ROBERT E. HOOD*

Role of Black Religion in Political Change: The Haitian Revolution and Voodoo

In his rather magnificent tribute to the Haitian Revolution called *The Black Jacobins,* C. L. R. James describes the rather dramatic scene linking black religion and political change on the eve of the revolution in 1791. In forests of the Morne Rouge, the enormously built slave Boukman, who is also a *houngan* (a Voodoo priest) is presiding at the ceremonies, thought by some students of this old African religion to be incantations for one of the loa in the Petro rite. Translating the Creole, James renders the incantation as follows:

> The god who created the sun which gives us light, who rouses the waves and rules the storm, though hidden in the clouds, he watches us. He sees all that the white man does. The god of the white man inspires him with crime, but our god calls upon us to do good works. Our god who is good to us orders us to revenge our wrongs. He will direct our arms and aid us. Throw away the symbol of the god of the whites who has so often caused us to weep, and listen to the voice of liberty, which speaks in the hearts of us all.[1]

The repudiation of the Christian god of the whites was the cause for the reaffirmation of the African gods of the blacks, who were invoked and welcomed through the religion of Voodoo. With that repudiation, the African influence in Haitian history and religious life was established and institutionalized permanently, so much so that Haiti is possibly the most Africanised country outside the continent of Africa.

This paper intends to 1) examine the relationship of this religion of the poor, namely Voodoo, to political change as that change was embodied and executed in the Haitian Revolution, 2) examine some of the characteristics of Voodoo which made it a viable link of solidarity between the various Africans from different tribes and colonies fighting for justice and political change in Haiti, 3) raise some theological questions in light of the New Testament claim and the Christian Church's teaching about

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* Presented to Afro-American Religion Section, American Academy of Religion, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, on 3rd May, 1981, by Professor Robert Hood, Associate Professor of Church and Society, General Theological Seminary, New York, New York.

[1] *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 87.

the christological victory over powers and demons. Related to the third point is an underlying question: if Voodoo is a viable religion for Africans, particularly the rural poor, does it offer a source of cultural and religious liberation for those in the black diaspora away from Mother Africa?

Haiti as the most African country outside the continent of Africa is also the second oldest republic in this western hemisphere. The revolution which gave birth to that black republic, albeit neglected or overlooked by North American and European historians, came about not through the actions of educated patrician and upper class gentlemen as was the case in America nor through the discontent of an emerging bourgeoise class craving for economic and political rights hitherto enjoyed by the aristocracy, as was the case in 18th century France. The Haitian Revolution was initiated and carried through by a group of slaves, illiterate for the most part, some mulattoes, and Voodoo houngans and mamboes (priestesses).

This revolution is all the more significant when one recalls that this group of black slaves defeated not only the major European world powers at the time—France, Spain, Great Britain, the Netherlands—but also shook the foundations of slavery in this country, particularly in the South, in Brazil, which, after the Caribbean islands was the second most popular destination for African slaves, and the slave-trading countries of Europe, whose economies and wealth depended very largely on the slave trade and products farmed by the slaves in their respective colonies.

The anxiety created amongst American slave-masters can be noted from a report about the Haitian Revolution which appeared in the *Richmond Enquirer:*

> . . . between five and six hundred (white) persons fell under the bloody hatchet of the (black) Haytians, and the warm blood which ran from them, quenched the thirst of their murderers, who went on their knees to receive it.[2]

Indeed whilst the southerners cited the Haitian Revolution as an example of what would happen should the slaves in America be given liberty, the northern abolitionists also cited the Haitian Revolution as indicative of the danger lurking were slaves not given their emancipation. They reasoned that slavery only could lead to such conditions as existed in the French colony and therefore to such a condition in those states which maintained slavery.[3]

The Haitian Revolution had an effect on slavery in the South in several respects. In 1800, the legislature of South Carolina forbade any slaves, free Negroes, and mulattoes to assemble for any kind of instruction or religious worship. In 1803, this was slightly modified to forbidding blacks to enter any assembly having a majority of whites before nine o'clock in the evening without permission of a magistrate and with-

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[2] Cited in Alfred Nathaniel Hunt, "The Influence of Haiti on the Antebellum South, 1791-1865." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1975, p. 2.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

out his presence or proximity within three miles of the meeting to be attended or entered.[4]

Even the Roman Catholic Church has been defeated by the Haitian Voodoo loa in spite of many efforts to wipe out that indigenous religion, often with the support of the civil authorities in Haiti. As one bishop noted wearily after a campaign to require Haitians to renounce Voodoo, amulets and other symbols through threats and excommunications, etc.: "It is not we who have got hold of people to christianise them, but they who have been making superstitions out of us."[5]

Permit me at the outset to deal with two preliminary issues before going to the heart of the paper, since there are often a number of misconceptions and stereotypes of this small but historically significant island in the history of ideas. The two issues have to do with perceptions of Haiti for whites and perceptions of Haiti for black culture.

For Europeans and North Americans, Haiti, first of all, is the prototype for the perfect caricature of black incompetence and a continuous minstrel show. Graham Greene's novel, *The Comedians,* has been a major contributor toward reinforcing all the expectations about a black country which many Europeans and North Americans would like to believe.

Secondly, Haiti is viewed as the place for all the idealised stereotypes and myths which whites have about black sensuousness and exotic sexuality. The number of tales and incidents circulating amongst social workers and agencies assisting the recent influx of boat people and refugees from Haiti having to do with sexual exploitation can be cited as some evidence of this. The fantasies about the fact that Haitians as well as most descendants of Africa are a very physical people, who make no clear separation between sensuousness and spirituality as Europeans and their descendants do, only reinforces the myths about the Haitian exotic nature.

Thirdly, Haiti is for many whites the prototype of the demonic, symbolised in popular views about Voodoo being the religion of zombies and conjurism or black magic. The cinema, television and the mythic needs of Europeans possibly needing to legitimate their claims of theological and cultural superiority over African non-theistic and animistic religions perpetuate this prototype.

Fourthly, Haiti remains for many whites the symbol of black resistance to white political and cultural imperialism and the accompanying claims for a superior civilisation. This resistance has never been forgotten by the French, so much so that they try to establish the superiority of even the French language by insisting that Creole, the mother tongue of Haiti, is really a patois descendant of a European language with a few bits and pieces of other languages thrown in. Nor was this resistance

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[4] DuBois, W. E. B., ed., *The Negro Church.* (Atlanta, Georgia: The Atlanta University Press, 1903), p. 22.

[5] Metraux, Alfred, *Voodoo in Haiti,* Hugo Charteris, trans. Introduction by Sidney W. Mintz. (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 331.

ever forgotten by the United States. The occupation of that country by the United States from 1915 to 1933 was the most remarkable attempt to put paid to Haitian resistance to white models and culture. It is to be noted that this occupation was carried out with the approval of President Woodrow Wilson, a President known as a high-minded idealist willing to fight Germany in order to make the western world safe for democracy, as he put it. It is also to be noted that this was done with France's approval, possibly still sullen over the defeat dealt her by these black slaves in the early 19th century. As Laboulayne, the French First Secretary at the embassy in Washington wrote:

> . . . It was urgently desired that the United States take energetic action in Haiti. That if she did France would look with approval on her action and be willing to support her in every way, provided that a just recognition of French claims . . . was made by the United States.[6]

Fifthly, Haiti reminds Europeans particularly of the loss of the centerpiece of a colonial empire which contributed muchly to 18th and 19th century wealth, particularly in France. By the middle of the 18th century, Haiti, then called St. Domingue, was the wealthiest colony in the Caribbean and the source of wealth for many French families. For example, in 1789 there were approximately 790 sugar plantations, 2000 coffee plantations, and over 3000 producers of indigo. The export of sugar to Europe equalled the total export from all the British colonies together. Haiti was also the world's principal coffee grower and exporter.[7]

What is the significance of Haiti from the black perspective—and here I am thinking of black as an inclusive term for Africans and descendants of Africa both in this country, the Caribbean, and South America?

First, Haiti is the symbol of victory by a black revolution over major European powers. As the first black republic, in spite of the subsequent history of corruption, inefficiency and brutality, Haiti is an important historical component of black pride and black power.

Secondly, Haiti is the place for the first major revolution with worldwide significance for blacks. The reverberations in this country with regard to slavery have already been mentioned. In addition both Europe and South America, particularly Brazil and Venezuela, where slavery existed, used Haiti as an example of liberation. Haiti itself understood its revolution to have this kind of significance. Indeed it was important that the second constitution of Haiti in 1806 declared that all Haitians regardless of their skin colour were to be called "black." Such an ideological term was also extended to the Poles and Germans on the island who had supported the liberation fighters during the revolution and had been

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[6] Heinl, Robert Debs and Heinl, Nancy Gordon, *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1971,* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), p. 407.

[7] Nicholls, David, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 19.

given citizenship.[8] Even the mulatto, Petion, understood this ideological significance of Haiti for the black world. One of the conditions of his support for Miranda and Bolivar in their liberation struggles in South America was that they must end slavery upon freeing South America from the Spanish. And in Venezuela in 1816 Bolivar did just that.

An additional important fact about this ideological self-understanding is that it means that the beginnings of Negritude lay not in 20th century France or in former French colonies such as Senegal, where Leopold Senghor and Alioune Diop came from, but rather in Haiti. As early as 1836 Haitian writers and *literati* began to discuss what it meant to be black in the New World. Through the literary magazine, *Le Republicain,* Haitian writers such as Emil Nau (1812-1860) and Beauvais Lespinasse (1811-1863) noted that even the French language could not contain the needs and aspirations of such a nation which they described as "the cradle of African independence."[9] Lespinasse wrote:

> But can we speak on the political state of Haiti, on the future of the Antilles and of the black race in America, without pausing to think of Africa? It is to Africa, our mother, that we owe the colour which is still, in the eyes of some nations, the emblem of inferiority. Hence Africa must be the object of all our wishes, of all desires, of all our hopes.[10]

In every respect, at least for me, politically, culturally, socially and historically, the Haitian Revolution has made contributions to black cultures comparable to that made to European cultures by the French and Russian Revolutions. That the Haitian Revolution has been ignored or neglected has less to do with the worth of that contribution and more to do with the way white European oriented scholars regard the political contribution of any black culture or country.

Thirdly, Haiti is the continuous link between blackness as shaped and deformed by the experiences of the New World and blackness as shaped and transformed by the experiences of Africa and the Old World. An important link is that of religion—the religion of the poor, namely, Voodoo.

Voodoo is the New World heir of African Old World religion which resisted its conversion to the Christian God. Instead it converted the Christian God and all His saints to itself. Metraux stated well the difficulty Europeans and whites in general have in affirming the inherent world-view and dignity of Voodoo:

> Voodoo is a paganism of the West. We discover it with joy or horror, according to our temperament or our background. Many of us go to Haiti in search of our classical heritage, and find in Voodoo the charm of fairy tales. Without compelling us to give up our habits and our ties with the present, it takes us into a *magic* realm.[11]

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

[10] *Historie des affranchis de Saint-Domingue,* (Paris, 1882), p. 19. Cited in Nicholls, p. 75.

[11] Metraux, pp. 365-366. Italics added.

Historically, Voodoo, like the black church movement in the United States, forged a bond of solidarity and a vessel of identity for a multi-tribal people thrown into an alien Christian environment. That link is especially apparent in New Orleans and parts of the South, where as early as 1716 the first slaves from Haiti as well as other French Caribbean colonies were shipped to Louisiana. They continued to be imported into Louisiana until such was forbidden, first from Martinique by the Spanish in 1782 and then from Haiti in 1792. One of the reasons given for the ban was that they were devotees of Voodoo and this could have a disruptive effect on the slave-master relationship. When the United States acquired Louisiana in 1803 the ban on slaves from the French colonies and especially Haiti was lifted. So the slaves brought with them their Voodoo.[12] It is this link between black religion and political change which is to be examined in the rest of this paper, using the model of the Haitian Revolution and Voodoo as the historical paradigm.

The western view of Haiti has largely been shaped by Europeans and white North Americans who have some polemic to set forth for various reasons. The dismissal of its revolution as a significant world-force has been partially caused by the subsequent overlay of brutalities, corruption, and illiteracy as well as the unrelenting poverty of the island-state. This has demonstrated to European and American satisfaction the justification of the stereotype about black inferiority and incompetence when it comes to running affairs of state. One Frenchman, Edgar Le Selve, wrote that Haiti "is that true paradise on earth, which has been the theatre of such horrible scenes and frightful dramas, whose soil has drunk more blood than sweat."[13]

It does not seem to matter that such could also be said of all European history. Sir Spencer St. John, the British minister to Haiti in the 1860's can be held largely responsible for the popular western view that Haiti as the scene of Voodoo is the scene of magic, demonology, and superstition. In his popular book, *Hayti: or the Black Republic,* Sir Spencer propagated two main ideas: 1) that Voodoo is a bloody rite which uses human sacrifices and 2) that cannibalism and zombies are central to the way of life in Haiti. The motivating attitude guiding the writing of that book is revealed in one of his observations about blacks:

> As a rule, the abler a negro is, the more wicked and corrupt he appears . . . I now agree with those who deny that the negro could ever originate a civilisation, and that with the best of education he remains an inferior type of man.[14]

Another British minister to Haiti, Alexander Murray, writing in 1910, reported to the Foreign Office that on special occasions children were sacrificed, claiming that a Haitian colleague once told him: "We have our solemn feasts at which we eat human flesh; your priests tell you to believe that it is the body of Christ that you partake of at Commu-

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[12] Raboteau, Albert J., *Slave Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 76.
[13] Heinl, p. 9.
[14] Nicholls, p. 128.

nion."[15] Needless to say, there are no known Voodoo rites calling for human sacrifice, although there are rites calling for animal sacrifices. What can we say about this "paradise on earth" which in fact has been the theatre of many horrible scenes as well as the victim of American and European stereotypes about the uncivilised savage lurking within every black breast? What can especially be said about this country to justify the raison d'etre of this paper, which is that the Haitian Revolution must be numbered amongst the epoch-making western historical revolutions like the French, American, Russian, and the so-called English, not to mention the more recent Chinese Revolution in 1948?

Haiti was discovered by the western world via Columbus, who made a sketch of the north coast of Haiti which is presently in the Library of the Duke of Alba in Madrid. In his diary on 6th December, 1492, Columbus recorded:

> He entered the said harbor and gave it the name of Puerto de San Nicolao, because it was the feast of St. Nicholas, for his honor; and at the entrance thereof he marvelled at its beauty and graciousness . . . The whole harbor is very breezy and uninhabited, clear of trees. All this island seemed to him more rocky than any other he had found hitherto.[16]

This name, San Nicolao, along with the name Tortuga, now called Ile de la Tortue, which he gave to the island lying north of the northern coast of Haiti because it reminded him of a tortoise, remain inhabited places in Haiti even today.

The Spanish, who slaughtered the native Carib Indian population, called it Ysla Espanola, meaning Spanish Island. This was latinised as "Hispaniola." The Indians themselves called it *Hayti,* meaning "mountainous." When the slaves defeated their slave masters during the Revolution, they adopted this original Indian name to symbolise both continuity and new birth.

Anxious about the killing of the Carib Indians and the importation of Africans to replace them, Bishop Bartolome de las Casas (1474-1566) said the Indian population in 1492 numbered three million. Only 16 years later in a census of 1508, less than 60,000 Indians could be counted. By 1550 that number had been reduced to 150. Ironically, it was Bishop Bartolome, concerned about the dwindling Indian labour force, who persuaded Carlos V to import Africans to the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean.

In 1510 the first official shipment of Africans to the island, now called Hispaniola, was registered. Sugar had been brought to the island in 1506 from the Canary Islands and was grown on plantations. There is some suspicion that Columbus may have actually brought slaves on his ships, for when Nicholas de Ovando, the royal governor, arrived in 1502, he noted that there were slaves already on the island. Juan Manuel de Ayala wrote that even by 1503 there was already evidence of slaves seek-

[15] Heinl, p. 680.
[16] Cited in Heinl, p. 11.

ing their freedom by running to the mountains. These runaway slaves were later called *marronages* or marrons.[17] Whilst there is some controversy amongst scholars about whether the marrons constituted a rudimentary liberation group or a band of refugees fleeing Spanish oppression, there is little doubt that the initial insurrections which led to the Haitian Revolution in 1791 were begun by marrons.[18]

There were many African sources for the slavery established in Haiti by the Spanish and later the French. Maya Deren in her book, *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti,* writes that the predominant African groups were Dahomey, Yoruba, Loango, Ashanti, and Mandingo. The latter group included the Senegalese, the Bambaras and the Mandingues.[19] Moreau de Saint-Mery, whose writings on the social and economic conditions of Haiti at the French colonial period are still amongst the best French sources for that period, also lists these tribes. But Metraux disagrees with this claim. He tries to demonstrate that most of the slaves shipped to Haiti came largely from Dahomey and Nigeria or the Gulf of Benin.[20]

Herskovits points out that whilst many tribes of West Africa make up the black ancestry of modern Haiti, the usual picture of many dissimilar small tribal groups with largely unintelligible languages and worshipping different gods is not true. There was a basic unity in language and culture in West Africa, so that even the languages, though mutually unintelligible to the different tribes, were structurally and idiomatically similar.[21] A possible comparison might be the structural similarity of the Romance languages used in countries in the Mediterranean area of western Europe.

Because of this similarity Herskovits points out that Creole spoken in Martinique and Trinidad as well as in Louisiana can be understood by Haitians, who also speak Creole:

> The slaves, having mastered a requisite number of words in the language of their masters, merely poured them into this mold of their own linguistic patterns and, approximating the phonetic values of such words in terms of the West African modes of speech, thus established a means of communication between one another, no matter what their tribal derivation.[22]

But there was also a similarity in religious beliefs and world-view which the West African slaves brought with them. This will be dealt with later in the paper when the origins of Voodoo are discussed.

By the middle of the 17th century the Spanish Island, Tortuga, had become a haven for vagabonds, religious and political refugees, and par-

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[17] Heinl, p. 13; see also Nicholls, p. 24, p. 26.

[18] Nicholls, p. 24.

[19] Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti.* Foreword by Joseph Cambell. (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 58-59.

[20] Metraux, p. 26.

[21] Herskovits, Melville J., *Life in a Haitian Valley.* Introduction by Edward Brathwaite. (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), p. 22.

[22] *Ibid.,* p. 23.

ticularly pirates and French buccaneers. Indeed it is from the French word, *boucanier,* which was French for the Indian word *boucacoui,* meaning a method of smoking meat, that we get our English word *barbeque.* Pere de Tortre, a priest writing in 1667, described a buccaneer as someone who cured meat

> after a manner learnt from the Caribbe Indians, which was as follows: the meat was laid to be dried upon a wooden grate or hurdle which the Indians called *barbecu,* placed at a good distance over a slow fire. The meat when cured was called *boucan* and the same name was given to the place of their cookery.[23]

At the same time, the Spanish empire was declining, so much so that the British and French began to feel bold enough to challenge the Spanish occupation of the island, especially Tortuga. Also, the French buccaneers who mainly came from Normandy controlled parts of the north and west on the island. Finally, joining forces with the French and the Dutch, the British organised an allied force which defeated the Spanish and expelled them from their garrison on Tortuga.

As these Europeans were competing amongst themselves for international supremacy as well as searching for new markets for their expanding economies, they carried their struggle into the New World. The territory and the name of the island changed many times between 1630 and 1659 when the War of the Great Alliance was fought and competition between the Europeans was at its fiercest. Finally, after the French established sovereignty over the western part of the island in 1659 and the Spanish over the eastern part, today the Dominican Republic, the European powers met in the Dutch town of Ryswick in September, 1697, and drew to a treaty which legalised the status quo on the island. The French renamed their part St. Domingue and began to import more slaves for working the plantations. In 1701 there were approximately 10,000 slaves on St. Domingue. By 1787, just before the French Revolution, there were more than 450,000. Even during that revolutionary year, some 40,000 additional Africans were imported. For the next 130 years the French were to occupy what is now present-day Haiti until the Revolution of 1791, which lasted until 1803.

It must be noted here that early on the Europeans observed that the Africans brought their separate religion with them, which was a hindrance to the efforts of Christians to convert them very much like the white Christians encountered initial resistance by slaves in this country. One French priest, Pere Labat, wrote in 1722: "The *noirs* do without scruple that which did the Philistines: they worship Dagon beside Jehovah and secretly commingle the superstitions of their old idolatry with the liturgy of Christ."[24] Metraux points out that just as Europeans have claimed that Creole is simply a corrupted form of French called patois, so Europeans have tried to extend their sense of being culturally superior by claiming that Voodoo is really a corruption of "Vaudois"—or what

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[23] Heinl, p. 16.
[24] *Ibid.,* p. 25.

we call the Waldenses.[25] The Waldenses were a 12th century sect which developed around a wealthy merchant from Lyon called Valdez or Waldo. He was declared heretical and excommunicated by Pope Lucius III in 1184. At the time of the Reformation, they accepted the principles and eventually identified themselves as protestant.

But a "Voodoo" in the Fon language of Dahomey and Togo is a "spirit" or a "sacred object."[26] Vessels used today in the liturgy still have their original Dahomean names, including the name of the Voodoo priest, the *hungan* from the Fon word *hunsis,* meaning a "servant of the divinity." Voodoo provided the slaves with a support system and ritual for daily life in an unfriendly and hostile environment and culture. It provided the transplanted Africans with the means of identity, sustenance, and eventually solidarity. In a life which evolved around hard labour that began before sun-up and continued until after sun-down, with usually only two hours per day for themselves during which the slaves could cultivate their own small plots of land, Voodoo or black religion offered a release. With the life expectancy of an adult slave in St. Domingue being only ten years, African religion in the form of Voodoo offered nourishment and hope.[27]

Moreau de Saint-Mery insists that Voodoo or Vaudou in Dahomey was worship of the snake, which exercises its power through high priests and priestesses called kings and queens or "papa and maman." Indeed the Voodoo priest and priestess in Haiti are called *houngan* and *mamba.* It is interesting to note that early Voodoo in New Orleans, the center of the rites in this country during the slavery period, had to do with the worship of a snake god called Li Grand Zombi. A rum libation was poured, the houngan spewed rum from his mouth as a form of blessing, and there were candles and altars to this god.[28] Apparently there were also ceremonies for a god called "Danny" which Herskovits believes to have been the Dahomean snake god called Dan and the Haitian loa called Dambella, which is the god of good fortune.[29] Sometimes the same god is called Blanc Dani and identified with St. Michael for reasons unknown.[30]

But Metraux quite rightly refutes **ophiolatry** as a source for Voodoo, pointing out that Saint-Mery may be simply revealing his European feeling of superiority, since this god or loa neither in Dahomey nor in Haiti is the only great "Voodoo."[31] Rather Voodoo has to be understood in the context of the African world-view or *Weltanschauung.* That world-view includes a much wider and different understanding of spirits than has generally been allowed in the normative Christian view of spirits and the

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[25] Metraux, pp. 27-28.
[26] *Ibid.,* p. 27.
[27] Metraux, p. 32.
[28] Raboteau, p. 79.
[29] Herskovits, Melville J., *The Myth of the Negro Past.* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 246.
[30] *Ibid.,* p. 250.
[31] Metraux, p. 38.

Spirit. Such a world-view shapes his relationship to the cosmos and to nature as well as to his gods. He is bound to believing because it has been handed down to him by his fathers.

The spiritual world of the African generally consists of four categories of spiritual beings, if we were to try and catalogue them for western comprehension: 1) a Supreme Spirit, 2) a large variety of lesser spirits and gods, 3) ancestral spirits, and 4) evil spirits. The spiritual world is not in conflict with the material world for the African mind. Spiritual beings are intimately related to and control the forces in the material world. As one African scholar has pointed out:

> Man has need of the spirit-world, while the minor spirits have need of man to gladden their hearts, to feed them with fat things. It must be pointed out, however, that between the world of men directed by the spirits and the spirit-world, there reigns order, not chaos. The spirits can topple the order of the world as a punishment for man's offences, but man has ways and means of preventing this or restoring the order when upset.[32]

With the exception of the evil spirits, and to a lesser degree the Supreme Spirit, the rites and practices of Voodoo have to do with the lesser divinities and the ancestral spirits. These spirits are self-sufficient, although some spirits are more powerful than others and indeed are able to misguide devotees of one spirit or loa by taking the place of the loa invoked by the devotee and thus can be a mischievous cause of confusion. That is, there is a playful sense of humor also attached to the spirits of Voodoo. They can disappoint, they can enthuse. They can be abusive, they can bestow. They can be angry and jealous and hungry. They also can be playful, satisfying, and full. They are both male and female and they have all the limitations of people.[33] As Myra Deren points out: "The living do not serve the dead; it is the dead who are made to serve the living."[34] Voodoo establishes for its adherents a link with what might be called archetypes, except that they are visible and not abstract. They can be seen and do not rely on a psychiatrist to act as guru. It is when these archetypes reappear and begin to possess the soul and body of the living - what is called "mounting" - that the connection between the world of the spirits and that of the living reaches its desired and highest point. It is the power of the loa of Voodoo to become visible in living persons that establishes their mastery over matter. Deren again observes:

> Deification, therefore, does not consist in the spiritualization of matter; on the contrary, the ceremony of *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* . . . restores the disembodied soul *to* the physical, living universe which was its origin . . . . The Haitian is an eminently realistic, reasonable man. His loa must share the needs as well as the privileges of life.[35]

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[32] Dickson, Kwasi and Ellingworth, Paul, *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), p. 36.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

[34] Deren, p. 28.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 32-3.

But one must return to the impending drama of the ongoing Haitian Revolution before this necessary diversion. Whilst slave uprisings in Saint-Domingue were recorded as early as 1522 under the Spanish, the first black rebellion against the French was noted in 1679 at Port-a-Paix. Later in 1697 there was the famous insurrection in Quartier Morin and Petite-Anse. Certainly the French treated their slaves very harshly, as one learns from Vastey, the private secretary to Henri Christophe, later the first King of Haiti and one of the leaders of the Revolution. Vastey had spent half his life as a slave on the island and described the treatment which was normative for the slaves:

> Have they not hung up men with heads downward, drowned them in sacks, crucified them on planks, buried them alive, crushed them in mortars? Have they not forced them to eat shit? . . . Have they not thrown them into boiling cauldrons of cane syrup? . . . Have they not consigned these miserable blacks to man-eating dogs until the latter, sated by human flesh, left the mangled victims to be finished off with bayonet and poniard?[36]

It is true that one cannot underestimate the connection between the tensions and excitement in France at this time and those on Saint-Domingue. Certainly much of the sympathy which the slaves received in France could be traced to the democratic ideas being unleashed by the French Revolution. But the initial cause for the Haitian Revolution was a passionate desire for liberation and emancipation from an oppressive system of the French slavemasters. Indeed there is a song in Creole which sounds the cry for liberation and which was used at Voodoo ceremonials at the time:

Pito muri pase m'kuri	Better to die than run away,
Desalin Desalin demambre	Dessalines, Dessalines the powerful,
Viv la liberte	Long live liberty.

Jean-Jacques Dessalines (ca. 1758-1806) was the first Emperor of Haiti after its independence in 1804.

On 5th October, 1789, King Louis XVI assented to the Manifesto, "The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen," which sounded the major themes of Enlightenment and western democracy. The first article of that Manifesto read: "All men are born and live free and equal in their rights." On 22nd October the mulattoes of Saint-Domingue, identifying themselves as the "free citizens of colour" presented a petition to the National Assembly in Paris, requesting a seat in the Assembly. The petition was accepted and the mulatto delegation was seated, contrary to the wishes of the white *petit bourgeois* plantation owners on the island.

On 22nd August, 1791, the Haitian Revolution began to the beat of the Voodoo drums and the slaves using pruning hooks, machetes, and

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[36] Heinl, pp. 26-7.

torches beset the whites. Whites were slaughtered and plantations and sugar-cane fields were burned. The fight for liberation by *noirs* was to continue until victory in 1803. Eventually the mulattoes joined them and for once both caste and race in Haiti were put aside for the common cause of freedom and liberation.

The Haitian Revolution started appropriately enough with a Voodoo ceremony at the place where a slave revolt had earlier taken place in 1751 led by another legendary slave in Haiti, Francois Macandal, on the Plantation Normand de Mazy. This time the slave was Boukman, who was also a houngan. At the Voodoo ceremony which he conducted and at which a black pig was sacrificed, all participants drank the pig's blood and pledged obedience to Boukman and death to all whites. The loa being propitiated were most likely in the Petro rite. Petro loa often demand pigs at their feasts. George Easton Simpson, the noted student of Haitian Voodoo, has suggested that the participants could have been agitated to rebel also because some Petro houngans taught that the souls of those killed in the insurrection would return to their ancestors in Africa.[37] Recalling the importance of ancestral spirits for the African, this was a summons well understood in the very core of their being and built into the very fabric of their spirituality.

Eventually the whites caught Boukman that same year and beheaded him at Cap Francois (later Cap Haitian), after which his body was burned and his head impaled on a pike. But from this uprising the leaders of the Haitian Revolution were born: Toussaint L'Ouverture (ca. 1744-1803), labeled by Napoleon in a fit of rage, "The Gilded African," Jean-Jacques Dessalines (ca. 1758-1806), who succeeded Toussaint - the latter having been tricked by Napoleon, kidnapped by his agents, and taken to France where he was imprisoned and eventually died, and who actually established the Haitian State in 1804, and Henri Christophe (1767-1820), the first King in Haiti after the country split following Dessalines' assassination. One must also mention Alexandre Petion (1770-1818), who was a mulatto and who eventually helped the *noirs* in defeating the French in the South where the mulattoes were strongest.

There is little doubt that the religion of the poor, namely, Voodoo, was a crucial bond of solidarity during this period of precarious social change and national survival. The French historian, Dantes Bellegarde, who had an utter distaste for all things African, even had to admit that in Voodoo the slaves discovered a communality and solidarity as they joined in a common political action.[38] Both Americans and Europeans have tried to discredit Voodoo as a viable religion, some efforts of which have already been mentioned. One American, William Newell, maintained in 1888 that Voodoo not only was derived from a European sect, the Waldenses, but also its beliefs were taken from Europe when blacks in the New World adapted this sect to their own African religious beliefs.[39] John

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[37] Deren, p. 63.
[38] Metraux, p. 41.
[39] Cited in Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, p. 28.

Craig, a marine officer stationed in Haiti at the time of the American occupation, in his widely-read book on Haiti, entitled *Black Bagdad,* portrayed Voodoo as a sign of black barbarism and black religious underdevelopment.

But with the bond of a common suffering, a common colour, and a common religion, the *noirs* under Toussaint were victorious on 26th January, 1801. On that day he was declared the ruler of the entire island, both its French and Spanish parts, having received the keys to Ciudad Santo Domingo and having hoisted the Tricolor over the main garrison on the eastern part of the island. The very first proclamation by Toussaint was that slavery was abolished forever. Then he went about building a nation: he divided the island into three administrative districts, established a currency, suppressed smuggling, set up courts, wrote the first budget, opened schools and built new roads. On 9th May, 1801, the first constitution was proclaimed. That constitution abolished distinctions of colour as well as the institution of slavery. On 8th July, 1801, this constitution became the law of the land.[40]

But Napoleon was not happy to have to admit to the victory of the guilded Africans. Determined to regain France's once wealthiest colony and source of much of her wealth, Napoleon in October, 1801, achieved one goal in his general strategy toward his objective of removing this embarrassing inkspot to France's honour: he made an armistice with England called the "Peace of Amiens." Now Napoleon had a free hand to deal with the blacks without fearing interference from England. He also had time to plan for using the island as a place for launching an attack on and blockade of America in order to retake Louisiana. Likewise he envisioned the island being a gateway to the eventual occupation of British Jamaica. On 21st July, 1801, Thomas Jefferson, now President instead of Secretary of State under President Washington who was in office when the Revolution had begun, was informed by the French minister that Napoleon planned to attack the independent black island-state. President Jefferson agreed to this plan, although other Americans saw the danger such a victory might pose to Louisiana.

Instructing his brother-in-law, Victor Emmanuel Leclerc, to use whatever deception was needed for the defeat of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Leclerc was charged to retake the island and to restore slavery after it had been returned to French sovereignty - this in spite of the "Declaration of the Rights of Man." "Rid us of these guilded Africans," ordered Napoleon, "and we shall have nothing more to wish."[41] In December, 1801, the French, Spanish, and Dutch sailed together for Saint-Domingue from various shipyards in France and Spain. Leclerc, who led the expedition, had over 21,000 troops under his command, the average age being about 30 years old.[42]

On 2nd February, 1802, with 23 warships and 5000 men, Leclerc went

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[40] James, pp. 244-246.
[41] Heinl, p. 100.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

ashore and by 7th February, he had reached Cap Haitian. Anxious to begin negotiations with Christophe as a way of undermining Toussaint, Leclerc also found support from the mulattoes and free blacks who were jealous of the *noir* illiterate generals under Toussaint. Christophe instead retreated to the mountains in order to fight the French. Using the sons of Toussaint whom Napoleon had sent along on the expedition to entrap the father, Leclerc with the help of some of Toussaint's mulatto generals, eventually persuaded Toussaint to surrender under the false pretense of making a peace. Just before the decisive battle, Toussaint L'Ouverture - his surname said to be a soubriquet assumed by Toussaint because this term was often given to slaves who, like Toussaint, had teeth missing in the front[43] - made a most extraordinary speech setting forth the reasons why the blacks should defend their liberation from the French:

> You are going to fight against men who have neither faith, law nor religion. They promise you liberty, they intend your servitude. Why have so many ships traversed the ocean, if not to throw you again into chains . . . Uncover your breasts, you will see them branded by the iron of slavery. During ten years, what have you not undertaken for liberty? Your masters slain or put to flight, the English humiliated by defeat; discord extinguished, a land of slavery purified by fire and evolving more beautiful than ever under liberty; these are your labours and these the fruits of your labours. And the foe wishes to snatch both out of your hands . . .[44]

Both Poles and Germans in Haiti supported Toussaint during this struggle for survival. Eventually when Dessalines was reorganising his armies he called one of his regiments the Polish regiment.[45] In gratitude, after Dessalines established the republic, the Poles were called both black and citizens of the new republic.

Toussaint was captured after some French trickery, sent to France, where he was imprisoned and eventually died. Dessalines assumed the leadership, who, together with Christophe and Petion, the mulatto who eventually realised that the fate of the mulattoes rested with the blacks and not the Europeans, defeated the French by November, 1803. On 1st January, 1804, Haiti was declared independent and Dessalines crowned himself its first Emperor, Jacques I, on 8th October, 1804 in Port-au-Prince. It is estimated that over 55,000 French soldiers died fighting the blacks - more casualties than at Waterloo.[46]

Even the political change had an effect on the Voodoo loa and their ceremonies. The already rich pantheon of Voodoo divinities was expanded to admit new divinities of the New World. But the loa remained essentially African as did the ceremonies. In the South the spirits were and still are called "loa" whilst in the North they began to be called "saints" or "angels" as Christian hagiography was absorbed into Voodoo pantheons.

In addition to the loa there are the Twins *(marassa)*, who are very

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[43] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[44] James, p. 307.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 318.
[46] Heinl, p. 121.

powerful, some even saying more powerful than the loa, as well as the Dead, who insist upon offerings and sacrifices. All of these divinities are regarded as basically good and compassionate to whom the devotees go for advice, support, counsel, and thanksgiving. But as mentioned before, like the Greek gods, they also have all the limitations of humans, including anger, jealousy, rudeness, etc. Metraux points out that whilst the Haitians speak of "Le Bon Dieu," they really have no definite image of God. God is an abstract term for most Haitians and Jesus Christ is equally abstract except as he can be identified with the loa. "(God) is a nice easy-going *papa* who wouldn't dream of getting angry or frightening people."[47]

The pantheon of loa and divinities in Voodoo is very rich and numerous. Some spirits are evoked regularly; others are neglected or forgotten. There are many new ones as well as numerous minor local ones. There are two primary Voodoo rites: *rada* and *petro.* Rada deities are mostly Dahomean. Rada is Creole for the town of Arada in Dahomey.

But there are also deities in Rada from the Yorubas of Nigeria, such as Ogoun Badagris, the spirit for war who protects his devotees from bullets and explosions, and named after a sea coast town in western Nigeria. The Rada deities are essentially benevolent, paternal, and passive unless they are aroused. Then they can be fierce and angry. Such characteristics are said to be due to the Dahomean culture which was stable, well-organised, and supportive, hence essentially peaceful.

The second rite, Petro, takes its name from an eighteenth figure called Don Pedro. Just why his name has been given to this classification is obscure and forgotten, but these are loa of the New World. They are called by the Haitians the *plus raide:* harder, tougher, sterner, less forgiving, more demanding, more aggressive.[48] The Petro divinities emerged out of anger and rage over the fate and sufferings of the Africans as slaves in the New World. The violent nature of the Petro loa developed out of that rage. And as has been suggested, it was probably the Petro loa which were evoked by the blacks to fortify them for the start of the Haitian Revolution in 1791.

Each loa classification has its own special drum rhythms, musical instruments, special dances, unique ceremonies, vever, and salutations.[49] These respective ceremonies are not to be confused with each other, although some loa within the particular classification are noted as tricksters and pranksters, turning up at ceremonies in place of other loa. Rada rites are usually quiet, whereas Petro rites include such things as the crack of the whip and small charges of gunpowder plus the whistle, all reminiscent of the brutal treatment rendered the Africans during

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[47] Metraux, p. 83.

[48] Deren, p. 61.

[49] For a rather good analysis of the imagery of the vever, albeit from a structuralist viewpoint, see the helpful article by Karen Brown, "The Center and the Edges: A Structural Analysis of Haitian Religious Imagery," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Center* VII (Fall, 1979), pp. 22-39.

slavery. I am more familiar with Petro rites than with Rada rites from my travel and research in Haiti.

One must not conclude from the dissimilar characteristics of the two rites that a moral difference exists or that Rada deities are good and Petro evil. The Rada spirits can punish just as severely as the Petro if they are unhappy or displeased and the Petro spirits can be very supportive if they are properly propitiated. Yet it is in Voodoo that the link between these spirits of the Old World and those of the New is affirmed and renewed.

Sometimes they have similar names, but different characteristics. For example, Erzulie, the Rada female loa for love, is concerned with beauty, flowers, femininity, jewelry at her ceremony. She likes to be dressed in good clothes and when she possesses her devotees, they dance gaily and merrily. Erzulie-Ge-Rouge, the Petro counterpart, is very different. When she possesses a devotee, he or she cries tears of rage, the entire body contracts into a kind of paralysis, shaking and tense. She flings her followers around, whilst they emit a curious sound that seems like a groan.[50]

To make matters more complicated, there are also some Petro loa with a Rada name followed by a surname: Damballah-flangho, Ogu-yansan, Erzuli-mapyand. These usually have bad reputations and the Haitians identify them with *je-rouge* or "red eyes." For the Haitians red eyes are signs of werewolves.

Whilst there is no hierarchy of loa, there is a system of seniority. At the head of this list is Legba from Dahomey. Legba has many meanings: the deity who is the sun and thus the source of the world's primal energy, the principle of life connecting the cosmos with its divine origin. In Louisiana, according to George Cable in his reliable novel, *The Grandissimes,* there is a Papa Lebat, "who keeps the invisible keys of all the doors that admit suitors."[51] This is thought by some to be Papa Legba in Haitian Voodoo, who is also the god of the crossroads, called in Creole *Carrefour.* In other parts of Louisiana he is called Liba and identified with St. Peter, who in the Christian table of mythology is the guardian of the keys.[52]

Legba is both man and woman and his vever shows this. He is also represented as the cosmic phallus, the link to fertility. He is honoured at every Voodoo ceremony by the fact that the poteau-mitan, which is the center post of the peristyle through which the loa come into the ceremony, is also called the poteau-Legba.[53] George Eaton Simpson in his book, *Black Religions in the New World,* describes him as a handsome old man with a flowing beard, whose favourite nourishments are meat and alcohol. When he possesses his followers, he limps and carries a

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[50] Deren, p. 62.
[51] Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past,* p. 246.
[52] *Ibid.,* p. 250.
[53] Deren, pp. 96-7.

cane, being careful to walk cautiously.[54] In other parts of the Caribbean Legba takes on different names—Lebba, Legba, Elegbara, Liba—but common to all is that he stands at the crossroads and precedes all other deities and spirits at Voodoo rituals.[55]

His counterpart in Petro is Carrefour. In contrast to Legba, who commands the divinities of the day, Carrefour oversees the entities of the night. However, he is not considered moral evil or evil in himself. He can also protect. Whereas Legba appears old, feeble, and carrying a cane, Carrefour appears as a straight, muscular, vigorous man full of vitality and life. He raises his arms in the figure of a cross and usually every muscle of the possessed body shows strength and stress.[56]

This depiction of the life force as old under Legba and youthful under Carrefour is interesting when comparing the solar deities of other cultures. In the ancient Assyro-Babylonian culture, Shamash, the sun deity and god of justice is depicted in iconography as a mature, but not necessarily old man, sometimes sitting on a throne,[57] standing tall on a pedestal,[58] and "rising" between two mountains.[59]

The solar deity in ancient Egyptian iconography is a bit more complicated. Some icons show the sun actually "aging" during the course of the day.[60]

Metraux points out that Legba also has certain surnames, such as Legba-si, Legba-zinchan, Legba-atibon, etc. These appear to be simply lists of names used in liturgical invocation, which may originally have been parts of African liturgical texts or words. These became unintelligible with the passing of time and were taken out of context to be used as epithets of divinities in ceremonies. Problems only occur when both gods of the same name decide to appear in different personalities. This may suggest that they are different loa belonging to the same family, rather than mere modalities of the deity, Legba.[61]

I trust I have been successful 1) in defending the thesis about the significance of the Haitian Revolution being comparable to those historical revolutions which western historians have seen fit to emphasise, namely, the French, American, and Russian with a side glance at the so-called English Revolution of the 17th century, and 2) in demonstrating the vitality of Voodoo for the Haitians as they sought political change at the time of the Revolution. One must be careful and not try to extend this connection in a western quest for eternal truths which can relate to

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[54] Simpson, George Eaton, *Black Religions in the New World.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 66.

[55] Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past,* p. 253.

[56] Deren, p. 101.

[57] Pritchard, James B., ed. *The Ancient Near East in Pictures.* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 175, p. 178.

[58] *Ibid.,* p. 180.

[59] *Ibid.,* pp. 220f.

[60] Keel, Othmar, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World.* Timothy J. Hallett, trans. (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), p. 32, p. 34.

[61] Metraux, p. 90.

the political situation in Haiti today. Voodoo has a different function in Haiti today than it did almost 200 years ago, although its ritual and ceremonies have probably remained the same. That is, the usual question raised by some about why Voodoo today does not fortify the Haitians to seek political change under the present conditions of Haiti is not a question either the priests or the devotees of Voodoo would understand. There is no ethical component or political component inherently connected with Voodoo. Theologizing is not one of the problems of this black religion. Voodoo is non-metaphysical and very personal. With the exception of the mulattoes who see themselves as Roman Catholics and the elite in one of the poorest countries in the world, the Haitian finds no problem in attending mass during the day and a Voodoo service at night. After all, his ancestors both in this world and in Africa have done it for centuries. Such is only a problem for western Christians with an horizontal view of history.

Neither for the African nor for the most Africanised country in this hemisphere, Haiti, is there a concept of the telos of history. This is Greek and western.

> Human life follows a rhythm of Nature which nothing can destroy: birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, entry into the company of the departed and eventually into the company of the spirits. Another rhythm is also at work: that of days and nights, months (moons), seasons and years; this also nothing can change . . . There is no "end" to this continuous rhythm and cycles, and there is no "world to come." People neither worry about the future nor build castles in the sky.[62]

The third question to be dealt with is that of the biblical, and more particularly, the New Testament understanding of spirits. Some of the questions which might be asked in light of the African and Voodoo understanding of spirits would include the following: What is the cosmological view of spirits in the first century which might be influencing the treatment of the spiritual world in the New Testament? Since "demons" and "demonic" in our language and in scripture immediately connote something evil or negative or even uncivilised and since it is popularly assumed that Voodoo has to do with demons, does our language carry with it an implicit cultural metaphysic through which we listen and judge religions and cultures honouring demons and spirits? By extension, how do we use this cultural metaphysic to judge and evaluate non-monotheistic religious traditions in Africa which have a different cosmology about the spirit world?

Can one describe our using this cultural metaphysic as an instance of western cultural "imperialism," especially if it is assumed that such traditions are inferior or less advanced examples of animism? Do the African and Voodoo understanding of the spiritual world raise fundamental questions about the biblical claims of the lordship of God and Jesus Christ over all spirits, demons, and principalities? Finally, how might the *Weltanschauung* standing behind such claims of scripture and culture

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[62] Dickson and Ellingworth, p. 63.

shape the relationship of western-influenced (meaning Greek, Latin, Hellenistic) cultures to non-western cultures and religions in the countries of Africa, South America, and the Caribbean?

The most characteristic word in the New Testament which has probably shaped and influenced our understanding of spirits is the Greek word δαιμόνιον *(daimonion)*. The more classical Greek term δαίμων *(daimon)* occurs only once in the New Testament: Matthew 8:31. Otherwise the Greek word translated as "demon" in the gospels is *daimonion*, which occurs 11 times in Matthew, 13 times in Mark, 23 times in Luke, and 6 times in John. It also occurs 4 times in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, once in I Timothy, and 3 times in the Revelation of St. John the Divine.

Another word also translated as spirit is πνευμα *(pneuma)*, but the derivatives of the word *daimon* or *demon* is that on which we wish to fasten our attention in order to demonstrate both what the New Testament writers understood by this word and what we have come to mean by it.

> Matthew 9:32-35: As they were going away, behold a dumb demoniac (δαιμονιζόμευου (δαιμονιζομαι) *daimonizomenon*) was brought to him. And when the *daimonion* (KJ: "devil"; RSV: "demon") was cast out, the dumb spoke, and the multitudes marvelled, saying, "It was never so seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "He casts out *daimonion* (demons or devils) by the prince of *daimonia* (demons)." And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity.
> Matthew 12:22-27 *passim:* Then a blind and dumb demoniac *(daimonizomenos)* was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw. And all the poeple were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Be-el'ze-bul, the prince of demons *(daimonion)* that this man casts out demons *(daimonia)* . . . (He) said to them . . . "if I cast out demons by Be-el'ze-bul, by whom do your sons cast them out?"
> Matthew 17:18: And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon *(daimonion)* came out of him and the boy was cured instantly. (This scene takes place after the Transfiguration, which by legend is reputed to have occurred at Mt. Hermon near Ceasaria Philippi.)
> Mark 1:32-34: That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons *(daimonizomenos)*. And the whole city was gathered together about the door. And he healed many who were sick with disesases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. (Mark 1:28 tells us that he was in the Galilee when this event occurred.)
> John 10:19-21: Many of them said, "He was a demon, and he is mad; why listen to him?" Others said, These are not the sayings of one who is possessed by a demon (δε μουιζομένου) Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Daimon in classical Greek is first thought to have been used to designate "lesser deities" or "lesser divinities." Some scholars maintain that the term was first used in Homer and was understood to mean "an unknown super-human factor" in the world of humankind.[63] A *daimon* was a power or divinity in the classical Greek world which affected and determined particular circumstances, situations, and experiences of

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[63] Gerhard Kittell, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, II, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 2.

humans.[64]

Other scholars maintain that the Greek poet Hesiod (fl. 8th cent. B.C. ?) provides the earliest text where this term is first used. There demons are identified with the souls of the dead who act as guardians and protectors of humans and distributors of prosperity and wealth, but who clothe themselves in darkness so that they would be able to walk around the earth undetected and unseen.[65]

Eventually the popular Greek belief of early times soon developed the idea that the souls of the dead were more powerful than the living and could in fact possess a human being. Thus the verb used by Sophocles (ca. 496-406 B.C.) to show demon-possession was *daimonizesthai* (δαιμονιζεσθαι).[66]

It was this popular Greek idea about demons which the philosophers tried to divinise. Plato, for example, liked to speak of demons being inferior to the heavenly gods, but who nevertheless acted as intermediaries between gods and human beings. In the *Phaedo* (107 D) and in the *Republic* (617 D), Plato asserts that every demon has his own sphere of operation and regards all humans within his sphere to be his flock. One finds this also in his *Politics* (271 D, 272 E). Thus in popular Greek belief, a demon was a spirit of the dead which had supernatural powers, able to possess a person or to appear at particular times in concrete but awe-inducing natural phenomena.[67]

In the Old Testament the Hebrew equivalent of *daimon* is *'elohim*, meaning "god," but not Yahweh. Rachel in Genesis 30:8 says that at the birtn of Naphtali she had been struggling with her sister Leah "with the wrestlings of *'elohim.*" Some scholars interpret this to mean that she has been struggling with her sister, who apparently was so strong as if possessed by a demon.[68] But the Old Testament gives a special name to the Greek notion of mediators existing between God and humans: *mal'ak*, who are thought to be messengers of God.[69] Yahweh uses *mal'akim* both to avenge Himself on His enemies, as in Genesis 19:1; Exodus 12:23; II Kings 19:35; Psalm 35:5f, and to bring disorder into the natural order as in II Samuel 24:16. This allowed the Hebrew writer to make the important theological point that God is one and is lord over all phenomena.

It was later in Hellenistic Judaism with a heavy Persian influence that it is thought the word *daimon* or *daimonion* came to have its negative connotation which the New Testament world simply inherited and accepted. Some scholars suggest that the Mazdean world-view was most likely the greatest influence in the alteration of the understanding of *daimon* in Judaism.[70]

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[64] *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, I, s.v. "Demons, Demonology," p. 817.

[65] *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, IV, s.v. "Demons and Spirits (Greek)," by A. C. Pearson, p. 590.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 592.

[67] Kittel, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[68] *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 817. (Hereafter *IDB*)

[69] Kittel, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[70] *IDB*, p. 821.

The Septuagint (LXX) translates *shĕdim* as *daimonion.* This term is also used in the LXX translation of Isaiah 13:21 and Isaiah 34:14 (RSV: "satyrs"), which suggests that *daimonion* had already become a term for heathen gods thought to be destructive not only to the God of the Israelites, but also to the whole of humankind. It is thought that the LXX avoids using *daimon* because it had positive religious images, whereas *daimonion* was connected with the evil gods of popular belief and was also probably in popular use at the time.[71] Philo followed this Hellenistic tradition in that for him *daimonion* represents both demons and angels which have the same character. However, he does not follow the biblical tendency, at least in the Old Testament, of equating the two in rank. Whilst they are of the same character, some are more aloof from earthly things and others are more involved.[72]

In the Jewish apocryphal books such as Tobit, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Book of Jubilees, and parts of the pseudepigraphical books of Daniel and II Esdras, great details of the life and tasks of demons and angels are given. One begins to detect the negative quality about demons in that they are described as seducers of people, tempting them to try witchcraft, idolatry, war, and enmity:

> The beginning of their demonic existence is a "fall," usually described in relation to Genesis 6. Hence the position of demons is not due to natural *empatheia.* Their fall implies sin and guilt.[73]

In this literature demons are connected with Satan and are called the spirits of Mastema. In Test. XII a distinction is made between the spirits of Beliar and the Spirit of God. But this is an exception, for otherwise there appears to be no clear or consistent subordination demons to Satan. This suggests to some that rabbinic Judaism which chronologically came after some of the apocryphal or pseudepegraphical writings, felt that it had to account for the fact that there is resistance in man's world to fulfilling the Law. Demons became the scapegoat theologically and linguistically. The concept of demons also helped account for the resistance to the Law in the Gentile world, for they provided the evil.[74]

What lay behind this development in the concept of demons? This is an important question because the understanding and appreciation of *daimonizomai*—demon-possession—also underwent a change in a negative direction. Most scholars trace such a metamorphosis to a Persian influence, which has already been mentioned.

In classical Persian thought, the world and human existence were being fought over by supporters of the Good Mind and supporters of the Spirit of Perversity and Deception. Demons were thought to be agents of the latter. Popular Judaism took over this concept which was the Juda-

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[71] Kittel, p. 12.
[72] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[73] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

ism of the New Testament world. However, this popular idea about demons did undergo an alteration in order that it be theologically consistent with the idea of the universal lordship of Yahweh as the supreme and one God. The theological revision went into two directions.[75]

On the one hand, some scholars suggest that the distinct order of demons under the authority of Satan or Belial became a special order of angels under Yahweh who were appointed by Him to be the angels of vengeance. They were to inflict punishment on sinners and unbelievers. Ecclus. 39:28-31 and the Testament of Levi 3:2 describe them as agents of fire, snow and famine, which bring retribution upon humankind.[76]

On the other hand, some scholars maintain that the demons were made into apostatic angels, who, though created by God, had in fact rebelled against God, come subsequently into man's world, and engendered mischief and seduction amongst God's creation. One sees this in the Book of Enoch.[77]

The chieftain of the demons is characterized in several ways. One way is to call him *Satan* in Wisdom (2:24) and II Enoch or the Slavonic Enoch (3:31), which would seem to be an expansion of the Old Testament notion of Satan descending from the serpent in the garden of Eden as the source of evil and disobedience as well as being the obstructor mentioned in Job and Zechariah.[78]

A second name is Mastemah (Hosea 9:7), which is translated as "hostility" and "obstruction." Still a third name is Belial, usually meaning "worthless" in the Old Testament (Nahum 1:15; RSV: "wicked"), which is also used in Test. XII and the Ascension of Isaiah. This title carried with it the notion of moral depravity for David in II Samuel 16:7 is called a "man of blood and man of Belial."

A fourth title is Azazel, found in the Parables of Enoch (37-71) and I Enoch or Ethiopic Enoch (1-36). Azazel first corrupted women sexually and then taught their husbands and other men how to sin and how to learn various magical arts such as enchantment, astrology, abortion as well as some of the arts of literacy, such as reading and writing.[79]

Finally, a fifth title given to the head of the demons was Asmodeus, which is found mostly in Tobit (3:8, 17). The derivation is uncertain, but some scholars suggest the the Persian god Aeshma.[80] Asmodeus lived in the bedroom of Sarah, where he vowed to kill anyone who tried to marry her. Tobit eventually drives him away with the smell of fish liver.

With regard to the New Testament which inherited this cosmology of the spirit world, since it is the synoptic gospels which almost exclusively are concerned with demon possession and since most of the instances of demon-possession occur in the Galilee, it has been suggested that the

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[75] *IDB*, p. 821.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 822.
[77] *Ibid.*
[78] *Ibid.*; *ERE*, pp. 597-598, 600.
[79] *Ibid.*; *ERE*, p. 600.
[80] *Ibid.*; *ERE*, pp. 600-601.

belief was particularly strong in that area, whereas John's gospel does not speak of demon possession because he centers most of Jesus' ministry in Judea.[81]

But such an idea cannot be pursued too closely, for although Jerusalem in the south in Judea does play a more prominent role in the Gospel of John than in the synoptics, nevertheless John does place much of Jesus's ministry in the Galilee (4:43-54; 6:16-8:11). Jesus is accused in John 10:19-21 of being demon possessed, but *daimonizomenon* would seem to be used here as elsewhere (John 7:20; 8:28) as a term of abuse or insult or doubt about one's credibility or even sanity, rather than as a description of one whose body and mind are directed by an evil demon.

Demon possession, as has already been illustrated in previous citations from the gospels, meant that the person's mental and physical states were manifested in disorders, especially emotional and mental disruptions such as epilepsy. They were connected with the diseases and sicknesses, which somehow contravened God's intended purpose for our existence. When Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law in Luke, he rebukes her fever in the same manner as he has rebuked the demon in a possessed man earlier in the day (4:33-39). Likewise in the same chapter, when he rebukes the people of many diseases, he also rebukes the demons, forbidding them to speak because "they knew that he was the Christ." (4:40-41) Thus, the writer establishes the link between demons, disease, and the devil. It is interesting to speculate about the possible power of the demons over Jesus when reading of such a prohibition by Jesus, especially when we recall the oriental notion that knowing and saying the name of a person meant having power over that person.

This analysis has intended to demonstrate the derivation of the negative tone in both our language and concept of spirits and demons and the idea of possession—two important items in the African and Voodoo religious traditions. Interesting enough, the powers associated with demons in the New Testament parallel those associated with the spirits and loa in African and Voodoo cosmologies, but the negative notion about demons has persisted throughout the New Testament and in our day. Paul in I Corinthians 10:19f not only associates these deities with paganism and heathenism but also suggests that there is something inferior about them:

> What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or than an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with *daimoniois* . . . You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of *daimoniois*.

But if the Greek only indicates lesser deities, which, for cultural as well as theological reasons came to be associated with evil in order that the biblical claim about monotheism of Yahweh be maintained, then the cosmology of African and Voodoo traditions raises the question as to

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[81] Henry A. Kelly, *Towards the Death of Satan: The Growth and Decline of Christian Demonology* (London: Georffrey Chapman, 1968), p. 68.

whether one has to accept this cultural cosmology in order to claim to be a Christian under Jesus Christ. Does the lordship of God and Jesus Christ provide for a pluralism of beliefs in the spirit world and the power of the spirits which are not evil but good? Might it not be that the theological claim of God's universal lordship over demons or lesser deities is an arbitrary claim which in effect is perpetuated by western-influenced religion and used linguistically and conceptually to render African traditions as underdeveloped and inferior. In other words, is there a built-in cultural imperialism at this point which has been sacralized by theology?

The issue is whether both Jews and Christians for whom a claim met a need in a historical and political context as well as theologically should continue to rely on this claim in order to exorcise and demonise such a vital black religion as Voodoo. This question is valid since it has been demonstrated that the rituals and practices of Voodoo have to do with good spirits providing support, protection, aid, and both spiritual and physical comfort and nourishment for its believers and their environment. African traditions about the spirits allow for an interpenetration of that world and our world without a contradiction. As one African scholar put it:

> African sensitivity to the spirit-world is something that could enrich the rather impoverished type of Christianity which has come to us through Western thought and practice, in which the spirit world is dismissed altogether or put in the extreme background—except for spiritual cults which function outside the Church. The New Testament is extremely aware of the spirit world and its nearness to the human world . . . Africa knows only too well that spirits exist and form an essential part of man's spiritual environment. The Gospel in Africa must address itself to the spirit world as well and not to the human world alone.[82]

[82] Dickson and Ellingsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 103.