

A Pastoral Response to Haitian Vodou:

A Nightmare for Religious Leaders Seeking True Converts to
Christianity

By
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Thesis under the direction of professors

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To my faithful wife Jardine and my lovely daughter Kedia.

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Abbreviations

NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
ECUSA	Episcopal Church of United States of America
CTC	Cholera Treatment Center
BCP	The Book of Common Prayer

Abstract

Thesis under the direction of professors:

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Syncretism between Vodou and Christianity is an important and current topic in the churches of Haiti. There seem to be conflicting ideas on how Vodou entered the Roman Catholic system and how the church should approach this subject. The church finds itself subjected to the same conflicts the pioneers of Christianity in Haiti first faced. The questions arise from two different ideologies of worship within systems that both use icons.

The church in Haiti, like all other churches, found itself in the midst of these two conflicting ideologies. Haiti has always faced a tension between the rich and the poor, and the High church and Low Church. Add in the implication of government in church business and the influence of other cultures and you can see why there are still few answers.

Haiti has long been in a situation of language conflict. Historically, the people have had to know many languages at the same time: Creole, French, Spanish and English. Early Haitians did not find it easy to speak and write in all four languages. They also felt that these languages, namely French, Spanish and English, were imposed on them. This is why Haitians find it very hard to understand missionaries and those who bring the Word in other languages. The communication dilemma makes victims of those who would be followers.

Education at all levels plays a major role in church relations. In Haiti, most (and certainly the best ones) of schools are run by nuns, priests and pastors. We must reeducate church leaders to teach a new approach to pastoral, evangelistic and ministerial care. In this quest to solve the dilemma, this thesis explains the many limiting beliefs that Haitians hold. Their own fear of

black divinity pushes them away from answers. This thesis will describe Haiti and the many barriers to its development.

Approved:

Date:

Introduction

One event that marked my life is the following story. When I was four, I was an acolyte¹ in my home church in the town of Croix des Bouquets, Haiti. I followed my father, a lector² in the Episcopal Church. I remember watching someone leave Vodou and come to the Christian faith. It was a most interesting event to watch how the converted person let my father burn and break everything that belonged to their Vodou past. The congregation understood that the person had made the decision to repent and be converted to Christianity. It is a hard decision for some people, because they are scared of Satan's reaction. Vodou's influence on Christianity in Haiti has been one of the most debated issues in the church.

In Sunday sermons and homilies, conversion to Christianity is always a key point. Many theologians have been thrown into seeking better ways and approaches to responding to syncretism. The fear of Satan puts people in pews.

This paper is meant for those who want to better understand ministry in Haiti and its particular challenges. I hope its ideas will be helpful for fellow Christian professionals working in Haiti. I also want it to be useful for missionaries from all over the world who plan to work in and experience third world countries –especially Haiti. Right now, Haiti is dreaming of new institutions and the development of its people, education and religion. I am using materials that can help many Christian denominations, but I write as an Episcopal priest who has been working in Haiti for 20 years in the field of pastoral ministry and education at all levels.

¹ Acolyte: In contemporary Anglicanism, a general term which covers not only servers, torchbearers, and lighters of candles but also crucifers, thurifers, and banner-bearers. Acolytes are mentioned as a minor order (along with porter, lectors, and exorcists) as early as 252, but like lectors, they are not ordained. Armentrout, Don S. and Robert Boak Slocum, An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church. (New York: Publishing Incorporated, 1999), p. 2.

² Lector is a layperson trained in reading scripture that is appointed by the clergy in charge of the congregation to read lessons or lead the prayers of the person. Ibid. P. 298.

My thesis is on the conversion to Christianity. Talking about conversion means I will begin with some general definitions, including my own of conversion as a “twice-born experience.” To be in the world, human beings feel a need to be connected to their personal history, their ancestors. I will also describe the implantation of imported rites and beliefs that make the situation of the Christian believers and religious leaders complicated. I will focus my attention on the Episcopal Church in Haiti, and how it has faced the Roman Catholic Church. I will also describe the Catholic Church’s relationship with the State of Haiti, which provides an interesting look at the blend of politics and religion in the country. Next I will take up conversion in the context of Haiti’s history with the dangers (past and present) of syncretism. The first missionaries or chaplains from the colonists onward presented their understandings of the good news, without considerations of the values of traditional imported African beliefs and practices.

I will define Vodou and its origin. I will explain the danger in practicing it as a religion.³ I think of conversion as a sudden break, not a gradual process. A complete change is needed. I will discuss why the Church has a vital role to play in initiating conversion. I also hope to give a critical descriptive analysis on Haiti’s mixed identity: it is a country with 200 years of discrimination and bad governance with some important and positive cultural traits. Social justice is also an issue in Haiti. I am often reminded of Loretta Capeheart’s argument that social justice is concerned not with the narrow focus of what is just for the individual alone, but what is just for the social whole. Social justice must include an understanding of the interaction within and among peoples.⁴

³ Anderson, Jeffrey E. Hoodoo, Voodoo and Conjure, a Handbook. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), p. 77.

⁴ Capeheart, Loretta and Dragon Milovanovic. Social Justice: Theories and Movements. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

In the second chapter, I will explain conversion in Haiti as a dialogue between ministers and lost people. Those who are lost still practice Vodou and don't seem converted at all. In the third and last chapter, I plan to share ideas to assist other ministers in the pastoral care of those who are not yet born again.

Chapter I: Religion and Culture in Haiti

1. Conversion: Definition

Conversion has long been of central importance in the life of the church. Famous conversions have been documented in the lives of Christians as early as St. Paul, St. Anthony of the Desert and St. Augustine. It has been argued that Christ himself experienced something of a conversion in the redirection of his life after his experience of baptism in the Jordan by John.⁵

Zacchaeus⁶ giving back all the money that he took wrongly and deciding to become a new person is an example of repentance followed by conversion. Conversion takes it a step further and involves a person shedding their past self so that Christ's identity can stand in their place before God's judgment. We see examples of conversion to Christianity throughout the New Testament. Acts, in particular, shows us two examples that related directly to the struggles of conversion in Haiti.

In Acts 2, the apostles, led by Peter, spoke to the people of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. When the apostles could speak to the crowd in their multitude of languages, they were stunned. Peter preached the gospel and when the crowd *"heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'"* (Acts 2:37) The crowd wanted to know how to know more about Jesus. Peter explained that repentance and baptism in the name of Christ would forgive their sins. He continued to preach and explain the

⁵ Montefiore, Hugh. Awkward Questions on Christian Love. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), p. 52-53; quoted in Conn, Walter. Christian Conversion. (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).

⁶ Zacchaeus is a character of the New Testament, quoted in the Gospel of Luke 19 :1-10 as a collector of Jericho, which would have allowed Jesus to his home. « ALLOWED JESUS TO HIS HOME » DOES NOT MAKE SENSE IN ENGLISH.

promise of grace. He added to *“Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” (Acts 2:40)*
“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (2:42).

Because the crowd believed, they were forgiven. They were truly converted when they devoted themselves to learning about Christ and his sacraments.

Continuing in Acts, in Chapter 8 we learn of Phillip’s preaching and the Samaritans’ conversion. In Samaria, a man named Simon practiced magic and sorcery, and had the people convinced he was a magician or prophet (8:9). When Phillip came and preached the good news of the Kingdom, the people asked to be baptized into the name of Jesus. Even Simon the magician shed his past life and was baptized. This example is important to Haiti, whose population is gripped by a belief in Vodou and sorcery. Simon could be seen as a typical, Haitian convert. Convinced that Christianity was a new trick to add to his bag, Simon entreated the apostles, “Give me also this power” (8:19). But Peter scolded him, calling him to repent of the evil intentions in his heart. Simon’s sin was in the “also.” The gift of God is not like the gifts of sorcery; they are attained freely and wholly or not at all. God is jealous, and he will not suffer idols to be placed above him.

Theologically, Christian conversion means to be “born again.” Walter Conn calls conversion a psychological process of unifying a divided self,⁷ or personal, cultural and political phenomena in the contemporary life.⁸ The word “conversion,” Bernard Haring reminds us, means “returning home.” He says, “The good news is the possibility of returning home to God’s

⁷ Conn, Walter. Christian Conversion. New York: Paulist Press, 1989.

⁸Ibid.

unconditional love. To accept this good news, of course, one requires a vivid sense of the wretchedness of sin and the need of redemption. Homecoming is for the homesick.”⁹

Conversions come in different forms and in different ways. Paul Tillich calls them a “turning away from injustice to justice, from inhumanity, from idols to God.”¹⁰ And John R.W. Stott, a fellow-Anglican with Evangelical leanings like my own, defines conversion as:

...A personal response to Jesus Christ, committing ourselves unreservedly to him as our Savior and Lord...He asked his first disciples, and he has asked every disciple since, to give him their thoughtful and total commitment. Nothing else will do.¹¹

My own theology is like Stott’s: Christian conversion is a radical change of life from wretchedness to redemption by means of the fundamental Grace-aided choice to commit one’s whole life to Jesus Christ, God’s son.

Another definition for conversion is this: a return to the original nature that God had created before the fall. According to my theology (like Stott’s, a Protestant theology), human nature after the fall shows itself radically defective and unable to take the first step toward salvation:

I can still remember my own perplexity when as a boy I said my prayers and tried to penetrate into God’s presence. I could not understand why God seemed shrouded in mists and I could not get near him. He seemed remote and aloof. I know the reason now. Isaiah has given me the answer:

Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,
Or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;
But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God,

⁹ Haring, Bernard. “The Characteristics of Conversion,” This Time of Salvation. A. Swindler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 217-228; quoted in Conn, Walter. Christian Conversion. (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Tillich, Paul. Systematic Theology III. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 219.

¹¹ Stott, John R.W. Basic Christianity. (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), p. 107-108.

And your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.¹²

We are tempted to say to God, as in the Book of Lamentations, “Thou hast wrapped thyself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through¹³.” But in fact God is not responsible for the cloud. We are. Our sins blot out God’s face from us as effectively as the clouds do the sun.¹⁴

This means conversion is more than a change of mind: it represents a mysterious change of our whole human nature, so that we now have the possibility to love God and to follow his commandments.

In this thesis I follow the ideas of William James who describes in psychological terms what Stott and I believe about human nature. Souls who turn to Christ out of their old, inadequate human nature are “twice-born”:

In the religion of the twice born ... the world is a double-storied mystery. Peace cannot be reached by the simple addition of positives and elimination of negatives from life. Natural good is not simply insufficient in amount and transient, there lurks a falsity in its very being. Canceled as it all is by death if not by earlier enemies, it gives no final balance, and can never be the thing intended for our lasting worship. It keeps us from our real good, rather; and renunciation and despair of it are our first step in the direction of the truth. There are two lives, the natural and the spiritual, and we must lose the one before we can participate in the other.¹⁵

What does the process of turning to God look like? In Stott’s words,

It is by the Spirit of Christ that we can become transformed into the image of Christ, as we keep looking steadfastly toward him. We thus have our part to play, in repentance, faith, and discipline, but essentially holiness is the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

¹² Isaiah 59:1-2.

¹³ Lamentations 3:44.

¹⁴ Stott, John R.W. P. 74-75. (This contrasts with what Roman Catholics and some other, less evangelically oriented Episcopalians believe. Namely, that grace builds, or can build, on human nature, using human nature as a base).

¹⁵ James, William. The Varieties of Religious Experience: A study in Human Nature. (New York: Random House [The Modern Library], 1999), p. 163.

¹⁶ Stott, John R.W. P. 101-102.

William James describes this sense of the “givens” of conversion like this:

Throughout the height of it (the subject of conversion undoubtedly seems to himself a passive spectator or undergoes of an astounding process performed on him from above ... Theology, continuing this tack with the doctrines of election and grace, has concluded that the Spirit of God is with us at these dramatic moments in a particularly miraculous way, unlike what happens at any other juncture in our lives. At that moment, (the subject) believes, an absolutely new nature is breathed into us, and we become spectators of the very substance of the Deity.¹⁷

How much freedom do human beings have to say “yes” to God’s grace? Like Stott, and like James’ description just quoted, I believe human freedom is real but relatively limited. In the moment of God’s call (to turn for example from Vodou to the real God) the Spirit gives us the possibility to add our “yes” or our “no.” After this moment there is something new in the human nature: the possibility to cooperate with God and to choose the good. God now sees a saved human being who leads life on a new level of existence.¹⁸

Now we have arrived at an understanding of the Church’s role as a central instrument of God’s grace in the process of conversion. According to our savior, this is the church’s vocation: to unify human beings and cultures with one true God:

Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples; baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.¹⁹

The church stays both a community and the collection of human beings that compose it. Within the Church, conversion is offered to individuals. Without responding to this vocation to

¹⁷ James, William. P. 222.

¹⁸ Lane, Dermot A. The Experience of God (An Invitation to Do Theology). New York: Paulist Press, 1981, p. 14.

¹⁹ Matthew 28:19-20.

offer salvation to individuals, the church will not stay healthy as a community. This is especially true in Haiti because Christianity is something imported. Christianity as you see it in Haiti is very often not a radical Christianity (right down to the roots) but it can be a shallow, superficial, or a syncretistic mix.

But to explain the syncretism, we have to know what Vodou is and how it developed and still develops in Haiti.

2. Review of Haitian History

If we want to make a brief history of Haiti, we must begin with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492. He nicknamed the island (which now includes both Haiti and the Dominican Republic) “Hispaniola.” The independence of Haiti came in 1804, which some historians take as the first period of the history of the nation. It is less clear when Haiti loses its nickname, “Pearl of the West Indies,” and becomes the poorest country of the Western Empire. This phase becomes a tool for NGOs, religious leaders and politicians who find funding by appealing to the world’s sympathy.

Christopher Columbus²⁰ lands in Haiti in 1492 and Haiti becomes a colony run by slave labor. In 1791, slaves and anti-colonists begin a bloody insurrection. The night of August 22 marks the opening of the war for independence, led by Haitian hero Toussaint Louverture. The Proclamation of General Freedom is announced in 1793 and is seen as a rapid culmination of the

²⁰ Marianne Mahn –lot, *La découverte de l’Amerique* Flammarion, 1999. Christopher Columbus: December 5th, 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered Haiti. Columbus landed near today's city of Cap-Haitien and claimed the island for Spain, naming it Hispaniola. Before Christopher Columbus arrived, the island that is now Haiti and the Dominican Republic was inhabited by the Taíno, an Arawakan people, who variously called their island Ayiti, Bohio, or Kiskeya.

insurrectional movement initiated two years earlier.

Leader Louverture was never able to see his people's victory, as he died in Fort-de-Joux, France in 1803. Still, indigenous forces were victorious over French troops at the battle of Vertières.²¹ Haiti proclaims its independence from France on January 1, 1804. Jean Jacques Dessalines,²² the commander of the independence army, was assassinated. Upon Dessalines' death, Haiti splits into two rival states from 1806 until 1820. A western republic emerges under the leadership of Alexandre Pétion.²³ In the North, Henry Christophe²⁴ founds a republic, which becomes a kingdom in 1811. He crowns himself king.

In 1820 Jean-Pierre Boyer,²⁵ a mulatto general, unifies Haiti and rules the island until 1843. During 1825, France and Haiti sign an agreement under which France recognizes the Republic of Haiti as a legitimate state. In return, Haiti agrees to pay an indemnity of 150 million francs. Haiti does not finish paying the debt until 1938.²⁶

Under the presidency of Rivière Herard, the division of the eastern part of the island is

²¹ Vertières: The Battle of Vertières (in Haitian Creole *Batay Vètèyè*), the last major battle of the Second War of Haitian Independence, the final part of the Haitian Revolution under François Capois. It was fought between Haitian rebels and French expeditionary forces on 18 November 1803 at Vertières.

²² Jean Jacques Dessalines: (born c. 1758, West Africa — died Oct. 17, 1806, Jacmel, Haiti) Emperor of Haiti who drove out the French in 1804.

²³ Steeve Coupeau., The History of Haiti. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press). 2007 Alexandre Pétion was born in Port-au-Prince to a black mother and a French father, Pascal Sabès. Pétion was one of the signers of the Haitian Declaration of Independence.

²⁴ Ibid .Henry Christophe (also *Henri Christophe*; Kreyòl: *Anri Kristòf*) (1767 Grenada –1820 Milot, Haiti)— an important general of the Haitian revolutionary army under Toussaint Louverture, and later emperor *King Henry I* of Haiti (*Henry Ier*), after he had himself crowned ruler of the Northern part of Haiti in 1811

²⁵ Jean-Pierre Boyer (possibly February 15, 1776 – July 9, 1850), a native of Saint-Domingue, was a soldier, one of the leaders of the Haitian Revolution, and President of Haiti from 1818 to 1843.

²⁶ Madiou Thomas, Histoire d'Haiti volume 3, imprimé de J. Courtois, Port au Prince, 1848

completed in 1844. The Dominican Republic emerges as an independent state. After five years, Haiti again becomes an empire under Faustin Soulouque. He rules the country from 1847 to 1859.

A year later, an agreement called the “Concordat” was signed in Rome, on March 28, and was ratified by the Haitian Senate on August 1, 1860. After decades of unstable presidencies and leadership, the U.S. Marines occupy Haiti at the beginning of the 20th century. This period brought some violence but relative stability for the country. The marines left in 1934.

The departure of Elie Lescot culminates the revolution of 1946. The Central Censure office declares François Duvalier the winner of the election on September 22, 1957. During his period in office, the President François Duvalier proclaims himself president for life with a self-attributed right to designate his successor. In accordance, the presidency of Haiti was transferred to his son, Jean Claude Duvalier in 1971. The junior Duvalier pursues the dictatorial policies of his father.

Pope Jean Paul II visited Haiti in 1980. He advocates for reformation: “Some things have to change here,” he announces.

In 1986, the Duvalier dynasty ends when Jean Claude Duvalier flees to France. The military-dominated National Governing Council easily rises to power. In 1990, Jean Bertrand Aristide, a popular Haitian minister to the people, was elected as the President of Haiti. In September 1991, a military coup deposes the President of Haiti. In 1994, President Aristide was reinstalled in office with the support of American troops. One year later, it’s the election of Rene Préval as President. After five years Aristide was again elected president of the country. Aristide fled the country after weeks of uncertainty caused by demonstrations by unarmed students, coupled with a separatist armed insurrection.

After Aristide's departure for exile on February 29, 2004, judge Boniface Alexandre, the president of the Court of Cassation, Haiti's Supreme Court, took the oath for the office of the Prime minister and as Provisory President of the Republic of Haiti. Rene Préval was then elected president.

Under the presidency of Rene Préval, the country moved slowly toward stability. Widespread poverty had fueled human insecurity and political violence. During Préval's government, there was a horrible earthquake in 2010 that destroyed Port-Au-Prince and in effect the entire country's ability to function. The U.S. government formed a coalition with two former U.S. presidents, G.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, at its head. This coalition collected billions of dollars to reconstruct the country. Many hundreds of NGOs had come to help Haiti. The quantity of work they are still doing has no precedent, but even if they work together for dozens of years, they will never be able to relocate the thousands of homeless people existing in the capital city. Many of those people did not have adequate housing before the earthquake.

Haiti is a country full of surprises. Before the country could even begin to find solutions to the many challenges posed by the earthquake, more problems appeared. While we were searching for solutions, the term of President Préval ran out and the broken country had to organize elections. In their vulnerable state, the Haitian people engaged in the election and flocked to the polls to choose among the numerous candidates. We pause here to mention that it was during this election time that the evil cholera first reared its ugly head and the work of the NGOs was diverted yet again, as they opened many CTCs to treat people who were ill with cholera. The weak government doesn't have the resources to manage the situation, so the NGOs had give food, water, and treatment to the afflicted while protecting themselves.

Violence surrounding the elections threatens the safety of many citizens. Add to that the return of two former Haitian presidents (Aristide and Duvalier) to further destabilize the country. The first to return was Jean Claude Duvalier, a dictator charged with many crimes. Then a few weeks later, Haiti saw the return of Jean Bertrand Aristide who was pushed into exile twice.

The presidential election results were tallied and re-tallied to see an unexpected candidate emerge victorious, Mr. Michel Joseph Martelly.²⁷ We can say it was a bit surprising, because this man has no experience in politics. His election shows the extreme disillusionment of the Haitian people with regards to established politics.

Meanwhile, the two former presidents, who were the cause of so much controversy and violence, are now sitting comfortably in their homes as if they were any other Haitians with little consequence waged from the justice system.

The Leadership Crisis in Haiti Today

Today, we see crises of human being. The values of our young people are clearly seen in their choice of clothing, language, entertainment and behavior. Their anti-Christ or new age beliefs and practices in our society have reached a point that defines them as values. Some say that our youth is a lost generation; others argue that society is decaying and schools are failing. Institutions of socialization (family, church school) have failed miserably.²⁸ Everywhere one expects to see honest citizens, seriously concerned about the problems of countries. Instead, we

²⁷ Michel Joseph Martelly (born 12 February 1961), also known by his stage name "Sweet Micky", is a Haitian politician, former musician and businessman, currently the incumbent President of Haiti.

²⁸ "Haiti Country Profile. " BBC News. 18 October 2011.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1202772.stm

are surprised to encounter dishonest and reckless individuals. Some are also aggressive, bitter, and hateful, making them jealous and perverted.

The use of alcohol and drugs has become normal for a big part of our youth. It is even common to see young people hold a bottle of rum in their pocket during their classes at school. And to think that sometimes it goes further. The possession of a firearm, sometimes brand new, is becoming a very normal thing for young people. Envy, hate, breaking, stealing and killing become as popular as national sports. I offer a single expression to describe all this devastating and evil action: the erosion of values. Indeed, the Haitian society is suffering through an unprecedented crisis of values. One wonders what to do to get back on track.

We need collective awareness. First, alert the elites. Then, reformat the collective consciousness through education in all directions. We will finally awaken the conscience of every citizen through the development of citizenship, ethics, and training based on the doctrine of Christian ethics. We will emphasize the duties of man toward himself and toward his fellow men.

Indeed, there is no nativist conception of patriotism and core values. The human being learns imitation and repetition. These qualities are the result of education itself. The forgers of consciousness are the parents, teachers, church authorities, and directors of conscience. It is also the work of any conscious citizen who wants to see their country evolve differently. We must help the young Haitian acquire virtues by first identifying our values and our traditional ancestral defects, our morals and values.²⁹

²⁹ Jean Miguelite Maximé, *Les Valeurs Dans La Société Haïtienne: Entre Crise et Inexistence*, June 2011
Imprimerie Henri Deschamps Port au Prince

Christians look at these events and problems and became even more zealous. Churches are full of new converts. They are praying harder and preparing for the imminent return of their redeemer. For the Vodouists, they too become more fervent seekers of spiritual help. They seek out the “loa” or Vodou spirits to find answers to the series of hardships. Those who used to worship the “loa” sporadically have become dedicated followers.

3. How Vodou Began in Haiti³⁰

We must begin with a definition of Vodou. According to Claudine Michel and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, “Vodou is a blend of various African traditions with Catholicism.”³¹ Jean Price-Mars called it a syncretism that is an amalgam of various religious traditions.³² If we go further, we find that Milou Rigaud described the word Vodou as the following:³³

The clearest explanation of the essential idea is that vo means “introspection” and du means “into the unknown”. The term vo-du is drawn from the language of the Fons.³⁴

In Haiti, Vodou evolved in a unique sphere. More details will follow in this thesis but the first Vodou practitioners were, in fact, not Haitians. There were the blacks who came from Africa to Hispaniola to supplant the Indians’ work at the beginning of the sixteenth century. This was during the Spanish era, under Ovando’s government. In the eyes of the Europeans, blacks represented a brute work force, capable of completing the Indians’ work as the natives died off to disease and overwork. Juan Gines de Sepulveda, an apologist for colonization, wrote that non-Europeans belonged to a lower class of human beings, “natural slaves.”³⁵ According to James G Leyburn, in the “Haitian people,” Vodou began when the first batches of slaves arrived in Saint

³⁰ What follows in this section is drawn from the common knowledge of the people. Specific citations as needed for specific facts will be added.

³¹ Claudine, Michel and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith. Vodou in Haitian life and culture, Invisible Powers. Palgrave, Macmillan.

³² Largey, Michael. Vodou Nation: Haitian Art, Music and Cultural Nationalism. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

³³ Rigaud, Milo. Secrets of Voodoo. (New York: City Lights Book Press, 1969).

³⁴ Thesaurus Dictionary: People of southern Benin and adjacent parts of Togo. They speak a dialect of Gbe, a Kwa language of the Niger-Congo language family.

³⁵ Gutierrez, Gustavo. The Power of the Poor in History. (Mary Knoll: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 195.

Domingue.³⁶ Therefore, the exploitation of the people was not considered an abuse or a sin in God's eyes. A large Negro population was brought into Santo Domingo, uprooted from their own cultures.

But when they arrived in Haiti, they were constrained in many ways, one of which was in the area of religion. Torn out of Africa to become slaves, they only really knew Western culture as the slave trade. They did not know the Christian religion of their masters at all, and they never really accepted the word of God or the Gospel of salvation. Although they were not allowed to practice their religious beliefs, they did not want to totally reject their religion. They developed their own strategy of religious practice, while at the same time following the Catholicism that white masters and priests forced them to practice during the day. The slaves just moved their own religion to the night hours.

A. -Haitian Context³⁷

Throughout its history, Haiti has sought to express its solidarity with other Latin American peoples who struggle for independence. The continuous movement of populations across the Haitian/Dominican border -although a cause of constant friction between the two governments – has resulted in a symbiotic mix of the two peoples and has enhanced their unique Latin American character. Haitian Creole, one of the national languages of Haiti, combines a vocabulary from 17th-century French, Spanish, and indigenous languages, with West African syntax and dialects. It is certainly its own language, but one can see the influences of history and other languages on Creole. Haiti is most renowned for its visual arts, especially its paintings.

³⁶ Metraux, Alfred. Voodoo in Haiti. (New York: Schocken Books), p. 25.

³⁷ The World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>.

Vibrant colors and designs with scenes of daily life tell the story of a people that has never given up its faith in life and in God.

B. -Haiti's Traditional Religion: Vodou

Many visitors and missionaries confuse Haiti's traditional religion (Vodou) with black magic (Voodoo). For anthropologists like Leslie Desmanges,³⁸ Vodou is a syncretism of numerous African traditional agrarian religions and of French and Spanish Catholicism that came together in the crucible of the colonial period. He states, "On the basis of similarities, Catholic saints were identified with or transfigured into Vodou gods."³⁹ Thus Ezily, the beautiful water goddess of love in Vodou, whose origins are found in the African goddess of the same name Whydah, in Dahomey (or Benin), and in Oshun in Nigeria, becomes the Virgin Mary. Benin's python god Damballah becomes Saint Patrick because of the story of the triumph of Patrick over the snakes of Ireland in Catholic tradition. Legba, the guardian of destiny who holds the keys to the doors of the underworld, becomes Saint Peter, and so forth.⁴⁰

Many people come with the question upon arrival to Haiti: are we going to face a religious war in Haiti? Through all the various definitions of religion, I choose David L. Edwards' definition as follows: "An attitude of awe toward God or gods, or the super natural, or the mystery of life, accompanied by beliefs and affecting basic patterns of individual and group behavior."

³⁸ Desmanges, Leslie. Professor of Religion at Trinity College, CT.

³⁹ The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti. 1992, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Ibid. P.10-11.

The leaders of the Christian religion have often made statements against Vodou. An angry crowd even attacked with stones people who held a Vodou ceremony in the slum of Cite Soleil to honor victims of the earthquake that devastated Haiti on January 12, 2010. Dr. Max Beauvoir, one of the most famous ougan (Vodou priests) in Haiti, commented on the incident, "Most of this has to do with the aid coming in. Many missionaries oppose Vodou. I hope this does not start a war of religions, because many of our practitioners are being harassed now unlike any other time that I remember."

Vodou combines beliefs and rituals rooted in Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Ghana, and Congo – where most Africans imported by the French of that period came from – blended together and combined with Catholic iconography. Haitian Vodou was born and evolved in a context of oppression. During the colonial era, the French administration of St. Domingue made it illegal for slaves to gather and worship their African gods. Vodou was then practiced in secrecy. Even after the independence of Haiti, practitioners of Vodou were persecuted by the zeal of the Catholic Church and its government allies. Until now, after the devastating earthquake, Vodou priest and priestesses have had some trouble practicing their clandestine acts.

Under the Duvalier dictatorship in the 1960s and thereafter, Vodou came out of hiding and assumed a more direct and public role. At the same time, the dictatorship used its evil twin (Vodou) to terrorize and subjugate the population. Vodou was recognized as an official religion in April 2003 under the leadership of Jean Bertrand Aristide. Its leaders could celebrate weddings, baptisms and funerals, which had never happened before.⁴¹ There is also a recognized National Association of Vodou priests (Ougan) in Haiti, and Vodou is gradually losing its

⁴¹ Official information, but published by this site: <http://www.infos-paranormal.net>. "Le Voodoo sort de l'ombre."

clandestine, covert and magical character to become a more mainline, open and legitimate expression of spirituality and religiosity.

In Vodou, there is one god, the Great Master, who is the creator of the whole universe. Under this “Great Master” reigns a multitude of small gods (Loas) which provide a link between Him and the temporal realm where human beings exist. These Loas are intercessors, seen much in the same way as the Catholic Church sees the Saints. In effect, Haitian Vodou loas are represented by Catholic images and statues of saints. They are also represented by incantative images called “Vêvê,” which are esoteric drawings that incorporate various symbols and “magical” signs which are characteristic of each Loa. True to their African roots, Vodou rituals give an important place to ancestor worship.

The coexistence of Vodou and Christianity in the context of Haiti as a whole and within the minds of many Haitians accounts for the nonfictional character found in many, torn apart between the rational, the spiritual, and the magical. Together with the Creole language, Haitian Vodou is one of the defining characteristics of Haitian culture, they say.

Haiti’s culture is a blend of many traditions. The elements that form values are drawn from the social formation and history of the medium. Haiti, the first independent black republic in the world, is, in the words of Francois Leon Hoffman, “the flagship of the African identity and that of Latin, the torch is both an African culture in the making and a French language that must protect the flame.”⁴²

What is surprising in Haitian Vodou is the blend between the sacred and the profane. For example, slaves were required to be baptized but they also fully incorporated Vodou acts into their daily lives. They performed in drum ceremonies and sacrificed animals. Traveling ministers

⁴² Hoffmann, Leon-Francois. Haiti, Couleurs, Croyances, Créoles. (Haïti : Ed. Henry Deschamps et les ed. du CIDIHCA, 1990), p. 59.

would praise the Lord for the slaves' faithfulness, when really their model of faith was used to disguise their celebration of Vodou gods. Celebrating an apostle or an evangelist or a faithful in the church; when you think that pilgrim travel all over the country to praise the Lord for giving them this model of faith is instead a way to feed or to celebrate their gods of Vodou.⁴³ Worse still, they did match their celebrations with Christian holidays like the Epiphany, Easter and Christmas.

The slaves had demonstrated an ability to adapt to their environment. Indeed, the settlers prevented any practice of African beliefs, Vodou, and what they perceived to be fetishes. Slaves were converted to Christianity as soon as they arrived in Santo Domingo, not by true spirit of socialization or civilization, but for fear of fallout from an attack from a distance of African deities. This was not apostolic zeal by the whites of Santo Domingo who prohibited Vodou, but conversion for security reasons.⁴⁴

The masters were opposed to any sort of "cult" of African paganism. This control kept the subject in a kind of insubordination. The slave instead protected a hidden spirit, and consequently he could indulge in actions most reprehensible under the protection of the spirit. Jean Price Mars described Christianity as forced upon the blacks, but Vodou gave them a chance to "play with a cunning opponent" and steal a bit of freedom during their daily toil.⁴⁵

Since slave owners expected their slaves to be baptized, and blacks saw baptism for the newcomers a chance to feast and carouse with their godparents, the slaves were baptized several

⁴³ Hurston, Zora Neale. Tell My Horse, Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica. (New York: Harper & Row), p. 113-132.

⁴⁴ Hoffmann, Leon-Francois. P.120.

⁴⁵ Price Mars, Jean. Thus Spoke the Uncle. (Haïti: Printer II), p. 42.

times to have the opportunity to have fun. Jean Price Mars adds that, “the Negroes went to the baptism with a passion suspect.”⁴⁶

To continue their African religious practices without attracting the attention of their masters, slaves took Christian icons to represent their own deities. These practices are perpetuated today in the name of religious syncretism.

C. - Religion Is A Human Need

Religion is a human need and is also a faith-implemented component that responds primarily to the biological-psychological-spiritual rational creature, which consciously or unconsciously seeks to commune, close to or under the protection of the Divine. It's how you arrange the experience of being in relationship with the transcendent through cultic acts, rituals, prayers, disciplines, ecstasy, contemplation and liturgical expressions. It is the extra dimension projection of the mundane, according to the reflection of Bishop Telesforo on religion.⁴⁷

Religion is not a delusion, not an illusion, not a hoax, not an impulse, not merely a feeling or emotional expression. It is not an invention of man. It is rather an experience, a dynamic response to a need of human beings.

The rituals of religion are expressions and gestures made in an attempt to flatten and straighten the road, to facilitate communion with the Supreme Being, Providence or Prima Causa. The human being needs to feel like a living thing with the potential to live in harmony with the virtues of the Supreme Good and according to transcendental demands.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The Right Rev. Telesforo A. Isaac, “A Pastoral Reflection on Religion.” A retired bishop of the Dominican Republic, he served in the diocese as diocesan bishop from 1972-1991; he is the first Dominican bishop of the diocese.

Based on these notes expressed here, human beings of all races, classes and cultures are looking for ways to be in right relationship with The Mighty God.

The truth is that religious activities are practiced in every known society. They are human behaviors that are exercised as a way of linking to divinity. People want to satisfy an inner need that comes from faith. They want to strengthen their ties to their Deity.

In fact, Homo sapien is a religious animal by nature and is always looking to connect to the transcendental that is outside himself, who he believes is more powerful than he. Therefore, as the psalmist said, “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you” (Psalm 63:1).

Despite all of the above, there has been the dilemma of who or what the Divine is. This is a theme that emerges continually throughout the history of civilization, but the consideration of whether to believe and act in accordance with the transcendental is taking a new perspective in the worldview of scientists, scholars, social scientists and people interested in these issues. It is happening thanks to the painstaking research of anthropologists who say the actors, faith and religion, are an integrated and intrinsic part of all peoples and cultures since the emergence of human beings on planet Earth.

We understand that the findings of anthropologists, the findings of the Human Genome Project and the news of religious behaviors have a genetic basis. Religion is an intrinsic part and a need for creatures capable of reasoning.

Again, one element that makes Haiti so attractive is its culture and its religious festivities.⁴⁸ Vodouists use as well those religious festivities to create ambiance and happiness in their black religion, often by connecting their festivals to Christian holidays.

⁴⁸ Coupeau, Steeve. The History of Haiti. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press). 2007

Holy week festivities, which occur annually such pre-Lenten Carnival, Good Friday, and Ash Wednesday are times when many Christians are fasting and the street of cities small and large are alive and festive. All the church feasts are also celebrated by Vodouists, like Christmas Eve, the Epiphany and All Saint's Day. As you will understand later, all major Christian feasts are also celebrated by Vodouists.

During the Holy Week, marching Rara bands walk from their turfs to other parts of the town. Sometimes the Rara bands may look chaotic, but they always follow directives from the leaders of the bands, who choose the route, blow on whistles, and carry a special whip, which they hit from time to time to clear the path ahead.

Another officer in each group is the "Majo Jon," who performs a spectacular dance while twirling a baton. The worst parts of the routine are the many sacrifices before the band goes out. Those are the acts that make strong Christians doubt that the bands are part of a faithful group. Some call the festivities "culture" and they are in fact, Vodou and not Christian.

Christians instead use their Lenten season for self-examination and repentance. They pray, fast, and engage in self-denial. They spend their time reading and meditating on God's holy word as the BCP recommends to the Episcopalians.⁴⁹ As such, Christian traditions are clearly defined, whereas Vodou traditions use other traditions as a host, and then warp and modify their meanings.

⁴⁹ BCP, p. 265.

D. -Why Vodou is Harmful to Individuals and Society

Vodou as a religion is dangerous for both the individuals who practice it and the society that supports it. It is based on a system of bribery and threats and ultimately does not answer the human need for religion.

One of the most important reasons why Vodou does not satisfy the deep human need for religion is because its tenants provide no peace or rest for the soul. Instead, through its works-based doctrine (these are orally passed down, not written), Vodou enslaves people to serve spirits and keeps them distant from attaining answers. They are constantly trying to mix potions, serve spirits, do dances, perform rituals, and control their neighbor's actions and they are never able to realize the peace that comes from trusting in faith. There is no faith, only questions and the hopeless belief that if the believer is just right enough or pay just the right amount, their lives will be taken care of. Each spirit in Vodou has its particular favorite foods, colors, and songs.⁵⁰ By serving the spirit with its particular feast of favorites, the believer tries to "trick" or convince the spirit to act on their behalf. This is not faith—it is simple bribery and a belief that fancy gifts can manipulate a spiritual force.

Vodou is rooted in the world, not in greater things. Vodou believers seek to control life on earth. At its core, Vodou is about people controlling other people, not about a human connection with the divine. The root of Vodou is fear, not love. This is an evil for Haiti because this way of thinking destroys human relationships and threatens the notion that people must work together to improve their lives and trust that their hope lies in something greater than themselves.

⁵⁰ Charles, Jacqueline. "Vodou's Veil" The Miami Herald. 3 May 2003. Online.
<http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti-archive-new/msg15401.html>

In Vodou, if you serve the spirits, they will serve you. This ideology turns into vigilante justice. With a slow, broken criminal system, Haitians take matters into their own hands. If there is a dispute between brothers over land, one may try to poison the other. He will find the poison by visiting a Vodou priest who will concoct a potion.⁵¹ In extreme circumstances, the priest might mix up an elixir to transform the enemy into a zombie—a walking dead that must serve its master. For example, in my congregation, my congregants tell me stories about threats they receive against their lives. People will go to a bokor, pay a little money for poison or spells, and cast them on their neighbor. My congregants tell me they are worried, not about the spells, but that someone will poison them. I do not believe spells have mystical power, but I do believe that poison can kill someone. This is one of the most obvious dangers of Vodou—its role as “decider” or judge of Haiti when people take justice into their own hands. Spiritually, the belief that people can cast spells on other people and control their lives is a spiritual sickness for Haiti. It is an earth-bound idea that robs people of the fulfillment of their human need—to see religion as something bigger than themselves beyond the earth.

A particular experience from my personal ministry comes to mind. Between the years of 1990 and 1993, I was working as a priest in the town of Mirebalais, about 60 km northeast of Port-Au-Prince. It is the nearest town for many farming communities.

In Haiti, we have a program for Episcopal youth to act as “troops,” similar to the Boy Scouts of America. One day, one of my young men fell ill and died suddenly. He was a fit and healthy young person, and it shocked everyone that he could pass away. It was very mysterious

⁵¹ Charles, Jacqueline. “Vodou’s Veil” The Miami Herald. 3 May 2003. Online. <http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti-archive-new/msg15401.html>

to his family and friends. His family buried the young man in a Christian burial service. We all mourned, and I assured them that his soul now resided with God.

A week later, the parents of the boy approached me. “Will you please go to the houngan and assure the safety of our son’s soul?” they asked me. I was startled. First of all, I was this family’s pastor. They knew my views on Vodou, and I often preached about its evil grip on Haiti. Second of all, it would be a harmful thing for someone in my position to visit the Vodou priest. It would legitimize their fears.

The family’s fear was that someone would try to raise their son from his burial resting place and attempt to convert him into a zombie. Becoming a zombie is the Vodou worshipper’s greatest fear. A zombie is neither dead nor alive, but is a walking dead corpse who must perform every wish of his master.⁵² To be unable to rest in peace is the worst possible fate. One way that Vodou believers frighten away spirits is by cracking a whip in the four cardinal directions. The family of the young man wanted me to bring the cord that wraps my robe and use it as a whip to drive out spirits that could attack their son.

I did not visit the Vodou priest nor stand guard at the child’s gravesite. I used this as an opportunity to talk about God’s promises to us. I reminded them of these scriptures:

“But all who listen to me will live in peace, untroubled by fear of harm.” –Proverbs 1:33

And

⁵² Davis, Wade. *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press. 1988

“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.” John 14:27

We prayed together and I asked for comfort for the family, and peace for their minds that their son was physically dead, but his spirit rested safely with God. We didn’t need to fear demons; I didn’t need to whip away any spirits.

This event showed me how deeply fear grasps those who worship Vodou spirits. There is no peace in death for oneself or one’s family. There is fear that even in death, evil forces can take over and control your soul. The peace of Christ covers this fear and it doesn’t need to be a worry in any Christian’s mind or heart. The Episcopal Church prepares a pastor to address the difficulties of a fear in demons and Vodou. I remind my congregation of the importance and simplicity of the creeds we say in the Episcopal Church—namely the Apostle’s and Nicene creeds.

E. -Church and State in Haiti

A healthy relationship between the state and Christian denominations in Haiti has rarely been assured⁵³. The problem remains the same: the state interferes in the affairs of the church and vice versa. The church faces difficulties when it does not keep a neutral position between the government and opposition. Right away it is understood that the church is either on the side of the opposition or the popular government.

The Episcopal Church of Haiti is a major victim of the state and especially the Duvalier

⁵³ Nicholls, David. From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1996, p. 119.

government. History suggested that the churches in the villages and hills were very helpful to Duvalier's rise to power. But unfortunately the Episcopal Church fell victim to the same government she had helped. The missionary bishop of the church of Haiti The Right Rev. Alfred Voegeli was expelled in the year 1971 by the government, requiring indigenous religious leaders. It is for that reason in 1971 the Episcopal Church had Haiti's first elected Haitian bishop, The Right Rev. Luc Anatole Jacques Garnier. Other religious sects were jealous, envying the position of the church. Despite the low percentage of the territory possessed by the church, they still had a place in strategic committees and commissions of the country such as the electoral junta, the wise council.

Another complication surfaced in the marriage of Jean Claude Duvalier to a woman named Michelle Benett who was already married and not yet divorced. The government declared that the first marriage was void because the Episcopal Church was not empowered to bless the marriage of two people. And the Roman church, without saying anything, agreed to marry the president with this woman.

Despite the thriving nature of the church with large attendance at the main churches, spontaneous revivals, rituals and celebrations, some many people were upset for political reasons. Among several dozens of new denominations, the Episcopal Church continues to fight Vodou as it journeys through the process of having more true converts to Christianity.

E. -The Catholic Church in Haiti

Catholicism is currently the religion of about 80 percent of Haitians. Historically it has been accused of being a church closely associated with the Haitian mulatto elite educated in religious schools. When François Duvalier came to power in 1957, he quickly launched an

offensive against this elitist church and its foreign missionaries. This was the reason also that the Episcopal Church was victim to Duvalier's decision to deport our diocesan bishop The Right Rev. Alfred Voegeli.⁵⁴

By 1963, most foreign-born church workers had been expelled from the country. In 1966, a new concordat was signed providing for the active training and deployment of Haitian clergy. In the 1970s, numerous Catholic lay training centers were opened throughout the countryside to teach literacy, leadership skills, social awareness, community organizing, and improved agricultural techniques to the populace. Through this effort, the Catholic Church broadened its social base to include poorer sectors of the population.

This trend continued in the early 1980s with base ecclesial communities ("Ti Legliz") generally called "low church" and organized within most parishes. People gathered in small groups to pray at one another's homes and to support each other as a community. Espousing the principles of Latin American Theology, many young priests emerged as spokespersons for the poor and oppressed. One of them became increasingly popular for his denunciations of the exploitation of the poor, governmental corruption, arbitrary arrests and abuses. His name was Jean Bertrand Aristide. His speeches and sermons put him in direct conflict with the hierarchy of the church and with the government.

The Catholic Church has experienced some deep divisions between social-justice minded clergy and more conservative elements of the hierarchy. Soon after the election of Jean Bertrand Aristide as president in December 1990, a rift opened between the Church and the Haitian government. This rift tore the two apart completely in January 1991 when the Archbishop of

⁵⁴Centre Anglican d'Haïti, "Petite Histoire de l'Eglise Episcopale d'Haïti," 1861-1996, p. 73 April 24, 1964. At the height of the campaign for the presidency for life, an unfortunate event will mark the life of the Episcopal Church. Bishop Charles Alfred Voegeli was deported by the government of François Duvalier.

Port-au-Prince in his New Year homily called for the people to rise up and overthrow Aristide. Later, when the military succeeded in ousting Aristide in a bloody coup, the Vatican became the only foreign state to recognize the military rulers.

G. -The Episcopal Church in Haiti

The history of the establishment of the Episcopal Church in Haiti is very complex. It is still a complex church today, because of the earthquake of January 12, 2010. During that disaster, most of the church's structures were destroyed, including beautiful murals in the capital's Cathedral. Many people still look to the church for guidance and strength in the same way it did at its establishment.⁵⁵ It is still a church that is interested in the development of the nation. The Episcopal Church is always proud of the annual statistic that shows the quantity of people who are baptized into new life.

The Episcopal Church stands in a country of blacks led by a black leader. David Dean wrote, "The Haitians needed a black man to lead a black church."⁵⁶ The white leaders were forced to pack up as native church leaders replaced them.

Around 1804, Haiti was the richest French colony. Once Haiti received its independence from France, the French clergymen left the country, and for the next 36 years, the Haitians had very little formal Christianity. They clung to the religion they inherited from their African ancestors: Vodou. Around 1807, during the division of the country into the kingdom of King

⁵⁵ Moore, Joseph. A Study of the Episcopal Church in the Missionary District of Haiti. December 1956, p. 59.

⁵⁶ "Defender of the Race," pages 60, 3rd paragraph.

Henri Christophe in the north and the republic of Alexandre Pétion as president in the West and South, there was an effort made by Christophe to abolish all vestiges of French imperialism. Christophe tried to introduce his court language and English education. Even as an Anglican, he was called “the most sublime.” He held correspondence with Wilberforce and had part of the Anglican Prayer Book translated into French that he printed on his royal press. There was also his court, led by the Anglican priest, Father Norton.

Christophe committed suicide in 1820, and then Haiti found its unity with Jean Pierre Boyer. The few steps taken by Christophe toward Anglican conversion were completed under Boyer. Soon various groups of Protestant missionaries began work in Haiti, including Baptists and Wesleyans.⁵⁷

In 1855, Jacques Theodore Holly made an exploratory visit in Haiti to study the possibilities of establishing a mission for the Episcopal Church. However, there was no initiative taken beyond the visit.

In 1860, Haitian President Fabre Geffrard signed a concordat with Rome. The following year, on May 26, 1861, Episcopal Theodore Jacques Holly arrived in Haiti, armed with letters of recommendations from the Bishop of Connecticut. Accompanying Holly was a group of 110 African Americans who were invited by President Geffrard⁵⁸ to help them establish and improve cotton production in the country.

Because of the tension caused by the American civil war, The United States’ production of cotton was so disputed that English spinners were seeking alternative markets. Geffrard

⁵⁷ Wesleyan: The terms, “Wesleyan” and “Methodist” connect participants in these communities to the eighteenth century origins of the Methodist movement under the leadership of the Methodism of John and Charles Wesley.

⁵⁸ Fabre-Nicholas Geffrard, the 8th President of Haiti (September 19, 1806 – December 31, 1878) was a general in the Haitian army and President of Haiti from 1859 until his deposition in 1867. Rogozinski, Jan (1999). A Brief History of the Caribbean (Revised ed.). New York: Facts on File, Inc.

wanted to share the bounty of Haiti's countryside, and Holly wanted to help. Geffrard allowed cotton fields to become established on his property at Drouillard and made his house available for religious services. He was appreciated from the very first day and a child was even named Geffrard, in the President's honor, during the trip. Over the 18-month trip, 43 people in the group died of malaria and typhoid, but the others returned with Holly to the United States, calling the project a success.

On May 25, 1863, the parish of Holy Trinity was established in Port-au-Prince and the American Episcopal Church made its first step toward recognizing the work of Holly. The Bishop Alfred Lee of Delaware was appointed supervisor of the church when he visited Haiti in November 1863 and administered the confirmation of 36 people. Growth progressed, especially in rural sections around Port-Au-Prince, Cabaret-Four, Cap-Haitian and Les Cayes. These were ultimately the four founding congregations.

The bishops Arthur Coxe of New York and George Burgess of Maine made official visits. The latter died as his vessel left Miragôane. In Haiti, ten more people were ordered to be deacon, one was ordained into the priesthood and 80 were confirmed.

As a result of the visit by Coxe in 1872, the General Convention decided that the work of the Church in Haiti should be accomplished before the consecration of a Haitian priest as the leadership of a new Bishop of the Apostolic Orthodox Church. So after two more years, in 1874, Jacques Theodore Holly was consecrated the first Haitian Bishop of the New Apostolic Orthodox Church at Grace Church in New York. The accomplishments of the Haitian Church of 1875 were listed as: six priests, four deacons, 1,000 members, 250 communicants and 18 congregations.

The work continued to progress, but not as rapidly as in previous years. Money was

scarce in Haiti and the English and American churches did not help much. Encouraged by the success of Holly, various Protestant groups who had retired during the signing of the Concordat began to return. Three times between the years 1872 and 1908, the Holy Trinity Church was burned down.

Despite setbacks, Holly continued to make the church in Haiti proud. Around 1878, Bishop Theodore Holly assisted at the Conference of Lambert and became the first black man to preach at Westminster Abbey.⁵⁹ Holly died in 1911, and in 1913, the Haitian Clergy proposed that Haiti become a District Missionary of the American Episcopal Church. The General Convention approved the application of Haiti and the Haitian church became a District Missionary. After this declaration, new growth occurred: 12 priests, one deacon, 200 members, 650 communicants, and 26 congregations. In addition to nine schools, there was a normal school, a school of agriculture, 54 teachers and seminary courses.

In 1915, the U.S. Marines occupied the country of Haiti for the first time. The resulting period was a time of confusion and disorganization. Several Caribbean Bishops provided supervision. Harry Carson Robert, the Archdeacon of the Panama Canal Zone was dedicated first Missionary Bishop of Haiti's Cathedral St. John the Divine in New York on January 20, 1923. His task was reorganization and consolidation.

Four Sisters of the Convent of St. Margaret arrived in Haiti in 1927 to help with art and religious education. They also provided administration support to the Holy Trinity School which was founded in 1913 for poor girls of the parish.

⁵⁹ Westminster Abby, The Collégiale Church of St Peter at Westminster, popularly know as Westminster Abbey, is a large, mainly Gothic church, in the City of Westminster, London, United kingdom, located just to the west of the Palace of Westminster. It is the traditional place of coronation and burial site for English, later British and later still (and currently) monarchs of the Commonwealth realms. The abbey is a Royal Peculiar and briefly held the status of a cathedral from 1546 to 1556.

President Roosevelt put an end to the U.S.' military occupation of Haiti. After the retirement of bishop Carson, Burthon Spence, SSJE became Bishop Suffragan of Haiti. Alfred Voegeli was again a devoted Missionary Bishop of Haiti to St. Peter's church in Morriston, New Jersey.

A large international fair in 1949 celebrated the bicentennial of the founding of the city of Port-au-Prince. The famous murals of the Cathedral were then presented as a contribution to the celebration.

The Centenary Celebrations took place in 1961 and at this time the Church's strength was 34,000 members, 13,000 communicants, 76 missions and 94 stations administered by 23 rural schools. Fifty years later, the church had 150,000 members, 120 churches and 240 schools in urban and rural areas.

The Episcopal Church celebrated its 150th anniversary with joy and sorrow in all five regions of the diocese. The church organized spiritual concerts, long marches with music and conferences, beginning in Mirebalais and followed by Cayes, Cap Haitian, on the ruins of the Cathedral and in Leogane.

The Episcopal Church of Haiti has grown tremendously in all areas, especially in quantity of members. The church can still do more, but speed is difficult in Haiti, especially after the earthquake. It is an opportunity for the faithful to show their strength, despite Haiti's hardships.

4. The “Day” of White Culture vs. The “Night” of Vodou

Vodou was always struggling with the dominant religion as mentioned before, and in Vodou the night is a symbol of dissimulation. I can still remember when I was a boy living in my hometown in Haiti. When it got dark by 6 or 7 p.m., every child came inside to tell stories and play together. It was believed that during the dark night, evil spirits worked to challenge the spirit of God and it was an unfriendly and threatening time.

In colonial times, the white master and the priest were not in a state of watchfulness at night, and the blacks took advantage of this time to practice the religion of their hearts. Naturally, Vodou activities could not take place during the day because slaves labored in the sugar cane fields, watched over by a Negro chief with a whip. It is from this coercive tradition that the night was known to be good for these religious manifestations.

The civilizing effect of the Gospel and of the rules of life taught by the white masters seemed to be alien to the slaves. The slaves at these privileged nighttime periods were able to defeat the bonds which shackled their imagination. In an ecstasy, like a trial of possession of their being, Vodou came to revive again and helped them gain a feeling of their initial state of freedom.

To sum up this section: black nighttime reality helps us understand the bi-cultural dimension of the slave religion.

Slaves mastered their existence as good theatrical actors with a role to play. They soon learned to lead double lives, because during the day they seemed to practice the master's Catholic religion.

In general the process went like this: when slaves arrived in Santo Domingo, they were baptized by a white Spanish priest who believed he was removing their diabolic aspect. Baptism

was an obligation, not a choice. Afterwards, the priest gave the baptized slave pictures of the Virgin Mary, Jesus, Saint Michael the Archangel, Saint James, John the Baptist, Our Lady, Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which are among the great figures of the Church.⁶⁰

It was very rare to find a Haitian who is not baptized in the Roman Catholic Church or the Episcopal Church. This is generally true for two reasons. First of all, to be a Vodouist, it is an obligation to receive the first sacrament of baptism in the name of the triune God. Secondly, Haitian birth certificates are often sealed or signed by a priest.

Historically, to avoid physical and corporal punishment, slaves would seem to practice the whites' religion. But in reality they did not practice it at all. The slaves received the icon (image) of the Virgin Mary after baptism, but they changed the content to represent one of their Vodou goddesses. But were the slaves really free to practice their religion? The believers of Vodou did not have the courage or ability to support their beliefs openly. If we go further, we will understand that Haiti is a country where evangelization is still necessary. We can look to Joshua in the Old Testament as well (Joshua 24:19-20):

Joshua said to the people, You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins.

If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.

This scripture makes it all the more interesting to understand Vodouist's combinations of Saints of the Roman Catholic Church with their gods of Vodou.

In the cosmology of Vodou, there are many gods. In "Secrets of Vodou," Milou Rigaud wrote the following:

⁶⁰ Frère, Gerard Alphonse. Le Voudouisme Haïtien (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 1989), p. 28-29

For the purpose of clarifying the roles of all the gods, it will suffice to present several traditional interpretations of the fundamental loas of the Vodou Cult. These roles show the reasons why the Haitian Vodouist considers the gods vitally inseparable from him.⁶¹

A. -Gods of Vodou

The idea of a “god” exists in Vodou, but very vaguely. The God in question does not give law to men. This is simply a creator god of the universe or cosmos. The religion is largely occupied by the loas (spirit) that mediate between God and men. Mind and will of the loas are the spirit and the will of God. We must obey the laws to be in communication with God.

B. -The Idea of Loas

Understandings of the Vodou loas is unclear, and varies from person to person. The deportation of blacks from different countries of Africa promoted a disjointed mix of African rites related to Vodou. With so many versions of Vodou came many varied loas: Legba, Tijan Danto, Tijan Petwo, Ogou Feray, Ogou Badagri, Ogou Chango, Ezili Freda, Ezili Danto, Danbala WEDO, Guede, Rada, Brij Mama and many others. But we do not know exactly what each ritual is for each loa.

The loas of Vodou share many similarities with the saints of the Catholic Church. In Vodou, it is not a question of the order as in the Catholic Church, but a matter of ritual. To evoke the spirit of the loa, the believer must know the particular Vodou ritual and demonstrate his faith in the law.

No one knows the names of every loa but there are a few well-known ones:

⁶¹ Rigaud, Milo. P. 69.

Damballa ouedo: Identified as Moses. Many tap-taps⁶² very often show Moses with a big staff in his hands. They are glorifying Moses for his work, but they want to serve their loa and symbolize Danballa ouedo through Moses.⁶³

Papa Legba Attibon: The god of the gate, the picture of St. John Baptist is used to represent Legba. This loa also has a diet of what and how to cook for him. All of his food must be roasted. He eats roasted corn, peanuts, bananas, sweet potatoes, chicken, and likes a tobacco pipe for smoking.

Agouetaroyo: The master of water. Before undertaking a voyage by sea, one may ask his permission. The saint he is identified with is St. Ulrich or St. Ambrose.

Ogours: The master of intersections. Its sign is the serpent.

Baron Lakoua: Master of the cemetery; it is he who watches over the dead.

Ezili: Goddess of beauty, the heart to conquer; identified with two virgins, Altagrace, also called Virgin Higuey, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Gran Batale: God of sweet (calm) water, protector of family. She is identified with St. Anne.

So the saints become transformed. The Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, will become in Vodou the Metres Ezili; St. James becomes Ogou Badagri; and St. Peter the baron becomes Legba Met Potay.⁶⁴

⁶² Tap-Tap is a type of transportation in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, from downtown to surrounding cities like Pétionville, Croix des Bouquets, Delmas, Carrefour, Tabarre, etc.

⁶³ Hurston, Zora Neale. P. 116.

⁶⁴ Syncretism denotes the fusion of two or several religions or of one or several cults in the religion or culture. "Synchrétisme," Encyclopedia Universalis, (Paris: Encyclopedia Universalis, 1989), p. 360.

She was the Virgin Mary during the day, but at night, in secret, slaves believed she was transformed into Ezeli. They told stories which transmitted the oral tradition of African cultural values to other generations. In each case, a different picture symbolized their god because all Negroes did not come from the same tribe. Each tribe had its own gods. In general, though, they assimilated some aspects of the whites' religion, developing a religious syncretism that responded to the constraints of the moment.

C. -Work Mediators: Bòkò and Ougan

In Vodou, there are different names for those who practice “good” and those who practice “evil.” “Bòkò⁶⁵” is the name for a “priest” who practices evil and “ougan” is the name for a priest who practices “good” Vodou. The ougan gives his knowledge to many members of his community whereas the bòkò works as a root doctor or magician anywhere.⁶⁶

There are a few training requirements for a Vodou ougan. Many ougan are decently educated in order to transmit the power of his knowledge by writing. The ougan works with the loa to speak with God. He must be able to know the rites, customs, and will of the loas he serves. All his work should reflect the rite of his choice. Many ougan work to write down and honor the characteristics and habits of their loa, and perform ceremonies to communicate with them.

⁶⁵ One who practices black magic as a profession; often used slightly instead of “ougan.”

⁶⁶ Macmillan, Palgrave. Vodou in Haitian Life and Culture. (New York: Claudine Michel and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith), 2006.

5. Syncretism in Haiti

Let's now return to the result of all of this history in Haiti: syncretism.⁶⁷ As we have seen, there were a mixture of African and European religious traditions, a mixture of Catholicism and Vodou. Therefore, Vodou existed and still exists in an informal, hidden, or secret manner and was coupled with membership in a Christian Church which baptizes infants. Syncretism would be harder in a right-wing Protestant denomination, which could insist on an adult conversion, a definitive break with a Vodou past. So Haitians can still consider themselves Catholics, Episcopalians, or Methodists and Vodouist as well. The fact that they could define themselves as Christians served, and sometimes still serves, as a social blanket of protection because of all the social services that the churches offer⁶⁸ (this will not make them become earnest Christians, to be sure.) Many recent converts to Christianity have faith in Christ, of course; but that faith can be doubtful or shallow.

To give a concrete example: Suppose a recent convert to the Episcopal Church is facing some sort of crisis. Here's an example from a "Christian Vodouist." "Maybe my baby is sick or my wife is seeing another man, or there are business problems we can't control. Now, if I can't get results from my Christian practice, I can go back to my Vodou for as long as I need to get results. Then I go back to my Christian practices, if indeed I ever left them at all. So in a sense, I am both Vodou and Christian."

The pattern of conversion can be seen as total or partial transformation (in this case, not really a conversion in the sense of commitment to Christ), or as a social cover. Even if the majority of Haitians are considered religious Christians (although this is not true), the words

⁶⁷ Frère, Gerard Alphonse. P. 29.

⁶⁸ This truth is well known among Haitian priests, and I have unfortunately experienced it myself.

“Christian” and “human being” are synonymous in the Creole language. Kreyen vivan (living Christians) is used to identify all human beings.⁶⁹ This shows how important the idea of religion is in Haiti’s conception of life. I think it also reveals how Haitians might throw around the word “Christian” as an assumed identity for all people instead of thinking critically about what it represents—faith and a changed way of life in Christ.

Nevertheless, there is always hope for the re-birth of the great majority of the population. As St. Paul says, “The old, the sinful self who is centered in it, must be ‘crucified’” (Romans 6:6) before the re-birth can take place.

A final problem remains that of motivation. Given that Vodou is the religion of Haitians’ ancestors and thus a part of their identity (along with Christianity, to some extent), why would modern-day Haitians want to leave it behind in a radical conversion to an exclusive Christianity? Vodou has in fact changed in the past two hundred years from a simpler religion with little or no profit motive to a highly commercialized religion with complications. Modern-day Haitians submit to these changes with suspicion and resentment.

For example, a mother with a baby who falls sick during the night (if she is not a radical convert to Christianity), will probably take the infant to the doctor; but she may also believe it is a loup-garou (an evil spirit who attacks at night)⁷⁰ who has harmed the child. She will have to pay for several procedures: an “expedition to the Carrefour” (a magic spell at a crossroads to allow her to diagnose the problem by sorcery), and then more payments for each magic spell or sacrifices to keep the loup-garou away. All these procedures cost money, and many Haitians wonder whether they are really needed. And who can tell? It is rather like the problems which

⁶⁹ Bijoux, Legrand. *Coup d’œil sur la Famille Haïtienne*. (Port-au-Prince: Editions des Antilles, 1990), p. 91. Additional Vodou names and titles I cite are drawn from a common Haitian vocabulary known to all Haitians.

⁷⁰ Lit., a werewolf; a woman who turns vampire and sucks children’s blood.

lead Haitians to have their car looked at over. Then they end up paying over and over for labor and parts to make it run. Are the problems really real? Or are some of them a sign of the greed of the mechanic, or of the ougan (Vodou priest)? Haitians are helpless before the expertise of either, but they become suspicious.

Compared with all these complications and fears of magic spells and evil spirits, Christianity is starting to look quite straightforward and sincere. Considering Jesus' mission on earth, the word of the Gospel according to St. John 3:16-17, and more especially in its prologue, John 1:7-8, the motive, the urgency to convert and the importance of a transformation are clear enough. Christ is the one who transforms human actions through a relationship that the individual Haitian must reach out to receive. Jesus is transforming lives today without all these complications, and he has done so since the beginning of his public ministry.

I close by saying that the conversion from Vodou to Christianity is an excellent illustration for conversion as I have defined it. Conversion, as Stott's, and James's, sense of "twice-born" action illustrates, is a step-by-step conversion process in Haiti. The subject turns from the old nature which is divided, conflicted and fearful (and from my standpoint, as a Christian pastor, steeped in worshiping idols instead of Jesus Christ), into a new-born soul, freed from needless anxieties about evil spirits, and at peace, protected by a new relationship with Jesus Christ.

Chapter II: Companionship in the Ministry

1. Companionship as an Art

Now it is time to turn to ministry. The minister must develop a special, enabling relationship with Haitian parishioners in the Haitian culture. Many missionaries and volunteers in all areas bring a helping hand to Haitians, both spiritually and in material support. They strive to cure and heal the body and the soul. After more than a century and a half, the Episcopal Church of Haiti has greatly benefited organizations of the church parishes and individuals. There's a Haitian saying, "tout moun jwenn," which means everyone has benefited. Rare are those who visit Haiti, not for sightseeing but to help, who themselves do not return home with a new conception of life. They too, are in a way converted. We have an example of a volunteer who became a famous and a very well known doctor, Paul Farmer.⁷¹

The minister must come to understand the culture his parishioners are coming from. In the case of Haiti, this means understanding the roots of Vodou belief that are or were formerly held by many congregants.

As discussed earlier, Vodou has its roots in fear and in the world. What makes it attractive is its promise of power. Was it not this same promise that deceived man in the beginning? Genesis 3 makes it clear that Satan's most seductive words were those promising equality to God. Vodou offers this same promise. But, as in the case of Adam, acting on this impulse leads to suffering for the individual and the community. In Ezekiel, the Lord makes a point to remind man that he is not God, despite the vanity and the pride of his thinking. Armed

⁷¹ <http://ghsm.hms.harvard.edu/people/faculty/farmer/>. His work is the subject of Tracy Kidder's 2003 book, Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World.

with this knowledge of the most attractive aspects of Vodou, the minister can serve as an effective companion throughout the conversion process.

The Episcopal Church, with its history of dialogue, tolerance, and solid doctrine, make it uniquely capable at meeting Haiti's Vodou practitioners where they stand. I coordinated the partnership program for the diocese of Haiti for several years and I can attest to the good the church is doing in the lives of real Haitians of all walks of life.

Conversion may take different forms in different cultures. In Haiti, it means being "born again" into a new level of existence. It is the moment where Perfect Love casts out fear, in the words of John's first epistle. The soul of the individual is the place where God's grace works to enable the response of "yes." The effect: the converted Christian has now, through God's help, learned to trust God and to enter a new ethical world where she or he takes responsibility for actions and their own behaviors.

A minister in any church is often rooted in his or her particular community. He will know its traditions. I agree with a point of view shared by Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg and Fowler that "conversion" is shaped and limited by development stages. But, after all, I have worked with subjects in the developed world just like all the men and women on whom I base my vision. I am working with the subjects from small, isolated villages in the developing world. Here we do not find stages of emotional, ethical or intellectual development like those in other places. Sometimes you will find people developed in two or all three of the ways, but it is rare. This is why I cannot apply their understandings or their methods of living to my academic or pastoral work. My work with them is focused on personal contact so they will understand in a very individual way what has influenced their beliefs and what their faith is about.

It is very sensitive and concrete way to connect with someone through personal relationships in the village setting. A typical subject could probably understand that:

Justice is contained in equality and moral reciprocity. Fairness consists in treating like cases alike: “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.” etc. One sees and knows that others have interests, needs, and goals different from one’s own. In order to secure the cooperation of others, our bargaining must take their interests and needs into account.⁷²

But Fowler’s next stage of synthetic-conventional faith and the interpersonal self, where the “capacities for abstract thinking and for the manipulation of concepts can begin to form”⁷³ will not normally happen. So this relationship will not be there to work with. So in what special way should we regard the minister who is fostering conversion in this setting? I will suggest that a minister is in this world to be first a hearer of the word, and next, a companion on the way.

The identity of the pastoral minister is rooted in the community which is the Church ... To be a pastoral counselor is to be nourished by the tradition of the community and formed by its authentic liturgy ... the task of pastoral counseling is to nurture, nourish and evoke a hope that can identify an “alternate perception” to the enslaving reality that is often at the heart of the individual’s problem ... (like an) artist, the pastoral counselor is called to be contemplative, whose creative insight comes to life through prayer, from having compared, mediated and identified a ‘mediating idea ‘that can evoke an alternative perception to one’s reality. This activity can be described as ‘envisioning’, engaging in ‘rational intuition,’ or perhaps most simply as ‘imaging.’ It is the art of communicating the inner meaning of the ‘World’ at the point of need.⁷⁴

⁷² Fowler, James W. Faith Development and Pastoral Care. Ed. Don S. Browning (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) p. 62.

⁷³ Ibid. P. 63.

⁷⁴ Lowery, Claire E. “The Art of Pastoral Counseling.” (Course outline, Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry, Boston College, 1990).

2. The Conversational Minister as a Hearer of the Word

Ministry has to do with hearing; from the side of the one being ministered to, Christ's saving words must be heard. But the idea of hearing applies not only to the one ministered to but also to the one who ministers. The minister, too, must hear in conversational ministry, listening with "the ear of the ear," which is to say, with his or her whole being. The minister listens to the stories of people as Jesus did.

In the Church today, there is a critical need for a conversational ministry,⁷⁵ especially for those who may be wandering through the dark night of Vodou. There is also great need of help for those who were traumatized after the earthquake. The need here is very big, because of the lack of professionalism in pastoral ministry in Haiti. In Haiti, as in many parts of the world tragedies, dramas, traumas are daily occurrences. The population lives with daily problems caused by a lack of infrastructure. They suffer through needing primary care, they search for their daily bread and are tossed around by the government, NGOs and natural disasters. Spiritual direction, spiritual companionship, spiritual conversation, patient visitation and home visiting are very important in the social and political life in Haiti. In these ministries, a minister – either clerical or lay – hears the word of God pronounced by the very brother or sister who may have suffered their own breakdown on the journey.

For each Christian, by virtue of his or her baptism, the presence of Christ lives in them.⁷⁶ Christ's Spirit is embodied in that person: their body is the Spirit's temple. Thus the minister, as he or she listens, reverences the Word of God and who that person uniquely is. As the minister listens to a person, the person gradually comes to be more who he or she is called to be and who

⁷⁵ Fowler, James W. P. 115-118 (Uses the term "sponsorship").

⁷⁶ Matthew 10:40: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

he or she is called to become before God and for God's people. Indeed, the "person" is derived from the Greek word "persona" which literally means to sound through.

As a person speaks to the minister, more and more of the unique word of God "sounds through" that person. The Christ in that person sounds in the manner that music sounds. James Fowler calls to our attention that what a person most deeply wants is what God also wants for that person, for it is God who has planted those wants deep within him or her.⁷⁷ As Christians, Christ intends us to be "for others": by virtue of their baptism into Christ Jesus, all Christians are called to be ministers in some way in Christ's Church.

As the minister serves the Church with a recognized gift, he or she collaborates with others and with Christ in transforming the Church more and more into the Kingdom of God "in your midst." The minister must first dwell with Christ. Out of this turning conversion and dwelling, the minister turns out to his other brothers and sisters in Christ and dwells with them.

He or she is Love incarnate; the expression of God's being, which goes out of God's self to the beloved other. Gula reminds us, "we are to preserve and promote through our own behavior the way to love God and love the neighbor as the self."⁷⁸

3. The Minister as Companion

I am serving as rector in a small parish in a village called "Beraud." I am the first appointed priest. This community was eager to experience a pastor. It seems that they were sheep without shepherd. I make myself available to my congregation in every way possible. My phone number is public, and every member of the church knows they may call at any time.

⁷⁷ Fowler, James W. 110.

⁷⁸ Gula, Richard M. S.S. Ethics in Pastoral Ministry. (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), p. 147.

After church services, I spend time with members who want to talk and tell me their stories. Sometimes, they are uncomfortable talking in a big group, so they invite me to sit outside their house, drink fresh milk from a coconut, and share their worries and joys. I like to invite people to meals as well, and I often invite members of the congregation to travel with me to other Episcopal congregations and their celebrations. I believe that as a pastor, my job is to encourage faith and fellowship among my congregation members.

The person who is doing his or her own discerning needs help while discerning. The minister is a ready, willing and able ear. This is where pastoral ministry is an art. The pastoral minister puts his or her own experience of pain transformed into new life at the service of another. The minister turns the knowledge born of his or her own transformation into an artful response to another for the sake of the other, the beloved. Behind the skillful response is compassion, born of suffering under the Lord's cross. The minister is called to listen with the heart of Christ.

This is what distinguishes clinical, psychological, or therapeutic conversations from ministerial moments. In the ministerial moment, the minister is consciously present not for him or herself. The minister is intentionally present for Christ and for the other (Galatians 2:20). The minister co-labors with Christ and the companion who may come to a breakpoint in his or her story. As the minister listens to that story, the individual may find a source of hope when they hear the "Good News."

The minister in a spiritual companionship relationship will direct the one to whom he or she is listening to recollect the fruit of their conversation, and (if the person is ready) direct it to God in the form of prayer, voicing, perhaps aloud or perhaps in writing, the person's needs, desires and fears. Pulling these from the personal depths of their heart and laying them out helps

them attempt to be transparent before God. When one is transparent in this way, one not only allows God to see clear through them, but they also see their life more clearly. One's needs and wants should now be more understandable as a result of the conversation with the minister and God. The minister, of course, does not allow the focus to rest on him or herself.

The minister's self is not effaced in the course of the listening relationship. He or she remains fully who he or she is with all the assets and liabilities. Yet the minister is also transformed by the heart of Christ. The love of Christ is formed in the minister's heart through experiences on his or her own journey. With their own experience and training on hand, the minister is enabled by Christ's love and grace to listen to the other Christian. The minister understands the expression of the other's self within the context of his or her own experience. The minister also views the life of another and nurtures it. "Nurturing," here, means that the minister listens patiently, contemplatively and compassionately to the other and "holds" the other in dialog.

As the minister holds the other with reverence, tenderness and care, the minister nurtures the other. The minister allows the other to grow stronger in being who he or she is before God and for God's people. The listening ministry may be a point of exchange of Christ's new life: Christ exchanges his love with the person who, in turning to Him, returns that love, becoming a point of exchange for others. In this way, the person loved turns into a minister for others. Haitians are rarely in the habit of sharing their own story. They are often more receptive than emotive.

4. Sharing the Story, Knowing the Self

As the person expresses him or herself, that person "presses out" the word of God that he or she is. Indeed, the person comes to know him or herself in the sharing of his or her story. As

one speaks, one finds Christ at the center of the story, for Christ dwells in the center of the self. Haiti is a country with a lack of people in the field of psychology who can provide rich insights into human problems. Parishioners are more willing to listen instead of issuing their ideas, to express their needs. Thus it becomes the job of the clergy to ask questions and seek ideas, responses, and the stories of the people in the church. Through those conversations, the vision of Christ comes forward. It is not about the “self” but rather about the Christ in each of us.

I make sure to express love to my congregation by assuring them that I am not a person who will judge them for their past sins or current struggles. As a pastor, I am a listening ear and an encourager of faith. The small rural church I serve never had a pastor before me, so my congregation and I are continually learning how to listen and speak with each other.

It is in this way that my congregants can come to a more confident understanding of their own identities. Rooted in Christ and in love, they have nothing to fear. In this way, Christianity is a liberating force. As a minister, I aim to point out how turning back to old beliefs can lead them back into the slavery of fear.

5. Returning Home

The minister receives and nurtures the life of others. The people in his congregation can grow stronger and will be able to stand within the truth of who they really are.

“Home” can also be read symbolically as the place one is most oneself. When one arrives “home” at the end of a long journey, one may be drained of strength. One may also be full of the truth of who one is before God; that is, one may possess abundant life. As one comes to stand in the fullness of oneself, before God and for God’s people, the fullness overflows.

When each person understands his or her particular role as the word of God, he or she goes out to the entire world to tell the Good News. Each person becomes a minister. Everyone can give their own gifts to all brothers and sisters. That is each one's treasure and purpose. The person ministered to, if truly converted, will seek a return to the Lord for love. Having been, perhaps, the "prodigal son"⁷⁹ who is extravagant, the person converted begins to exchange life lessons with others. Through this exchange, people form and transform the church.

Studying religious subjects in Haiti is a little bit different than studying them in the U.S.A and elsewhere. The same technologies, like computers and cell phones, are not everywhere. Haitians are people with an oral culture, so they aren't reading the news from outside the village, and they only hear music on the radio. The TV news does not affect them. Generally information is shared by mouth and all relationships are personal. The world of the village is still a very traditional world, although not as traditional as the world of their parents, who had a little more of a belief in taboo and magic.

We must think about cause and effect in the context of the rules of the community. It is very difficult to change a Haitian's world unless perhaps someone from the village leaves and travels to Port-au-Prince and then returns to teach others. That word-of-mouth relationship is personal and can bring change. But in the countryside, this is not a frequent reality. In many areas, the minister is the most educated person. In cities, this is not always the case. Through 20 years of service, I feel blessed by lessons of pastoral care, and I'm grateful that I've been able to develop those skills in the countryside. I hope other ministers will consider the importance of pastoral conversations in understanding their congregations.

⁷⁹ Luke 15:11-32.

Chapter III: A Pastoral Program

1. Rationale and Purpose of the Program

Haitian pastors need assistance in face-to-face conversations to develop personal relationships. Many of their members can't read and the Church is the only place she or he can hear the Word of God. There is no Bible study at home.⁸⁰

I would like to support the church's efforts to reach out to people in small, isolated villages who are not yet fully-developed Christians. The discussions must be based on dialog and the process would be to question people and lead them to find an answer from God.

2. Outcomes and Evaluation Metrics

The use of a companionship approach to ministry is important in Haiti for a number of reasons. Haitian society is built on a tightly woven web of relationships that interact directly. Families and friends live in close proximity, spend most of their time together in large groups, and help each other with all the aspects of life—food, shelter, rearing children, and emotional support. A pastor is also seen as a close part of this relationship. When a person goes to a Vodou priest for their relationship and life advice, they bring that Vodouist's ideas into the entire family. That is why it is so important for a pastor to be a close force in the Christian's life. Individuals can rely on the pastor for spiritual guidance and share their lessons with their family. This exchange only works in a close, companionate relationship between pastor and congregation.

⁸⁰ Lowery, Claire E. "The Art of Pastoral Counseling." Course.

After talking, the subject will not be doubtful but have a new perspective on Christianity and obedience: That Christ is powerful and will take care of his children without the need for magic and Vodou sacrifices. The subject obeys Jesus and can't make Jesus obey him or her.

To understand the role of a minister in Haiti who is fostering an exclusive Christian allegiance in his people, let's begin with an ougan (Vodou priest). Jeannette Pierre, a parishioner of mine, is one of those syncretistic half-Christians⁸¹ who takes her problems to the ougan. For a price, he will offer her magical means for finding out what is really going on, the underlying magical reason for her trouble. When they are both satisfied about the cause, the ougan will ask her to decide what step she wants to take to change her life the way she wants it. Even though Jeannette herself has committed a harmful act, which caused her dangerous situation, the ougan will promise to abort the consequences of it by means of magic, purchased with her money. She suspects the ougan of trying to get her money by exaggerating or complicating her problems.⁸² This is the kind of situation her Christian pastor wants to save her from.

So far, Jeannette Pierre has not taken responsibility for her life or for what she has done. The ethical-moral dimension is not present, but only the desire to control things her way.⁸³

Let's suppose now that Jeannette Pierre comes with her problem to her Christian minister, priest or layperson. Although she is still a half-Christian, she will meet with a different response that will present to her a different opportunity.

She might begin by asking the minister to pray that she will be converted. She is probably asking him only for relief from her immediate problem, for instance to heal a sickness or win her

⁸¹ See Theological Essay, 8.

⁸² See Theological Essay, 9-10.

⁸³ See Ministry Essay.

husband back. Conversion or prayers would be seen by Jeannette only as a means to achieve her single practical goal.

The role of minister is to gently ask about Jeannette's conversion. "Do you really desire to be converted? What caused you to want this? Are you ready to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior?"

If Jeannette is like most clients in her situation, in my experience, she will eagerly answer "Yes" to please the minister. So the minister or priest goes into it further: "Jeannette, let's see what the Bible says about marriage, or jealousy, or conversion." He and Jeannette will talk and study scriptures together for a half hour or so. The minister also shares his own experience, if it is suitable, in more of a dialogue than just teaching.⁸⁴

Now, Jeannette has probably been expecting some neat answers from him, or some clear directives to follow. She needs to learn that ministers try not to give these because God alone knows the depths of the answer and it will not usually be neat. She also needs God's direction to follow and that means she must learn how to look for God's will, not her own. This in turn means Jeannette needs to learn how to pray in new ways.

Her minister ends this session with a prayer to express God's role as the Creator who tests us sometimes and is slow to answer. We always want to know right away. We need to consecrate a little moment to listen and wait. We need, more than anything, to trust; and this can be hard.

Then they make an appointment for another session. Jeannette is going to pray and listen for God's answer. Again, if Jeannette's experience follows a typical pattern, I will learn that she now feels that God is working in her and the problem will seem to be changed. Or God can seem

⁸⁴ Whitehead, James D. and Evelyn. Method in Ministry. (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), p. 46-48.

to “push away” her harmful ideas, and she will usually feel this. The minister assures her that he will be praying too.

Jeannette comes back and she and her minister pray together again. Gently he wanders around in conversation until the time seems right to ask, “How do you feel now?” It’s important that Jeannette trusts her minister even more than before.⁸⁵ Last time, he shared his own experience with her as a fellow human being; now he is going to go on helping her. She must feel accepted by him. He has not used a tone of judgment or said that she is exceptional among human beings, a real sinner. The minister, instead, has had confidence in her. Now she can have confidence in herself and in him.

Obviously he hopes that her prayers and his have been answered and that she has received some kind of an answer. If she has, she shares it, and he encourages her. If she hasn’t, God is often late; the minister shares in confidence that she will receive a good result. Sometimes God’s “good” answers don’t seem very life-giving. Meanwhile, they will go on praying together.

Finally, in God’s good time, Jeannette returns with God’s answer. She has accepted something: her sister really is going to die, or the husband has really gone for good. Or maybe she has decided God wants her to change something. In either case, Jeannette has decided to stay in the way of Jesus Christ and will not return to the ougan. At the end of her period of struggle, she has become a new person; the dimensions of God’s will and of personal, ethical responsibility, have entered her life. God has evidently worked in her to make possible her “yes” to Him. She is now fully converted.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ This is hopefully becoming a relationship of trust between two fellow human beings, very different from the expert-to-client, manipulative, fear-based relationship with her ougan. See above, Theological Paper, 9-10.

⁸⁶ Again, given openness and trust on both sides, if the minister uses the human-being-to-human-being conversational method I have described, the “answer” usually arrives as soon as God wants to send it.

The minister notices her new faith and gives thanks with her. Before praying, he points out that we are always thanking God for things but this is something special to thank God for: God's response to her. He asks her to witness about her experience with God to others, so she can help make even more disciples for Jesus.⁸⁷

Of course the minister represents the Church. But his job has been not just to tell her what to do, but to lead her to the Bible and then to stand on one side so that God can work directly with her. The best answers are God's, and Jeannette is learning to work with Him.

What kinds of follow-up does my Church offer for someone like Jeannette, for accepting in an official way what God has done for her?

There are some ongoing groups at my Church for developing fellowship and support, including a women's group which involves prayer at meetings. If Jeannette's child goes to the parish school, there are scholarships available and parent support groups. And as her priest and pastor, I will go on being available. There are other groups who support the parish in specialized ways: the choir, if she likes singing; and the groups who work on the altar and in the sacristy are also good for building relationships.

3. Christ's Gifts

There are three forms of ritual from which I can choose to share Christ's gifts:

A. -Sacrament of Confirmation: I assume that if the subject has a baptismal certificate from a priest, she is a validly baptized Christian (even if she's from a half-Christian

⁸⁷ This was a method for affirming new faith in the early Church; see Colossians 4:5-6. Once a month, I don't preach, but rather, I ask the parishioners to give Christian witness and share experiences with others. A friend of mine asks people who don't talk well to witness by singing a hymn that tells the experience.

family.) The follow-up may have been in Christian Sunday School. So the intention to baptize was there and the baptism was valid. Now, she can make the adult promises to "follow Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior" which will confirm what she has already begun to understand her life as never before.

B. -Reaffirmation of Faith: The Church provides an opportunity to reaffirm faith in the presence of a Bishop for those who have already been confirmed. It is a renewed promise to follow Jesus, made as an adult as many times as the subject needs to make it, whenever the subject has been prepared for the Bishop's arrival to confirm, and understands what he or she is promising.

C. -Reconciliation: If the subject needs help repenting of sins and obtaining absolution, this could be a preparation for confirmation or re-affirmation.

Conclusion

I can therefore conclude that Vodou is not always welcome by Christians. Many Haitians use Vodou's loans and ideas for cultural interest and religious reasons. There is a need to pay closer attention to the interrelationship between Christianity and Vodou that exists among the Haitian people. I believe that Vodou should be under control and Christianity should be put in its proper place.

I have found also that Vodou has a strong element of community. The solution to the problem of the crisis of Christian values is inevitably through pastoral and Christian education. Education must be given in the broadest sense. Religious leaders and opinion leaders are the educators. The importance of the need for Christian education lies in the fact that, as Emmanuel Kant acknowledges, it is the means by which man becomes man, or man acknowledges God's greatness. Christian education allows human beings to deny their animal natures and, in doing so, the socializing allows him to move from individual and selfish to his social state; from the animal and immoral to human and moral. We should not, however, spend all his time teaching the Bible without using the pastoral techniques that attract people to these teachings. We must show them how to put them into practice like the parable of the sower Jesus tells.

Education is active, participatory and liberating, although sometimes God's instructions come to us when we are just listening. Christian education and pastoral care is both about love and knowing how to support a community. Pastors must use their knowledge, apply theological and biblical concepts, and be present listeners to their congregations. Book learning is good for scholars, but true theological lessons are found in a pastor's daily walk.

Definition of Terms

Ougan: Male Vodou priest.

Mambo: Female Vodou priest.

Vodou: Vodou is the original religion of the old kingdom of Dahomey (West Africa).

Veve: Intricate symbols of the loas used in rituals. Each Loa has his or her own veve, which is traced on the ground with powdered eggshell or a similar substance prior to a ritual. The ability to draw a Veve correctly is considered to be the skill of an initiate. A veve is believed to be more powerful if it is drawn with the correct details. The figures below are the veve of some major loas.

According to Milo Rigaud's book, Secrets of Voodoo (New York: City Lights Book Press, 1969), "The veves represent figures of the astral forces... In the course of Voodoo ceremonies, the reproduction of the astral forces represented by the veves obliges the loas ... to descend to earth."

Majo Jon: A central figure in some Vodou ceremonies who dances a special dance while whirling a baton.

Rara: A type of music and rhythm predominately using the drums of Vodou. Associated with festivities during Carnivale.

Figures and Appendices

Figure 1: Veve of Aysan

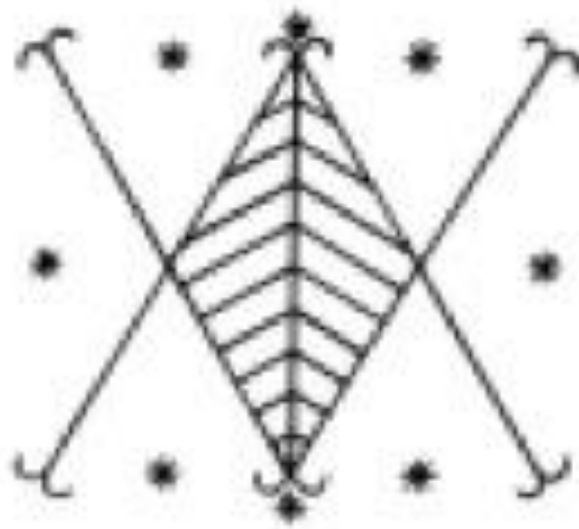


Figure 2: Veve of Baron Samedi

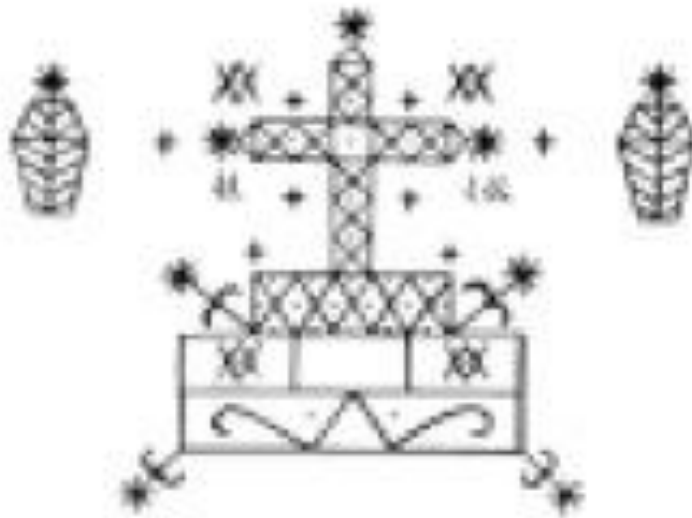


Figure 3: Veve of Manman Brigitte

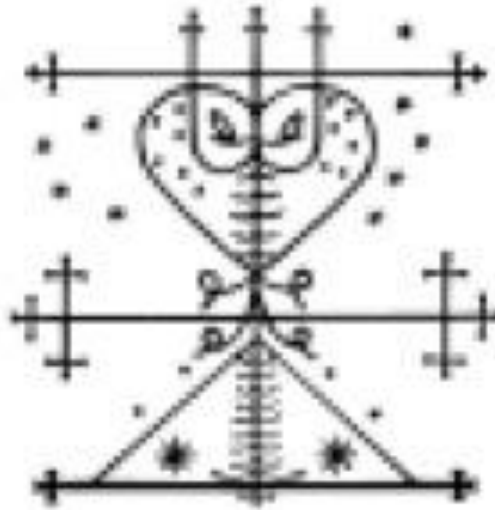


Figure 4: Veve of Dambhallaweddo

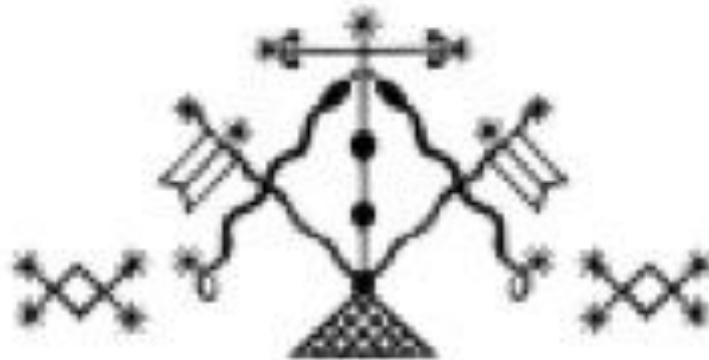


Figure 5: Veve of Papa Legba



Figure 6: Veve of Ogoun

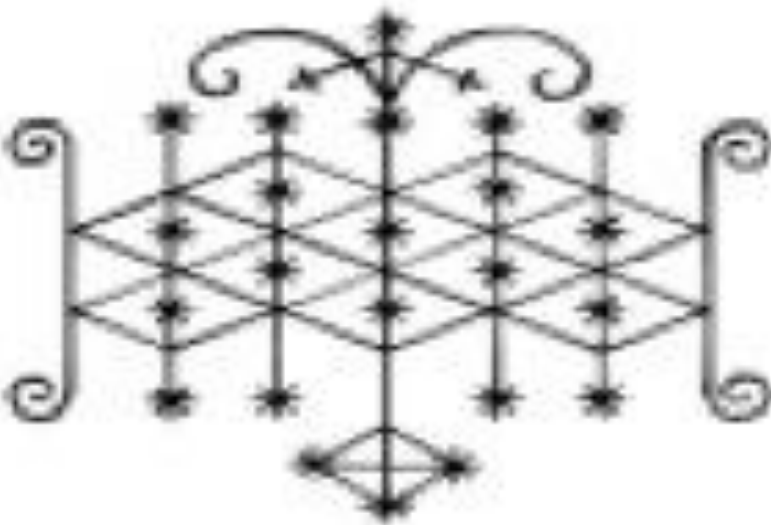


Figure 7: A Vodou Celebration



Figure 8: A Sacrifice



9. -Appendix I: Map of Haiti⁸⁸



⁸⁸ Haiti is divided into 10 departments. Each department has a principal town: North: Cap-Haïtien, Center: Hinche, Southeast: Jacmel, West: Port au-Prince, Nordest: Fort-Liberte, Northwest: Port de Paix, Artibonite: Gonaïves, Grand-Anse: Jérémie, South: Les Cayes, and Nippes: Miragoâne. There are also 3 islands: La Gonâve, La Tortue and La Vache.

Haiti is a country of 28,000 km². Of the nearly 10,000,000 people, one third live in the capital city Port-au-Prince.

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