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The Christian Vocabulary

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Even more complex are the difficulties which the translator must solve with regard to the terms for "Spirit" and "Holy Spirit", and here perhaps more than anywhere else it is vitally necessary to be sure what the original texts say. Most primitive peoples know something about spirits. They inhabit trees and mountain-tops, they are shadowy wraiths of departed men and women. They are like the unsubstantial smoke of the domestic fire or the still reflection in the jungle pool. They cause all kinds of mischief if not placated, sickness to ill-favoured children, accident and misfortune to the overweening and proud. They are released from the body at death and linger on to haunt their lifetime abodes. Not only men but animals have their "spirit", the ox, the lion, the pig and the goat. These may be interchangeable under certain conditions, especially at death, and each may symbolize some psychic quality of man. No wonder the translator is embarrassed! In most instances he knows he must steer clear of the popular terms because of their speciousness and possible treachery. Occasionally, however, some word has been chosen which means "the disembodied spirit of a man". When used for the Spirit of God it carries with it the implication that God had died. From this it is easy for the native mind to imagine that the Holy Spirit is simply the disembodied spirit of a dead Jesus, while God Himself is equated with one of the pagan deities. Occasionally, however, patience is rewarded, and the most unpromising term made to serve the purposes of Christian thought. Translators who turn to the Greek find there a word which speaks of "breath", of life and movement where the underlying idea is not primarily of unsubstantiality but of divine influence and activity, not life-denying but life-giving, and in the case of the Holy Spirit always personal. Where the range of Biblical thought is so wide, translators have sometimes felt obliged simply to resort again to transliteration, perhaps using some adaptation of the word "Spiritus", but by common consent this is the least satisfactory expedient.

On the other hand, in the case of the Luba-Katanga language, close observation of a tribal custom provided a most suggestive term for Paraclete or Comforter. J. A. Clarke tells us how in early days the word used for "Comforter" suggested the relationship of mother and child. It was an unsatisfactory word but the best that could be found, until one day the missionary happened to be present when Kabongo, the village headman, was presiding over a court. One of the chief's advisers was continually addressed as "Nsenga-Mukwashi", which had long been thought to be a proper name. After the proceedings, however, it was discovered that this was a false conjecture, Nsenga really being a functional title to describe the one whose task it is to interest himself in the people and stand by them in trouble, in other words to plead their cause and be their advocate. So at last it was possible to give richness and meaning to such key passages as "If I go not away the Nsenga-Mukwashi will not come to you", and "If any man sin we have a Nsenga-Mukwashi with the Father".

Such characteristically Christian words as Love, Grace and Redemption have always been the subject of profound Biblical research. Even so it is easy to forget that such conceptions are essentially Christian, having no obvious counterpart in non-Christian religious systems.

The idea of Saviourhood and redemption has been variously treated and often with considerable success as many backward and exploited peoples have had good cause to meditate long on their need for deliverance. For example, in Luba-Katanga the first word used was derived from the background of slavery. Mr. Clarke tells how he first found the word when setting free by purchase a runaway slave boy. This first word, however, proved inadequate. Let Mr. Clarke tell in his own words how he found the perfect term: "There came a lad weeping, with body cruelly lacerated, saying to me, 'See how cruel my master is to me!' and I said, 'I will redeem you'. With piteous tears, he cried, 'You are not able to redeem me. A great price only can be paid for my redemption'. 'What shall I pay?' I asked, 'I can give calico and a gun if need be—I shall certainly redeem you', but once more came the cry, 'You are not able to redeem me, for you are no relation of mine. If you would help me, go to my father and mother, and bring them here with the ransom for my redemption. Only my parents or one of my relatives can redeem me. You may buy me, but I would be your slave'. So, after years of waiting, we found the word *Mukuji*, which brought to us the significance of the 'Kinsman-Redeemer'."

The Umbundu language also has a wealth of names for the Saviour. In the ancient days of slave-raids and of chattel slavery, the name used for one who delivered his fellows from captivity was *Upopeli*. The same word was used for one who freed a man from his debts. What better word for the Saviour of mankind? Another word used is *Onjovoli*, "the deliverer, the opener up of the spring-time". In a description of the beauty of the African highlands at this season of the year, Dr. Tucker, the Umbundu translator, writes: "Tropical twilights brief but beautiful: sun-

sets and sunrises which surpass the power of painters to reproduce on canvas; the bewitchery of the tropical moon; the songs of birds of varied hue and class; the abounding insect life; the variety of tree, hard and soft wood; lovely flowers, gladioli and orchids, violets and begonias, asparagus ferns and tree ferns..... Then, too, the midday hush when all life seems to be resting under the blazing sun overhead..... The lovely spring has come after five months of dry, cold weather, when all the trees seem to be liberated and burst forth into a glorious array with abounding colours; greens of varied hue, rust, brown, gold, yellow, silver, pink and red. Then comes the rain, bringing new life and hope to man and beast". This wonderful season is called in the picturesque Umbundu language *Onjovoli*, and Christ is called *Onjovoli*—the spring-time herald, the bringer of the new life, the passing away of the deadness of the winter season.

The Luba-Katanga word for "Faith" in its New Testament connotation is *Twi tabilo*. This word means "echo", and the way in which it came to be adapted to the New Testament meaning gives a very good idea of the way in which the translator goes to work. One day a missionary was on a journey through wild and mountainous country. At midday he called his African porters to halt, and as they lay resting in the shade from the merciless heat of the sun, an African picked up a stone and sent it ricocheting down the mountain-side into the ravine below. After some seconds the hollow silence was broken by a plunging, splashing sound from the depths of the dark river-bed. As the echo died away the African said in a wondering whisper "*Twi tabilo*, listen to it". So was a precious word captured for the service of the Gospel in its Luba Christian form. *Twi tabilo*—"faith which is the echo of God's voice in the depths of human sinful hearts, awakened by God Himself, the answer to his own importunate call". The faith that is called into being by the divine initiative, God's own gift to the responsive heart! Another aspect of the word is beautifully illustrated in Shambala, where the word used means literally "to hold as when a wife surrenders her child to the chief for safe-keeping". Its meaning is thus to trust someone with your most precious possession. The Luba-Katanga word for unbelief provides an admirable commentary on St. Paul's description of the state of heart and mind he found so prevalent in the pagan world. The word is *Lugulala*, which is a reversive form of a verb which means "to say" or "to do" or "to ask". To the Luba people, therefore, an unbeliever is a *gainsayer*, an undoer, one who feels no need of God's favour or blessing, and so one who flies in the face of God, seeking to frustrate His purpose, who makes the Word of God of non-effect, bringing to naught His counsels. Yet another colourful phrase is *Maboko abibi*, which is used to describe the measureless bounty of God's goodness. It speaks of one who gives with both hands, and behind the phrase is the picture of a humble suppliant who draws near to petition the chief. In order to win the royal favour he brings a gift, and no matter whether it be great or small, precious or common, he presents it with both hands as a token that he gives without reserve.