

## The Generalization of the Notion of *N'kisi* (Fetish?) Thanks to the Concept of Being-force and to Natural Theology

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### Abstract

Starting from Placid Tempels' discovery of "being-force" as characteristic of the worldview of Bantus and from the natural theology of Kongo religion as the exposition of its essential doctrines through deductive logic, this paper attempts a generalization of the notion of *n'kisi*, often wrongly reduced to the concept of fetish. This generalization demonstrates that the concept of *n'kisi* alludes to spiritual power as the protecting presence surrounding the human being and the animating spirit governing human beings, phenomena as well as objects of nature and of human creation. Thus defined, the concept of *n'kisi* can be grasped through the divine, human, and demonic modes. While the divine *n'kisi* is related to the practice of African traditional religion, the human-produced *n'kisi* is rather an aspect of African traditional technology. As for the demonic *n'kisi*, it is the result of the loss of the support of holy ancestors due to failure to observe ethical requirements, and/or the use of submitted evil spirits.

**Keywords:** fetish; Kongo; *n'kisi*; Tempels; cosmological argument; African traditional religion; Bukongo.

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### INTRODUCTION

In a paper titled *Le Nkisi dans la tradition woyo du Bas-Zaïre* [the *N'kisi* in the Woyo tradition of Bas-Zaïre] Mulinda<sup>[1]</sup>, due to the diverse nature of Kongo cultures, warns his readers against the generalization of the notion of *n'kisi*. However, to generalize the particular principles that govern sections of nature is essential to the proceeding of science as impelled by the rule of enumerative induction [1]. Conceived as a scientific attempt to grasp nature in its universality, it is natural to generalize "about the properties of all things of a certain kind"<sup>[ii]</sup> when opportunity allows it.

The possibility of the generalization of the notion of *n'kisi* is first of all dictated by the fact that Kongo religion, Bukongo, has been demonstrated to be the continuation of the religion that characterized the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Sumer; now, the essential doctrines of this religion have been demonstrated to be in parallel correlation with a cosmological argument; which proves its scientific nature<sup>iii</sup>. It thus follows that the southward migration of African ethnics from the confines of these civilizations and their immersion in the same epistemology with them imply that this religion is the original form of African traditional religion (ATR). Therefore, the evidenced scientific nature of this religion implies the

possibility of the existence of general principles governing the *n'kisi* as an aspect of religion-linked African culture<sup>[iv]</sup>.

Secondly, the ethnography of Placid Tempels and the natural theology of Bukongo reveal the existence of core notions that are shared by all Kongo sub-ethnics and probably by most south-Saharan African ethnics. The existence of these general notions opens the vista for the possibility of the generalization of the notion of *n'kisi*. This generalization should allow us to avoid cornering the notion of *n'kisi* to the concept of fetish introduced by the Portuguese explorers in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the Kingdom of Kongo as alluding exclusively to something artificial or human-made.

The generalization of the concept of *n'kisi* is a powerful tool that might also allow any researcher to catch the notion of *n'kisi* in its divine, human and demonic configurations and thus avoid confusing these three different usages of this African notion by labeling all of them as religious practices. Moreover, this generalization participates in the efforts to better understand the other African cultures related to this issue; because, the somewhat biased conclusions drawn by the missionaries in the Kingdom of Kongo from the 15<sup>th</sup> century were used later *per se* to qualify all other south-Saharan Black cultures.

In his then thought-provoking work titled *la Philosophie bantoue* [Bantu Philosophy], Placid Tempels<sup>v</sup> revealed the existence of the notion of “being-force” as a core element characterizing the ontology Bantu people. This notion of “being-force” was also evidenced by the kemetic cosmological argument (KCA), an argument about the existence of God that, beyond the usual limited Western practice of philosophical theology, exposes through deductive logic the essential doctrines comprising the religion of ancient Egypt and Sumer that was continued in Bukôngo. The KCA reveals spirit as the power surrounding and animating celestial and temporal beings.

The conjugation of the notion of “being-force” and the natural pneumatology of Bukôngo revealed through the KCA shows that, according to the deep African worldview, being is essentially the spiritual power that surrounds and animates it. The KCA shows that, as animating power, spirits govern not only human beings but phenomena, objects of nature, as well as some artifacts.

### Methodology and rationale

According to the exposition we made in the introduction about our motive in attempting this study of the notion of *n'kisi*, the methodology we intend to use in our attempt to generalize this cultural notion implies the comparative study of the ontology of some Africans, including Kôngo people, described by Placid Tempels as the notion of “being-force” and the pneumatology of the Bukôngo drawn from the KCA, a comparison that will enable us to draw their commonality. This commonality will be applied to the notion of the *n'kisi* to arrive to a broader definition of it.

The combination of the ontology of Bantus and the pneumatology of Bukôngo thus obtained will allow us to draw general typologies classifying the notion of *n'kisi* thanks to their different aspects. The conclusions obtained from this classification will be justified through the ethnographies of the Kôngo culture obtained from different authors or directly from our personal acquaintance with Kôngo tradition.

Our rationale in this approach of the generalization of the notion of *n'kisi* will imply the demonstration of the following statements:

- At the core of the ethnology of Placid Tempels lies his discovery of the concept of “being-force”.
- Usage shows that the concept of “being-force” can be applied to God, to human beings, and to demonic beings as well as to God, to human beings, and to things.
- The natural pneumatology of Bukôngo reveals that Spirit is a power surrounding every *muntu* and animating him as it animates also things

and phenomena. As the manifestation of the divine Spirit, spirits can be seized in the divine, human, and demonic modes.

- The ethnology of Placid Tempels enhanced by the KCA leads to the perception of *n'kisi* as alluding to the power that surrounds, and animates human beings and things.
- Thus perceived, the concept of *n'kisi* should be grasped in the divine, human, and divine modes and applied to things as well.
- Therefore, general typologies can be drawn thanks to this new perception the notion of *n'kisi*.

### The ethnology of Placid Tempels

Placid Tempels [2] was a catholic priest who worked as a missionary in what was then called Belgium-Congo. Like for all his Western brothers of faith who were called to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ among the Blacks of Africa, the knowledge of the colonial anthropology of Africans was believed to be a must for a better accomplishment of the evangelical enterprise. This prejudiced anthropological description of Africans depicted them as inferior beings devoid of rationality.

As he grew more and more disappointed by the discrepancies he always noticed between the biased conclusions of the colonial ethnography and the behaviors of the Blacks, the Franciscan priest decided to undertake his own ethnological investigation about the worldview of the Luba ethnic of the Katanga province of the Belgium-Congo among whom his was officiating<sup>vi</sup>.

His ethnological researches eventually led him to understand that far from being non-rational, the behavior of these Africans obeyed to some rules of conduct the synthesis of which he called “Bantu philosophy”. For Tempels this rationality of the African gravitates around the ontological concept of “being-force”.

According to the observations of the catholic priest, this ontology of being, as identified to a force, applies not only to human beings but to God as well as to things. Speaking, for instance, of the notion of “being-force” as applying to God Tempels explains:

*When they try to draw metaphors or periphrases, the [Luba people] will designate God himself as the Powerful, the one who possesses the force in himself. He is also the generator of the force of every creature. God is the “Dijina dikatampe”, the great name, because he is the great force, the “mukono” as say the Baluba, the one more powerful than any other.*<sup>vii</sup>

That the concept of “being-force” applies to God is seen also in the fact that the Most-high is

perceived by some south-Saharan ethnics as a kind of “*muntu*”; a concept known in the Bukôngo where a proverb affirms that “*Nzâmbi I muntu a mpil’ankaka*”, God is another kind of *muntu*. In the context of the Luba people, Tempels explains this conclusion in this way:

*The “Muntu” might thus mean a vital force endowed with intelligence and will. This acceptance would give a logical meaning to the assertion I gathered a day from a Black, saying: ‘God is a great muntu’ ‘Vidye i muntu mukatampe’*”<sup>viii</sup>.

Thus, we learn from the ethnography furnished by Placide Tempels that the concept of “being-force” is characteristic of the rationality of the ontology of Africans he surveyed. This concept applies to God, to human beings as well as to things. Our purpose will now be to comparatively study this ontology along with the pneumatology of the KCA, along with a scientific model of religion.

### The natural pneumatology of Bukôngo

For a long time the religion and the art of the Black people of Africa has been labelled as a non-rational superstition<sup>ix</sup>. Alluding to this false qualification of ATR, Biko deplores its awkwardness in these comments:

*“By some strange and twisted logic, [the Western missionaries] argued that theirs was a scientific religion and ours a superstition--- all this in spite of the biological discrepancy which is at the base of their religion”*<sup>x</sup>.

Fortunately, it can be demonstrated today that the situation is the very opposite; what was thought by Western missionaries to be a superstition, i.e., ATR, is a scientific religion, while the religion they brought us, as well as Islam which belongs to the same epistemology as Western Christianity and which was introduced by Arabs, is well defined by themselves as being only a “system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith”<sup>xi</sup>.

The scientific nature of the ATR is seen through the systematic natural theology of Bukôngo. This systematic natural theology is the result of the development of the kemetic cosmological argument (KCA) as to cover the essential doctrines of solar religion, the religion that characterized the civilizations of ancient Egypt and Sumer and which has been continued in Bukôngo; this religion have been demonstrated to be the original form of the ATR<sup>xii</sup>.

### Introduction of the KCA

Like Western cosmological arguments, the KCA goes from “the presence of cosmos back to a creator of the cosmos”<sup>xiii</sup>; but unlike any Western argument, it extends to the essential doctrines of solar religion. Thus, the KCA constitutes a systematic natural

theology. The KCA can be summarily introduced in this way:

- As an aggregate of individualities, this visible universe is individual. Its possession of individuality is an element of contingency.
- According to the law of causality, a necessary cause of this universe exists which by hypothesis includes it.
- As the cause of an individual universe, this necessary cause is an individual one. Thus, this individual nature induces the existence of other necessary causes that are at least potentially causative.
- An ultimate being exists which includes all the above deduced relative necessary causes, their sum total, and which is the cause of their individual nature.
- Since any manifest created universe is by hypothesis included in the consciousness of its creator, this sum total is the ultimate being, the greatest possible being. This ultimate cause is thus the Most-high God.
- Thus, God is indivisible; he is absolutely infinite, transcendent, non-contingent, and immutable. This is the case because any lesser nature would invite the existence of a cause higher than the greatest possible being, which is impossible.
- Every relative necessary being (every Child of God) is the manifestation of Most-high (the Father-Mother); thus, since the Father-Mother is indivisible, each Child expresses his completeness. This completeness we call the Word.
- God’s indivisibility implies that the Father-Mother, the Child, and the Word are inseparable in their existence, substance and activity. This is solar trinity. It implies that the Father-Mother can only act through the Child thanks to the Word, and the Child can only act for the Father-Mother and through the courtesy of the Word.
- Due to the absolute transcendence of the Father-Mother, there remains, according to solar trinity, two principles having directly and consciously participated in the creation of this temporal universe: a Child of God and the Word.
- Since all the Children of God taken around anyone of them is a Child of God, a collective Child of God, this later expresses the Word. Thus, the Word is the completeness of God in and around every Child of God.

**The KCA and the theology of ancient Egypt, Sumer and Kôngo**

It results from this brief introduction of the KCA the following doctrines of theism deduced from an empirical basis, i.e., the existence of individuality and the law of causality<sup>xiv</sup>:

- The notion of a transcendent Most-high God.
- The presence of a creator different from the Most-high.
- The concept of the completeness of God, the Word.
- The existence of two creative principles the creator and the Word.

Now, these characteristics of the theism of KCA can be demonstrated to be the very doctrine of the theology of ancient Egypt (especially Memphite theology) and Sumer. The existence of a Most-high God in Egypt is taught explicitly by *the Pyramid text of Unas* which alludes to him a “the Sole Lord”. The hierarchical monotheism above defined is expressed implicitly by *the Egyptian book of the dead* which speaks of the creator as a “son of Nut”, an expression that uncovers the existence of an order higher than the creator and causative of him. The transcendence of the “Unnamed” Most-high God of ancient Egypt is also seen in the fact that, according to iconographies, prayers were never addressed to him. The Most-high

God in Sumer is affirmed as being An. That An is a transcendent God is seen by the fact that he “more or less ‘retreated’ living power to his son Enlil”<sup>xv</sup>.

As for the presence of two creative principles in ancient Egypt, James informs us that “Atom, i.e., Atom, having absorbed the thought and creative power of Ptah, then proceeds with the work of creation”<sup>xvi</sup>. Ptah is recognized as being the “Logos and Creative Power”<sup>xvii</sup>. This existence of two creative principles can be affirmed also of Sumer because it advocated “the doctrine of the creative power of the divine word”<sup>xviii</sup>. Now, Enkai is recognized as the creator, while Enlil is the “Lord-breath” or the Word [Logos] who, according to this doctrine, participates in the creation along with Enkai.

The table 1 elucidates the convergence which exists between the theism of ancient Egypt and Sumer compared to that of Bukôngo. The three religions advocates the existence of a transcendent Most-high God, the existence of the notion of the Word seen in Sumer and in Bukôngo as a governing principle, and the existence of two creative principles, the creator and the Word. The Kôngo divinities found in the table are furnished by a prayer contained in a sermon of the great Kôngo prophet Simon Kimbangu delivered during the clandestine phase of his ministry<sup>xix</sup>.

**Table-1: comparative table of hierarchies of divinities**

KCA	Egypt (Memphis)	Sumer	Bukôngo
Most-high	Unnamed God	An	Nzâmbi Ampûngu Tulêndo
Creator	Atom	Enkai	Mbumba Lowa
Word	Ptah , God of order	Enlil, the governor	Mpina Nza the governor

**On the validity of the KCA**

The scientific validity of the KCA can be established in two ways, through the deductive nature of its reasoning and through the mathematical validity of the cosmology that results from it.

- The KCA is a deduction, a form of reasoning in which “it is not possible for the premises all to be true while the conclusion is false”<sup>xx</sup>. Therefore, the premises of the KCA being valid, the conclusion of this deductive argument can only be valid.
- The KCA results in a cosmology that explains the dynamics of this temporal universe (gravitation, translation, rotation, and stability of the atoms) at the astronomic and subatomic levels in a deterministic way. This cosmology has been mathematically proven to be the

simplest and more complete explanation of these dynamics, a holistic “theory of everything”<sup>xxi</sup>.

It follows from these two proofs that the KCA is scientifically valid and correct. As a model of religion its natural systematic theology exposes the science of the religion that characterized the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Sumer, the religion which is continued in Bukôngo. Now, as we said above, the southward migrations of the African ethnics from the confines of these civilizations and their being bathed in the same epistemology with them imply that this religion is the original form of the ATR<sup>xxii</sup>.

**The natural pneumatology of Bukôngo**

The KCA has demonstrated that God is the ultimate cause. Being the sum total of reality, God is the substance of all. Therefore, it can be concluded that God is Spirit, the ultimate power which animates

reality. Now according to solar trinity, God animates the celestial realm only through the Children of God and thanks to the Word. Therefore, due to the absolutely impartial nature of the Father-Mother each Child of God animates an aspect of celestial reality, i.e., each is a divine Spirit.

Moreover, since all reality is included in the Most-high who is absolutely infinite, any additive reality would deny this absolute nature. Therefore, the temporal plane is only a limited perception of the celestial reality. The temporal is only a limited appearance of the celestial. Thus, every real thing in the temporal realm is only a limited manifestation of a reality of the celestial plane. This perception of the phenomena is expressed in Plato's metaphysics, the Grecian philosopher certainly took it in ancient Egypt where he studied<sup>xxiii</sup>. This perception can be also be affirmed of Kongo culture because Placid Tempels reports of the Bantus that they "distinguish in the visible beings the external appearance and the being itself which is a force and an invisible nature"<sup>xxiv</sup>.

It follows from this nature of the temporal plane that; according to the transcendent nature of God and to the doctrine of solar trinity, the Most-high animates the realities of the temporal realm through the manifestations of the divine Spirits. Now the hierarchical nature of solar theism and solar trinity imply that the action of the divinity is exercised from nearby to nearby. It follows that the divine spirits (manifestation of the divine Spirits) that animate the *muntu* on the temporal level are his nearby illuminated ancestors.

### On the convergence between the ontology of Tempels and Kongo pneumatology

Tempels' ontology revealed that for the Bantus, including the Kongo people, being is force, and the natural pneumatology of Bukongo affirms this force to be ultimately God, the Spirit which is manifested at all the levels of the ontological hierarchy. Dianteill<sup>xxv</sup> defines the *n'kisi* as a material object containing a spirit. Thus, explained from the convergence of the ontology of Bantu people and the pneumatology of Bukongo, the concept of *n'kisi* offered by Dianteill is only a lower manifestation of the highest *n'kisi* which is God himself, the ultimate animating Spirit. This is all the more the case as the visible nature is only an appearance, and reality is invisible, i.e., spiritual.

Mulinda<sup>xxvi</sup>, contrary to the theory of a unique model of interpretation of the phenomenon of the *n'kisi* offered by researchers inspired by the commentaries of the missionaries and of Fukiau Kia Bunseki, insists on the fact that "there are several interpretations of this cultural phenomenon"<sup>xxvii</sup>. However, the convergence established between the ontology of Tempels and the natural pneumatology of Bukongo, added to the clarification they bring to the notion of the lowest

notion of *n'kisi*, as simple manifestation of its highest celestial nature; implies the existence of a unique frame of the interpretation of the *min'kisi* and *bakisi* (plurals of *n'kisi*) which leads to several typologies related to these notions.

### The different typologies of *min'kisi* and *bakisi*

The generalization of the notion of the *n'kisi* that we attempt in this paper, thanks to the convergence which exists between the natural systematic theology of Bukongo and the ontology of Africans furnished by Tempels, implies the existence of several typologies of the concepts of *min'kisi* and *bakisi* (plurals of *n'kisi*).

### God as the highest *n'kisi*

We deduced above that the highest *n'kisi* is God himself, the ultimate Spirit, or power, animating all reality. This concept of God is seen in the fact that he is called in Kongo culture Mpungu Tulendo, i.e., the "*mpungu* which embraces all authority".

Now, the word *mpungu* is synonymous of *n'kisi*. Karl Laman seized the convergence of the notion of *n'kisi* and *mpungu*, but explains the last as a family of the first<sup>xxviii</sup>. The *Dictionnaire Kikongo-Français* [Kikongo-French dictionary] affirms also the synonymous nature of *mpungu* and *n'kisi* by equating *mpungu* to fetish.

It is interesting to note that this perception of the concept of *n'kisi* in relation to God, the Most-high, is signaled also in Benin. This is indicated by the following sad and ignorant words pronounced in support of slavery by an African kingle: "... the big fish eats the little, what the Great Fetish wanted in the water, he also wanted on the earth"<sup>xxix</sup>. The expression "Great Fetish" can be translated in Kongo language, Kikongo, into "Mpungu Tulendo", the Almighty. Thus, the expression "Great Fetish" illustrates the blunder inaugurated by the Portuguese explorers in 15<sup>th</sup> century in the Kingdom of Kongo, by translating *n'kisi* into fetish, reducing it in this way to the meaning of something material and artificial.

Four centuries after Diego Cam, the first Portuguese who reached the mouth of the Congo River, Holman Bentley raised his voice against the use of the word *n'kisi* in connection with God. Bentley (1855-1945) was an English missionary of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS). One his major literary contributions was a dictionary of Kikongo. His work brought him in contact with the first book written in Kikongo, a Catholic catechism printed in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1624.

In this catechism the word *n'kisi* was used in its original and true meaning as alluding to holiness and divine power. Thus, using an old transcription of Kikongo that we avoid here, the author of this catechism called the Bible *N'kand'an'kisi* (the Book of

*n'kisi*); while the church was recognized as “*nzo an'kisi*” (the house of *n'kisi*); and the “Holy Faith of the Church of Rome” was translated as “*kanka an'kisi ya nzo an'kisi ya kuna Roma*”<sup>xxx</sup>. (Bentley, 1895, vii).

Alluding to this usage of the word *n'kisi* in connection with the concept of God, Bentley estimated that “this is a very objectionable use of *nkisi*, fetish”. Now, about this use, it must be first noticed that it is not the Africans who identified the word *n'kisi* to fetish, but the Europeans, as seen in the very objection of Bentley. Secondly, one must know that Bukôngo went through four centuries of bedeviling by the missionaries of the first evangelization, that of the pre-colonial time. So that when Bentley reached the Congo in 19<sup>th</sup> century, the true concept of the *n'kisi* was already distorted by his predecessors; while the Africans in their initiatory milieus, as it will be seen below, kept the original semantic.

As a solution to what he deemed as an objectionable use of *n'kisi* in connection to the concept of God, Bentley introduced in his dictionary the notion of the component *mpûngu* in the Kôngo name of God (Nzâmbi Ampûngu Tulêndo, or Nzâmbi Mpûngu Tulêndo) as inducing a superlative. To him Mpûngu-Tulêndo (or precisely as he puts it Mpûngu-ngolo) means the Almighty, so that *mpûngu* is a simple modifier of *Tulêndo* (or *ngolo*) instead of meaning *n'kisi*, i.e. power.

Unfortunately, Bentley's solution has been shown to be not in conformity with Kikôngo grammar.<sup>xxx</sup> First of all, the superlative is formed in Kikôngo by using the expression *luta* or *sunda* (to surpass), as indicated in the following examples found in Kôngo literature:

- “*I besi Mputu basundidi fululu mu ntomosono a nsi*” (Europeans are the most perseverant in the improvement of one's land),<sup>xxxii</sup>
- “*I bulu kialuta longa muntu kinkongo*” (It is the animal which most teaches man to be a hunter).<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Secondly, as seen in these examples, the words modified (*fululu* and *longa*) for the superlative is always in singular. Even in instances he provides in his dictionary (*mpûngu-ngolo*, *mpûngu-nkanka*, *mpûngu-zayi*, *mpûngu-vuvu*), Bentley follows closely this rule because *ngolo*, *nkanka*, *zayi*, and *vuvu* are in singular. However, in the expression *mpûngu tulêndo* the last component (supposed to be the one modified) is in plural.

It follows that, what is objectionable is not the use of *n'kisi* in connection with the concept of God, but the reduction of this Kôngo word to the meaning of fetish, an artificial thing; because this reduction

obscures the connection that exists between the concept of *n'kisi* and the divine. The component *mpûngu* means *n'kisi* as power or, as Tempels puts it, force. Therefore, *Mpûngu Tulêndo* means the power which embraces all authority (*lêndo*). God is perceived in the deep mind of Kôngo people as the supreme *n'kisi* or *mpûngu*.

### The Word as a *n'kisi*

The affirmation that God is the highest concept of *n'kisi*, force, naturally leads to the notion of the Word as alluding to this supreme power. The KCA revealed that the Word is the completeness of God; thus, God being a *n'kisi*, the Word is the highest expression of this supreme *n'kisi*.

It must be remembered that according to the KCA, the Word has a double nature; he is the manifestation of the completeness of God in and around every Child of God. Moreover, due to the absolute transcendence of the Most-high, the Child of God is never deprived of the Word by the Father-Mother. It results from these two deductive doctrines that since the temporal plane is only an appearance of celestial realities, the *mûntu* is never deprived of the manifestation of the Word, though sin reduces its relative full scope to a mere potential state.

Therefore, the Word as a *n'kisi* is the manifestation of the protecting power of God around the *mûntu* and the manifestation of the animating power of God in the *mûntu*. As we will see it, this constitutes the first great typology of the concept of *n'kisi* in Kôngo culture.

### The *n'kisi* as a protecting power

It should be remembered that the hierarchical nature of the divinities in Bukôngo and solar trinity dictate that the divine action is exercised from nearby to nearby. Thus, at a divine level, the protecting function of the Word, as *n'kisi*, is expressed through the holy ancestors surrounding a *mûntu*. When he invokes this protective presence, a Kôngo initiate usually says to the *nkukunyûngu* (holy ancestors), “*bika lua kala kuntuala, kunima, kulumonso, ye kulubakala*” (be in front, behind, at the left, and at the right side).

Thus, this concept of *n'kisi* is what is intended in the expression “*n'kêmbô di n'kisi ngânga kimoya*”. Literally this precept of the Kimpasi (the Kôngo divine initiatory academy) means: the glory of the divine *n'kisi* is that the *ngânga* be alive. One must remember that a *ngânga* is an expert in a domain of traditional knowledge. Therefore, this proverb means that we enjoy the divine protective power of a *ngânga* as long as he is alive.

However, when the *ngânga* dies, this precept of the Kimpasi remains valid; but, its meaning changes to become: to enjoy the protective power of a *ngânga* we must *believe* that, though being dead, he is alive in

the beyond and is around us. In this second meaning, this proclamation of the Kimpasi rejoins the Lemba (the Kôngo civil initiatory academy) where the initiate is reminded of the protective surrounding presence of holy ancestors by this stanza, “*nge bahungila badianga*” (they surround you those who eat)<sup>xxxiv</sup>.

The fact that this holy ancestors who surround the initiate are claimed to be “eating” translates the conviction of the *ngânga-Lêmbe* that they are alive in the beyond. One therefore understands why in many African religious rites food is presented to the holy ancestors. This act is a deep expression of our knowing that they are alive around us and protecting us, “*n’kêmbo di n’kisi ngânga kimoya*”.

In this protective meaning the word *n’kisi* becomes in plural *min’kisi*. But in a deeper speech the holy *bakulu* (ancestors) associated with it are referred to as *nkukunyângu*.

### The *N’kisi* as an animating power

Solar trinity teaches that the divine power is exercised by lower divinities through the Word for the benefit of the *mûntu*. Now, the nearby to nearby approach of this exercise dictated by the hierarchy of divinities implies that the *n’kisi*, as the animating power of the Word, is manifested as the presence of holy ancestors as animating divine spirits (the manifestations of divine Spirits) acting in a *mûntu*, in a thing, or in a phenomenon.

In this meaning the *n’kisi* becomes in plural *bakisi*. Bittremieux offers us an interesting classification of these *bakisi*. His typology includes in hierarchical order:

- Nzâmbi Ampûngu, the transcendent supreme *n’kisi*.
- The *Bikinda bi nsi*, “transcendent genii, personifying the forces of the universe endowing fecundity.”
- The *N’kisi nsi* (or *Bakisi banene*, the great *Bakisi*), they control “political, social familial life of the clan”.
- The *Nkita*, “envoys of the *Bakisi banene*”<sup>xxxv</sup>.

Thus, we learn from this ethnography of Bittremieux that Mpûngu Tulêndo, *bikinda bi nsi*, *n’kisi nsi*, and *nkita* are different forms of *bakisi*, or animating divine powers.

### Tempels-inspired typology

The ontology of Tempels and the natural theology of Bukôngo sustain that the true nature of being is the spiritual, the body being only an appearance. Moreover, this ontology reveals three categories of beings: God (*Nzâmbi*), the human being (*mûntu*) and the thing (*kîntu*, or *bîntu* in plural, but to keep up with Kikôngo uniform usage, we will speak of *kîma*, or *bîma* in plural). It follows from this ontological

categories that the *bakisi* and *min’kisi* include the following three types:

- The *Nzâmbi-n’kisi*, properly named Mpûngu Tulêndo. We have seen that the word *mpûngu* is synonymous with *n’kisi*. Hence *Mpûngu Tulêndo* refers to God as the *n’kisi* which embraces all authority. This is the Kôngo allusion to Omnipotence. The *Nzâmbi-n’kisi* is also the Word as the animating or protecting manifestation of the completeness of the Most-high. So, in relation to a *mûntu* and the Word that is inseparable from him, we have two aspects of *Nzâmbi-n’kisi*, the inner-animating aspect and the outer-protecting one.
- The *mûntu-n’kisi*. The expression *mûntu-n’kisi* alludes to a *mûntu*, on this plane or in the beyond, as being a force. On the divine level, the *mûntu-n’kisi* is the manifestation of the *Nzâmbi-n’kisi* by a holy ancestor or by a divine *ngânga* as a protective or an animating force; this power is acquired through the Word by the means of the purification of thought. On the human level the *mûntu-n’kisi* is expressed by an ancestor or a human *ngânga* as a protective or animating power acquired through human means, faith in holy ancestors of faith in matter as an agency of the first, or even acquired through money.<sup>xxxvi</sup> When a *ngânga* of Kimpasi affirms that “*n’kêmbo di n’kisi ngânga kimôya*”, he refers to himself as a *mûntu-n’kisi*, a divine protective force, but once in the beyond he will be a *mûntu-n’kisi* in the protective or animating meaning. Someone can become temporarily a *mûntu-n’kisi* by being inhabited by the spirit of an ancestor. We were once astounded by our dear mother when we asked her why she could not be as eloquent as the lady X in palavers; she replied point-blank, “it is her ancestors who speaks in her”. It took us years and a Ph.D. (hon.) to understand what our mother seized naturally as being a case of *mûntu-n’kisi*!
- The *kîma-n’kisi*. As a natural power, the *kîma-n’kisi* is the force manifested by a thing or a phenomenon of nature as being animated by a divine spirit (*bakisi*); when this kind of *n’kisi* is used for healing purpose it becomes a *n’lôngo* or sacred medicine.<sup>xxxvii</sup> On the divine level the *kîma-n’kisi* is the power of a divine *mûntu-n’kisi* transmitted through mere faith in holy ancestors and in a material thing (as their medium of acting). Referring to the divine origin of the spirit

that animates this kind of *kîma-n'kisi* van Wing<sup>xxxviii</sup> affirms that they came from water, i.e., from the holy world of the ancestors. On the human level, the *kîma-n'kisi* can be also an artifact animated by an enslaved non-incarnated spirit for the purpose of good or evil.<sup>xxxix</sup> The *kîma-n'kisi* alone can in some cases be referred to as a fetish, i.e., as something artificial, a product of a *mûntu*.

It should be realized here that the *mûntu-n'kisi* and the *kîma-n'kisi* are only limited manifestations of the *N'zâmbi-n'kisi* (this is in accordance with the KCA-revealed nature of the temporal universe as a mere appearance) or its perversion as a totally evil *n'kisi*.

### The divine, human, and demonic classification

To introduce this typology, we must first deduce logically from the natural pneumatology of Bukôngo the notion of the demonic spirits. The KCA demonstrates that God, the ultimate cause, manifests his fullness in the Child of God. Since God manifests thus the completeness of his substance in the Child of God, this act is an expression of love. Therefore, expressing an infinite love to an infinite number of Children of God, the Most-high is infinite Love.

We learned also from the KCA that God is inseparable from the Children of God, due to his absolute immutability. This attachment of Love is not contingent on any act of the Child of God; thus, it is an act of loyalty from the Most-high. Therefore, expressing a quality of truth, i.e., loyalty, to infinite number of Children of God, the Most-high must be infinite Truth.

Being Truth, the love of God for his Children is true and unconditional, all the more as God is absolutely without contingency. Therefore, the Children of God are endowed with free will. They can turn down the divine grace manifested as the Word. However, such an act causes the fall of the Child of God into a state of consciousness which is a potential universe characterized by chaos and darkness. This is the case because the celestial plane is order and light and is without any contingency.

But, by turning away from God, the All-in-all, the lost Child of God has turned away from his substance, thus he becomes a non-incarnated spirit groping in chaos and darkness. However, he cannot be annihilated; because this eventuality will cause a relational change to the absolutely immutable Most-high God, which is impossible.

Creation is thus a loving act of a Child of God in favor of the non-incarnated spirits to help them find a relative spiritual light and take human forms, incarnations, in order to begin their spiritual

“ascension” back to the celestial realm. Creation is soteriological.

Now, being absolutely immutable, God doesn't violate the free will of lower beings at the celestial level as well as on the temporal planes. Therefore, those of the non-incarnated spirits who at the creation of a temporal plane refuse the loving saving offer, remain in spiritual darkness as non-incarnated spirits devoid of directional autonomy. This is the case because, according to solar trinity, and being good, the power of directional autonomy is vested in the Word.

It follows that, being without directional autonomy, these non-incarnated spirits are at the mercy of any autonomous *mûntu* for good or evil purposes. Thus, when used for evil purposes these non-incarnated spirits become, under the enslaving command of the malicious *ngânga* or a witch, demonic spirits. However, the ethnology of Bukôngo reveals that the loss of the incarnation can happen also on the ascending path after death, this remains to be explained by natural theology<sup>xl</sup>.

The pneumatology of Bukôngo has thus revealed that a *mûntu-n'kisi* can be animated by a divine spirit, a human spirit, or a demonic spirit, so is it with a *kîma-n'kisi*. We have seen that in the first case of the *mûntu-n'kisi* the authority is obtained from the Word by the courtesy of the purification of thought. This authority can be transmitted as a human *kîma-n'kisi* through mere faith in holy ancestors or in matter as their agency. Animated by a human or a demonic spirit the *mûntu-n'kisi* and the *kîma-n'kisi* result from enslaving a non-incarnated spirit<sup>xli</sup>.

When the divine *mûntu-n'kisi* is transmitted as a *kîma-n'kisi* it can be used for good or evil purposes, but the last usage is forbidden. This is why, due to its divine origin, great ethical requirements are attached to the divine-originated *kîma-n'kisi* to avoid any misuse. The failure to remain loyal in the observance of these requirements leads to the desertion of the animating holy ancestors; thus, the *kîma-n'kisi* may become a human-animated *n'kisi* or a demonic one. This means that, in order to remedy the desertion of the sustenance of the holy ancestors, human or demonic non-incarnated spirits are replaced.

The natural soteriological creative doctrine alluded above is confirmed in Bukôngo where two words are used for creation: *sêma* and *bûmba*. Now, the word *sêma* alludes also to the action of lightings splitting the sky, while *bûmba* means also the fact of giving a form to a bunch of clay<sup>xlii</sup> the other confirmation is the absence of the notion of Satan in Bukôngo. The absolutely transcendent God, Nzâmbi Mpûngu, has no adversary. The word *nkadi ampêmba* alludes to the devil, not as an individual being, but as an attitude<sup>xliii</sup>.



Mulinda defines spirits as “individualized and personalized entities”.<sup>xliv</sup> However, it cannot be said of non-incarnated spirits that they are devoid of individuality and personality. The KCA allows us to arrive to the conclusion that the non-incarnated spirits are devoid of directional autonomy. Were they devoid of personality God would be condemned to a relational change, the loss of the relationship with an individual, this is impossible due to his absolute non-contingency.

That the non-incarnated spirits are devoid of directional autonomy is verified by their being enslaved. Dianteill explains it in this way:

*The palero dominate the spirit and compels him to act for him or for another person who called upon him. Insults, knocks, threats, all the means of coercion are good to put at work the dead, who is frequently assimilated to a wicked “dog”, like in Kôngo*<sup>xlv</sup>.

In his ethnography of Kôngo culture, Van wing<sup>xlvi</sup> sustains the point underlined by Dianteill that the spirits are dominated by the *mûntu*.

**The *n’kisi* and the technological function**

Since in Kôngo culture, as in any African traditional culture, religion underpins every aspect of

life, there seems to be a confusion between the religious and the technological functions of the *min’kisi*<sup>xlvii</sup>. This confusion leads to a distorted concept of ATR as a manifestation of the *mûntu-n’kisi* and *kîma-n’kisi*.

The KCA demonstrates that Bukôngo is a science, a set of coherent and deductive truths having connection with other fields of knowledge. This implies that this African religious lore should lead to technological or practical applications, this is all the more the case as in the paradigm that Bukôngo shares with ancient Egypt, praxis is the eminent aim of knowledge.<sup>xlviii</sup> Therefore, the religious function must be distinguished from the technological one as far as the *min’kisi* is concerned.

The first function of *min’kisi*, the religious one, allows the *mûntu* to regain the manifest expression of the Word he has lost due to the original and subsequent bad uses of the free will. As to the second function, it enables him to express his dominion over nature. It follows that the *mûntu-n’kisi* has religious and technological functions, while the *kîma-n’kisi* has only technological functions and should not assimilated to a religious practice though these functions may be related to religion.

**Table 2: Synthetic table of various *min’kisi* and *bakisi***

Celestial level of <i>n’kisi</i> <i>Nzâmbi-n’kisi</i>		Mpûngu Tulêndo, the God Most-high						
		The Word as protective <i>Nzâmbi-n’kisi</i>			The Word as animating <i>Nzâmbi-n’kisi</i>			
Temporal levels of <i>n’kisi</i>	Limited manifestations of <i>Nzâmbi-n’kisi</i>	<i>Mûntu-n’kisi</i>		In human <i>Mûntu-n’kisi</i>		In <i>kîma-n’kisi</i>		
						Nature & phenomena	Artifacts	
		As a divine <i>n’kisi</i> : spiritually gained protective force	As a human <i>n’kisi</i> : humanly gained protective force	Divine <i>bakisi</i> (holy ancestors as divine spirits)	Human <i>bakisi</i> (mere ancestors as divine spirits)	Divine <i>bakisi</i> (as divine spirits)	Divine <i>bakisi</i> (holy ancestors as divine spirits)	Human <i>bakisi</i> (non-incarnated spirits enslaved)
	Holy ancestors (divine service of a <i>nkukunyûngu</i> )	Ancestors (impelled by family links alone)						
	Divine <i>ngânga</i> (divine service)	<i>Ngânga</i> (sold human protective service)						
	Devilish <i>n’kisi</i>	Demonic ancestors or demonic <i>ngânga</i> (sold demonic protective service)		Demonically animated <i>mûntu-n’kisi</i>		Demonically animated <i>kîma-n’kisi</i>		

We know that, according to the KCA, the temporal universes are only appearances, limited manifestations of the realities of the celestial plane. Thus, as depicted in this synthetic table, at the origin of all *min’kisi* and all *bakisi* is the *Nzâmbi-n’kisi*

manifested as the Word according to solar trinity. At the temporal levels any *n’kisi* is either a limited manifestation of the *Nzâmbi-n’kisi* or its perversion. As a limited manifestation of *Nzâmbi-n’kisi*, the *n’kisi* can be divine (capable of good usage only) or human

(capable of good or evil usage, though the evil usage is forbidden). While as divine the *n'kisi* is acquired through purification of thought, as human it is either the result of faith in holy ancestors through the agency of a material object, *kîma*, or the result of the use of human *bakisi*, as enslaved non-incarnated spirits. According to the will of its maker the *kîma-n'kisi* can be destined totally for evil purpose, in which case it is a demonically animated *n'kisi*.

## CONCLUSION

Starting from Placid Tempels' discovery of "being-force" as characteristic of the worldview of Bantus and from the natural theology of Kôngo religion as the exposition of its essential doctrines through deductive logic thanks to the kemetic cosmological argument (KCA), this paper attempted a generalization of the notion of *n'kisi*, and demonstrated that this concept should not be wrongly cornered to the notion of fetish introduced by the Portuguese explorers of the Kingdom of Kôngo in 15<sup>th</sup> centuries as alluding to something artificial.

The generalization attempted in this paper demonstrates that the highest concept of the *n'kisi* is God himself as a *Nzâmbi-n'kisi*. Thanks to the double nature of the Word as the completeness of God in and around lower beings, it has been evidenced that the concept of *n'kisi* alludes to the Word as a *Nzâmbi-n'kisi*, the highest spiritual power as the protecting presence surrounding the human being and the animating divine spirit governing human beings, phenomena as well as objects of nature and of human creation.

Since the KCA demonstrates that the phenomena of the temporal planes are only appearances of the reality of the absolutely non-contingent celestial plane, it has been demonstrated that any lower *n'kisi* is either the limited manifestation of the *Nzâmbi-n'kisi* or its perversion due to failure to abide by the strict ethical requirements attached to it, and/or the use of the non-incarnated spirits subdued for good and evil purposes or for evil ones exclusively. It thus follows that the concept of *n'kisi* can be grasped through the divine, human, and demonic modes.

While the *mântu-n'kisi* has religious and technological functions, the *kîma-n'kisi* has only technological functions. Therefore the religious function of the *n'kisi* should not be confused with the technological one, though the last is always related to the former.

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- <sup>x</sup> Biko, *ibidem*, 93.
- <sup>xi</sup> Woolf, *Webster's new collegiate dictionary*, 977.
- <sup>xii</sup> Luyaluka, *African indigenous religion*.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Thompson & Jackson, *The Case of the existence of God*, 2.
- <sup>xiv</sup> An objection can be raised about the law of causality because quantum physics escapes it. However, this objection is not valid since the KCA offers a valid alternative to the particle/wave dilemma by demonstrating that subatomic elements are particles on undulating trajectories (Luyaluka, 2014).
- <sup>xv</sup> Cuvelier, *La Mythologie mésopotamienne*, 4.
- <sup>xvi</sup> James, *Stolen legacy*, 74.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Ibidem*, 104.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Kramer, *History begins at Sumer*, 78.
- <sup>xix</sup> Bandzouzi, *le Kimbanguisme*.
- <sup>xx</sup> Ladyman, *Understanding philosophy of science*, 264
- <sup>xxi</sup> Luyaluka, *Religion and science*.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Luyaluka, *African indigenous religion*.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Diop, *Antériorité des civilisations nègres*.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Tempels, *la Philosophie bantoue*, 58.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Dianteill, *Kongo à Cuba*.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Mulinda, *le Nkisi dans la tradition woyo*.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Fukiau, *Kongo ye nza*, 201.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Laman, *Dictionnaire Kikongo-Français*, 589.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Dumont, *l'Histoire générale de l'Afrique*, 164.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Bentley, *the Dictionary and grammar*, vii.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Luyaluka, *the Notion of "Nzambi Ampûngu Tulêndo"*.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Disengomoka, *ku Ntuala*, 27.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Bahelele, *Lusansu ye fu bian N'kongo*, 27.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Fukia, *Kôngo ye nza*, 43.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Bittremieux, *la Société secrète de Bakhimba* 189.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Bahelele, *Lusansu ye fu bia*.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Fukiau, *Kongo ye nza*.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Johannes, *Dogs and the spiritual world*.
- <sup>xl</sup> Dianteill, *Kongo à Cuba*.
- <sup>xli</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>xlii</sup> Bentley, *the Dictionary and grammar*; Laman, *Dictionnaire Kikongo-Français*.
- <sup>xliiii</sup> Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Mulinda, *le Nkisi dans la tradition woyo*, 203.
- <sup>xlv</sup> Dianteill, *Kongo à Cuba*, 76.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Van Wing, *Etudes Bakongo*.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Dianteill, *op. cit.*
- <sup>xlviii</sup> William, *a History of science*.
- <sup>i</sup> Mulinda, *le Nkisi dans la tradition woyo*.
- <sup>ii</sup> Ladyman, *Understanding philosophy of science*, 28.
- <sup>iii</sup> Luyaluka, *Comparative theology*.
- <sup>iv</sup> Luyaluka, *African indigenous religion*.
- <sup>v</sup> Tempels, *la Philosophie bantoue*.
- <sup>vi</sup> Magoza ma Dobo, *La Philosophie en Afrique*.
- <sup>vii</sup> Tempels, *la Philosophie bantoue*, 28.
- <sup>viii</sup> *Ibidem*, 36.
- <sup>ix</sup> Essel & Acquah, *Conceptual art*; Kanu, *Causality in African ontology*; Biko, *I write what I like*.