perform death-obstructing rituals to remove witchcraft from their natural body functions, which people believe are witchcraft due to their unfamiliar appearance. The behaviours people engage in indicate death and afterlife beliefs because they conflict with Christian death views, which see death as a natural event that requires faith in God, who controls everything.

Bemba Catholics who live and engage with two worldviews create a fusion of beliefs and rituals that can sometimes conflict with the Christian faith, causing controversy, posing a unique challenge, and requiring individuals to navigate traditional beliefs, worldviews, cultures, and practices. Without research into dual religiosity among Bemba Catholics and how it manifests in daily life, there may be misconceptions about their beliefs, insufficient support from religious organisations, and missed opportunities for interfaith dialogue. This study aims to investigate the dual religiosity of Christianity and AIR among Bemba Catholics, exploring how Bemba Catholics manifest dual religiosity through their indigenous cosmology of supernatural powers in Muchinga Province, Zambia, following a century of Catholicism in the region. This was achieved thought the use of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, ituating the tudy ith the framework between 1999 to 2024. Church leaders may use this research to develop customised pastoral support solutions which will handle the challenges of people practising dual religiosity. This study provides information that may help resolve disputes arising from dual religiosity while maintaining peaceful relations between different religious customs and religious leaders who respect cultural differences, thereby making the church more relevant to modern society.

METHODS

The study of how Bemba Catholics manifest dual religiosity was conducted using qualitative research methods and Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology. The researchers chose Muchinga Province as their study site because of its historical significance to the Bemba people, 125 years of Catholic mission work, and suitability for studying Bemba cultural traditions. The researchers chose two sites for their study: Chilonga and Ilondola. The study included 20 members of the Bemba Catholic community who discussed how their dual religious beliefs affected their lives, as well as four priests. The researchers selected study participants using purposive sampling, allowing them to distribute information without bias while ensuring that both male and female participants had equal opportunities to participate. The researchers employed in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and observation to collect data. Research ethics required researchers to obtain informed consent from participants while protecting their privacy rights during the study. The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Zambia approved this study.

Data was analysed using Van Manen's (1997) thematic reflection analysis. This method was used to identify key themes that explained Bemba Catholics' dual religious practices, as well as to investigate how people experience their lived experiences by first understanding their real-life experiences. The study used interviews and focus groups to investigate how people experience their daily lives by gathering firsthand information on how Bemba Catholics demonstrate dual religiosity. Thematic analysis was used to identify the main themes of the phenomenon by reviewing recorded interviews and observations that revealed the participants' life experiences. The writing and rewriting process was used to convey the participants' feelings about their thoughts, behaviours, and attitudes while remaining consistent with the research questions. The researchers interpreted emerging patterns within the research themes and continued with the evaluation of data analysis results by employing precise verification methods that tested the findings against larger research frameworks.

RESULTS

Manifestation of Dual Religiosity through Participation in Supernatural Beliefs and Practices

The participants' belief in and practice of indigenous spirituality, supernaturalism, and magic illustrated the phenomenon of dual religiosity. They demonstrated a strong belief in God and intermediaries, curses and divine retribution, ancestor veneration, traditional rituals, divination, and traditional healing practices. They further indicated their belief in the cosmology and worldview surrounding witchcraft, sorcery, and magic, witch-hunting beliefs, practices and accusations.

Belief in God and Practice of Intermediation

The participants expressed a profound belief in God and the role of intermediaries in spiritual lives, reflecting a combination of faith and traditional practices within identity as Bemba people. P9 stated, "We believe in fighting negative forces such as harmful magic, sorcery, and witchcraft through traditional means like divination and herbal medicines, which the Catholic Church condemns." The researcher observed that *Ing'anga* [witchdoctors] served as intermediaries between people and divinities, which the participants confirmed. Faith has a significant influence on perspectives on life events, particularly during challenging times. P12 noted, "Our strong faith in God influences our outlook during difficult times, such as illness or failures." In contrast, the Catholic Church encouraged adherence to its teachings, as P4 asserted, "The Catholic Church encourages us to maintain faith in the Christian God and draw guidance from this belief rather than relying on traditional practices involving ancestral authority and healers."

Despite their affirmation of the Catholic faith, traditional beliefs remained significant. P5 illustrated this by stating, "Bemba traditional beliefs emphasise prayers and offerings to seek protection against misfortunes caused by malevolent forces." P9 added that during difficult times, a mix of faith and tradition becomes relevant, stating, "In times of difficulty, we contemplate God's intentions and find comfort through prayer and divination." P16 summed up these beliefs by stating, "Trust in God's strength shapes our perspective and influences our responses to challenges, including traditional means." Participants echoed that the Bemba religious identity is characterised by a combination of deep-rooted faith in God and traditional practices that address life's challenges.

Belief and Practice in *Amatipo* [Cursing] and *Icilandushi* [Divine Retribution]

Participants shared common beliefs and practices regarding cursing and divine retribution. These beliefs were deep-seated in the cultural fabric of Bemba society; they argued that they maintained social order and unity. P1 argued that cursing was a potent way to express displeasure or seek retribution for perceived wrongs. P15 added that the belief in the efficacy of curses instils fear and serves as a deterrent against actions that disrupt community harmony. Collectively, participants expressed belief in divine retribution, that *Lesa* [God] avenges them against those who do them evil. This belief was rooted in cultural consciousness, as P13 noted, "Traditional religious belief associated with retribution holds significant importance, which in turn shapes our worldview and understanding of justice." It was observed that divine retribution was a powerful response to wrongdoing, with the belief that those who committed evil deeds would face consequences from Lesa, a higher power.

According to P12, the Bemba phrase *Lesa Nimalyotola* reflected belief in [God as an avenger], capable of punishing those who cause harm. P1 suggested, "Where sorcery, witchcraft, or magic brings suffering, divine retribution is a last resort for justice." P17 observed a contradiction of this belief with church teachings, noting, "This belief system contrasts with the teachings of the Church, which often criticises such Bemba cultural practices." Nonetheless, P13 argued that indigenous beliefs regarded divine retribution as the most efficacious response to evil deeds. This was exemplified by P3, who narrated:

My in-laws were responsible for the death of my daughter. After seeking guidance from religious leaders [charismatic prophets], it was revealed that they had conspired together to harm her. Now, whenever a family member passes away under mysterious circumstances, they must confess to their actions or face dire consequences. God has chosen to seek justice for me by holding them accountable.

Most participants claimed that such a thought process stemmed from their belief in divine punishment for transgressions as a primary source of justice.

Belief and Practice of the Cult of Ancestors

The interviews and FGDs highlighted how ancestor veneration is a manifestation of dual religiosity among Bemba Catholics. There was a deep reverence for ancestors among the participants. For example, P10 alleged, "In my culture, ancestors influence our spiritual beliefs and are revered for wisdom and protection. They are the guardians of the

community, who shield us from harm and ensure our well-being." Furthermore, P3 articulated, "I believe that ancestral spirits have the power to influence events in the physical world, and I call upon them for guidance and assistance." During an FGD, participants collectively expressed reliance on traditional practices such as divination, dream interpretation, and rituals, which were the means of communicating with ancestors and seeking blessings. However, it was challenging to reconcile ancestral veneration with Catholic teachings, as acknowledged P6:

Ancestral beliefs and practices very often clash with the teachings of the Catholic Church, and this creates tension for me as a Bemba Catholic who embraces my traditions. Despite these challenges, I still honour my ancestral heritage while embracing my Catholic faith.

P1 affirmed the importance of ancestors, remarking, "In our Bemba tradition, ancestors hold a crucial place in our spiritual beliefs and are honoured for their guidance and protection." Adding to this discourse, P7 elaborated on the cosmological roles of ancestral spirits, stating:

Ancestral spirits serve two functions: they protect our communities from threats such as famine, drought, illness, and witchcraft, while also upholding traditional moral values and punishing those who deviate from them. So, honouring our ancestors is essential to our existence.

Belief and Practice in *Ubwanga* [Witchcraft, Sorcery and Magic]

The participants conveyed a firm belief in witchcraft, sorcery, or magic. They acknowledged the presence of witches and wizards within their communities. P13 expressed a personal conviction, stating, "I believe that the power of witchcraft influences my attitudes towards divination and the use of protective charms." P8 raised a concern regarding the community's response to witchcraft beliefs, mentioning that this often led to witch-hunting activities within the community, which was detrimental to the growth of the Catholic faith in the region. Moreover, P20 pointed to a fundamental conflict, stating, "Witchcraft practices contradict the teachings of the Catholic Church, which creates a conflict between traditional beliefs and the 'authentic' Catholic faith." P5 added, "The merging of traditional and Christian beliefs creates confusion for Christians like me, as I struggle to reconcile our cultural heritage with my religious identity." Adding an authoritative perspective, Priest D articulated the official stance of the Church, stating,

"The Catholic Church, as outlined in the Catechism, rejects the belief in magic, witchcraft, and sorcery; meanwhile, it emphasises the importance of personal faith in God and reliance on divine intervention for all needs."

Belief and Practice in Magical Traditional Rituals

The interviewees in this study expressed a pronounced belief in and engagement with magical rituals. This indicated a strong conviction in the ability of magic rituals to influence unseen forces and natural elements through specific ceremonies and practices. P2 articulated this belief by stating, "I seek mystical powers to impact various aspects of my life, such as education, exams, and competitions." P7 expanded on this idea, sharing her perspective on the intersection of health and spirituality, stating, "I often interpret health issues and mortality through a combination of supernatural and human explanations." Furthermore, P10 provided a strong example of why these rituals were practised, saying, "We perform funeral rites to prevent or delay death." Interestingly, the participants displayed thoughtful, emotional, and cultural connections to the rituals associated with life and death.

Belief and Practice in *Ulubuko* [Divination] and Ukucapa [Witch-Hunting]

A notable emphasis emerged regarding the beliefs and practices related to divination and witch-hunting among Bemba Catholics, as derived from interviews and the researcher's observations. Participants expressed widespread fear that the manifestations of mystical powers associated with these practices would have a significant impact on their daily lives and spiritual understanding. P13 poignantly expressed this sentiment: "The fear of witchcraft and my desire for protection against its perceived threats produce a sense of vulnerability and insecurity in me, and I believe among us Bemba Catholics." During an FGD, participants articulated how belief in *Ulubuko* [divination] and *Ukucapa* [witch-hunting] shaped their worldview and affected interactions with the spiritual realm from a Bemba cosmological perspective. The group collectively agreed that these beliefs served as lenses through which they interpreted spiritual events and phenomena. Despite the deeply rooted traditional beliefs, all participants acknowledged a significant conflict with Catholic teachings. P14 articulated this internal struggle: "I sometimes find that my reliance on traditional practices and beliefs conflicts with my Catholic faith." The participants reported that this experience constantly distorted the lines between traditional and Catholic beliefs, forcing many of them to reconcile these two identities within a spiritual context.

Belief and Practice in Traditional Healing and Medicine, and Health

Bemba Catholics demonstrated a deep-rooted belief in and practice of traditional healing and medicine, and were greatly influenced by their faith in God's healing powers, which they expressed using traditional methods. P16 expressed this integration by stating, "I believe in direct divine healing from God, but I also turn to traditional methods when immediate healing is not achieved." Participants indicated a dual approach to healing, where reliance on traditional remedies coexisted with spiritual beliefs. P9 noted, "I believe in the healing power of *Imiti ya Cikaya* [nature and herbs]." Seeking traditional healing is often shrouded in secrecy. For instance, P2 remarked, "I sometimes secretly practice herbal healing." Priest C emphasised that religious cosmologies encompass beliefs, rituals, experiences, ethics, and social norms that influence how individuals interpret their spiritual and physical world. P4 expressed that the discord between traditional spiritual practices and Catholic beliefs created difficulties for Bemba Catholics. Participants argued that in Bemba traditional thought, health transcends mere physicality and is viewed as a spiritual concern. Priest D elaborated that this belief encouraged individuals to engage in indigenous religious observances to address health issues. It is this holistic view of health that drove some Bemba Catholics to engage with these traditional institutions for healing and general welfare, argues Priest B.

DISCUSSION

Manifestation of Dual Religiosity through Engagement in Supernatural Beliefs and Practices

The dual religiosity of Bemba Catholics is evidenced in their beliefs and practices related to AIR's spiritual, supernatural, and magical systems. This includes their unwavering belief in God and intermediaries, a strong conviction in divine retribution, and the significance they place on oaths, vows, and covenants. Bemba Catholics exhibit a profound respect for their ancestors and active engagement in the alleged practices and suspicions of witchcraft, sorcery, and magic. These further include practices such as traditional magical practices, divination, witch-hunting, and the use of traditional healing and medicine. Bemba Catholics have shown that they often feel powerless in the face of issues like illness, omens, infertility, and negative dreams, particularly when traditional Christian methods such as prayer do not yield immediate results.

The Undisputable Belief in God and Intermediaries

Bemba Catholics' dual involvement in traditional and Catholic worldviews is evident in their reliance on prayer for protection and worship of God. They use indigenous methods to combat negative forces such as harmful magic, sorcery, and witchcraft, despite the Catholic Church's condemnation of such practices. The Bemba Catholic identity entails navigating their faith and cultural heritage, with traditional practices shaping their perception of divine power. The complex relationship between faith in God, traditional practices, and Church authority reflects a syncretic identity in which Catholic and indigenous beliefs coexist. They believe that harmful magic, sorcery, and witchcraft can be dealt with traditionally. This demonstrates how indigenous beliefs influence how Bemba Catholics respond to misfortune, despite the Church's disapproval. During difficult times, various people reflect on God's intentions and seek solace through prayer and divination. This demonstrates the importance of these practices during times of distress. Mbiti (1999) asserts that Africans view God as their ultimate protector and provider, seeking His help in times of trouble. They focus on prayer and offerings, seeking protection from harmful forces like magic, sorcery, witchcraft, and evil spirits.

Belief in *Icilandushi* (Divine Retribution), *Imilapo* (Cursing), *Ifilayo* (Oaths and Vows)

Dual religiosity among Bemba Catholics is manifested through their belief in divine retribution, cursing, oaths, and vows. These beliefs and practices are deeply ingrained in Bemba society and help to maintain social order. These beliefs and practices are deeply ingrained in Bemba society and help to maintain social order. The fear of divine retribution acts as a deterrent against undesirable behaviour and helps resolve disputes through traditional methods. Cursing is used to express displeasure or seek retribution for perceived injustices, reinforcing social norms within the community. The fear of spiritual consequences, combined with social control, creates a worldview where God punishes wrongdoers and influences concepts of justice. Cursing is the act of wishing harm on someone or expressing ill will through words. This demonstrates how spiritual beliefs shape morality. P3's account of divine retribution, "God has chosen to seek justice for me by holding my in-laws accountable," shows how belief in divine punishment serves as a moral recourse when formal justice systems fall short. This reflects indigenous ideas of retribution, offering an alternative justice framework based on spiritual authority. The

simultaneous adherence to both faiths reflects the enduring influence of indigenous beliefs on local religious practices.

This study asserts that from Bemba's perspective, divine retribution is deeply ingrained in cultural consciousness. When sorcery or witchcraft causes suffering, divine retribution becomes the final recourse for justice. As Mbiti (1999) observes, traditional religious practices are crucial and deeply rooted in collective consciousness, reinforcing the belief in divine punishment for transgressions as the most effective response to evil deeds. Practices such as cursing, oaths, vows, and divine retribution often conflict with Church teachings, which condemn these traditions. Notably, Pope Benedict's (2007) remarks on local customs and spirits among African Christians emphasised the tension between traditional beliefs and Church teachings, calling for Metanoia (true conversion) within African Catholicism.

Belief and Veneration of *Imipashi ya Fikolwe* (Ancestral spirits)

Bemba Catholics demonstrate dual religiosity through their belief in and veneration of ancestors. The belief that long-dead ancestors have supernatural powers significantly influences the lives of the Bemba Catholics. The dead exist among the living in a variant form, inherited through names, nature, and objects. Ancestor veneration represents a dual religious observance among Bemba Catholics. This emphasises the connection between Indigenous practices and formal Catholic faith. Ancestors are guardians of the community, protecting its members from harm and ensuring their well-being. They influence events in the physical world and are often called upon for guidance and assistance. Traditional practices such as divination, dream interpretation, and rituals are used to communicate with ancestors and seek their blessings. Ancestors are revered in Bemba traditions for their guidance and active contribution to the community's well-being.

Ancestral spirits are believed to protect communities from threats such as famine, drought, illness, and witchcraft, while upholding traditional morals. Ancestor veneration functions as protection and ethical regulation, positioning ancestors as moral enforcers within the Bemba ethnic's cosmology. For the Bemba Catholics, indigenous spirituality provides a foundation for social unity, moral order, and community resilience. The study has established that ancestor veneration is a crucial expression of dual religiosity among the Bemba Catholics, embodying not only spiritual protection but moral governance. Bemba Catholics hold beliefs that clash with the Catholic Church's teachings against animism and

ancestral worship, which creates conflict between their two belief systems. The belief system conflicts with Catholic teachings because its adherents practice elements that exist outside of the church's doctrine. Chanda & Cheyeka (2024b) affirm that ancestor veneration links human existence with the ancestral realm, emphasising its integral role in daily life. However, this indigenous belief and practice are tied to practices often not accepted by the Catholic Church. Despite these challenges, many honour their ancestral heritage while embracing their Christian faith.

Belief and Practice in *Ubwanga* (Witchcraft)

The beliefs, practice and suspicions of witchcraft, sorcery, and magic demonstrate Bemba Catholics' involvement with AIR. Some Bemba Catholics strongly believe in witchcraft, which influences their attitudes towards divination and protective charms. This belief frequently leads to witch-hunting activities within the community, which participants believe to be detrimental to the growth of the Catholic Church in the region. Belief in witchcraft, sorcery, or magic alongside Catholicism reflects dual religiosity. This affects individuals' perceptions and practices of AIR elements. While church doctrine officially rejects *Ubuloshi* [witchcraft] and Indoshi [witches/wizards], *Ing'anga* [traditional healers/diviners] and Bamuchapi [witch-hunters], these elements still influence personal and communal behaviour, especially when unity and protection are sought through these traditional means. Participants recognised the dissonance between their cultural attachments to some ancestral belief systems and the Church's authority. This blending of traditional and Christian beliefs confuses Christians as they seek a balance between cultural heritage and religious identity. Moreover, the Catholic Church firmly rejects ancestral veneration, magic, witchcraft, and sorcery concurrently (Benedict XVI, 2011; Udelhoven, 2022). It emphasises personal faith in God, reliance on divine intervention, devotion to God, and acceptance of His truth. Findings indicate that despite the Church's rejection of witchcraft and magic, they remain integral to Bemba spirituality.

Belief and Practice in Magical Traditional Rituals

The belief and practice of magical traditional rituals demonstrate their connection to the AIR elements. Bemba Catholics believe that through rituals and ceremonies, they can harness mystical powers that affect their lives, such as education, examinations, and competitions. For example, funeral rites are performed to prevent or delay death, reflecting their belief in driving death away from the family. These practices reveal a relationship

between indigenous cultural beliefs and Catholic traditions. Bemba Catholics seek mystical powers to impact various aspects of their lives, such as education, exams, and competitions. This illustrates a pragmatic use of traditional spirituality, where rituals serve as tools to manipulate unseen forces for personal advancement. This viewpoint illustrates a worldview in which supernatural powers are required to achieve tangible results, highlighting the importance of these practices among Bemba Catholics. Understanding health problems and death requires both supernatural and human explanations, demonstrating a framework that integrates traditional beliefs with modern medical knowledge.

This cultural hybridity suggests that traditional beliefs continue to influence perceptions of well-being and illness, even as modern health paradigms shift. Funeral rites to prevent or delay death demonstrate that rituals go beyond mourning to serve a protective purpose, which reinforces the belief that spiritual acts can influence vital outcomes. Participants' use of rituals illustrates how indigenous spiritual practices uphold social fabric and personal identities despite doctrinal condemnation. The persistence of traditional rituals, rooted in a belief in unseen powers, further reflects the resilience of indigenous spirituality in everyday life. Through funeral rites, Bemba Catholics express their cultural identity and seek security in the face of death. Mbiti (1999) suggests that the people of Africa can influence the unseen world and natural forces. Africans use rituals to call upon mystical forces to affect their lives, with death understood within an African context.

Belief and Practice in *Ulubuko* and *Ukucapa* (Divination and Witch-hunting)

The belief and practice of divination and witch-hunting show the Bemba Catholics' dual religiosity. The Bemba Catholic community's reliance on traditional practices and beliefs complicates its relationship with the Catholic faith. Bemba Catholics' worldview and interactions with the spiritual realm are influenced by their fear of witchcraft and the desire for protection, creating vulnerability and insecurity. The debate surrounding their religious practices reveals contrasting views on activities like divination and witch-hunting, alongside their Catholic faith. Notably, the fear of witchcraft and the desire for protection against its perceived threats produce a sense of vulnerability and insecurity in Bemba Catholics. Yet their reliance on traditional practices and beliefs conflicts with their Catholic faith of sole belief in God's providence. This conflict illustrates the broader sociocultural challenges of

reconciling indigenous beliefs with institutionalised religious doctrines, often resulting in spiritual ambiguity and identity negotiations. The focus group discussions (FGDs) revealed that traditional beliefs strongly influence Bemba Catholics' worldview and cultural integration. Conflict arises from recognising that these practices contradict Catholic teachings, representing an internal struggle. In this vein, Hinfelaar (2007), Cheyeka (2015), and Chanda & Cheyeka (2024a) contend that Bemba Catholics' participation in indigenous practices such as divination and witch hunting complicates their adherence to Christian beliefs.

Belief and Practice in Traditional Healing and Medicine

Dual religiosity among Bemba Catholics is also seen through their belief in and practice of traditional healing and medicine. Some Bemba Catholics believe in direct divine healing from God, but when this is not possible, they turn to traditional methods. They recognise the healing power of nature and herbs used by traditional healers. The practices of Bemba Catholics revealed potential clashes between social and religious norms as they sought assistance from traditional healers despite their Catholic belief in faith healing and modern Western medicine. The integration of traditional practices with Christianity demonstrates both commonalities and disagreements. Traditional healing resulted in social shame or religious condemnation, causing tension among those seeking assistance while remaining loyal to the Catholic Church. In the Bemba worldview, health is viewed as both a physical and spiritual problem in Bemba spirituality. It is a combination of spiritual wellness and physical health, reflecting its subtleties, which include healing, social, and economic components. Perceived within a socio-economic framework, health, religion, and commerce converge in this spirituality. While some Bemba Catholics believe in divine healing, they also acknowledge the healing power of nature and traditional practices.

The tension between these practices and Catholic beliefs creates challenges for indigenous Bemba Catholics. Belief in spirits and the spirit world influences perceptions of life challenges and practices such as consulting diviners and traditional healers, affecting their Christian faith and identity (Udelhoven, 2022). The clergy, particularly missionaries, condemned rituals and spirit possession as superstitious, resulting in the alienation of people with these beliefs from the church (Kaunda, 2023). The discord between traditional practices and Catholic beliefs creates difficulties for Bemba Catholics. Bemba Catholics have strong ties to indigenous cosmological beliefs about supernatural beings such as

ancestor spirits and spirits, as well as mystical powers that govern health, morality, and social bonds. The commitment to one God through formal Christianity leads to the prohibition of traditional practices, which Bemba Catholics continue to practice because they believe that indigenous beliefs deliver them spiritual benefits. The hybrid religious environment shows that indigenous cosmology exists as an active force which influences how African Christians practice their faith and identify themselves in modern times (Khosa-Nkatini, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The study of how dual religiosity manifests among Bemba Catholics in Muchinga Province during the post-centenary of the Catholic faith found that dual religiosity was evident in their participation, beliefs, and practices in social and communal contexts. This duality was further evidenced in the Bemba Catholics' belief and practice of indigenous spiritual beliefs. This encompassed belief in God and intermediaries, divine retribution, and ancestor veneration. Bemba Catholics' belief in and practice of supernatural and magical beliefs and practices further manifested dual religiosity. This is made up of belief in the manifestations of supernatural powers within the AIR cosmology, involvement in beliefs about witchcraft, sorcery, and magic, and the practices surrounding traditional magical rituals. Divination and healing practices, including beliefs and practices associated with divination, witch-hunting, traditional healing, and medicinal applications that Bemba Catholics believed in and practiced also manifested dual religiosity. Belief in intermediaries, Christian interpretations of divine justice and ancestral veneration also manifested this duality. The study shows how Bemba Catholics' indigenous beliefs merge with their Catholic faith, enhancing understanding of their religious practices and helping preserve their cultural traditions. The research results will enable church leaders to develop personalised pastoral assistance programmes which will address the specific needs of people who practice two different religions. The study results in useful insights which will help create solutions to religious practice disputes by building peaceful relationships between different religious belief systems and enabling leaders to respect cultural differences. The research shows that more research is needed to understand how Bemba Catholics practice their dual religious beliefs, which include both Christianity and AIR.

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