Emmanuel Milingo, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Lusaka in Zambia, resigned under Vatican pressure in 1983. If the unhappy controversy surrounding his healing ministry has helped the Church in Africa to take the concept of integral healing more seriously, and even to make a cautious approach to traditional spirit healers, then the painful experience may have been worthwhile. Gerrie Ter Haar, a Lecturer in the Study of Religions at the Catholic University of Utrecht, has produced the most comprehensive account so far of the events surrounding Milingo's removal from Zambia, and of his present ministry in Rome. Milingo's own papers were available to her and she learned much from members of the Society of Missionaries of Africa ('The White Fathers'), such as Bishop Patrick Kalilombe of Malawi and Father Hugo Hinfelaar, who are both close to Milingo. In particular, she makes extensive use of Hinfelaar's Ph.D. Thesis on religious change among Zambian women, submitted to London University in 1989.

Ter Haar lays claim to objectivity, and her closeness to Milingo enables her to give—for the first time—a coherent account of the archbishop's thinking, as well as of the sequence of events in Lusaka and Rome. The secrecy which has surrounded the Vatican's own investigations and decisions, however, prevents her from giving an equally coherent account of the opposition to Milingo. It is also notoriously difficult to assess the strength of public opinion in an African country. Support for Milingo was widespread, but the impression Ter Haar gives that almost the entire population of Zambia sided with the archbishop may be over-generous.

Milingo is presented as a man of faith, utterly convinced of his vocation to heal the sick and the afflicted. The archdiocese he inherited was ethnically heterogeneous and staffed with an assortment of clergy, mainly from European countries. It was also the seat of a government, increasingly sensitive to accusations of corruption and oppression. Social reconciliation is an important level of African healing to which Milingo's personal character was not, however, suited. Ter Haar describes his tactlessness, his want of
diplomacy and bureaucratic ability, but she does not go so far as to charge him with lack of judgement. A point of no return was reached when he publicly rebuked his foreign missionaries in front of the Zambian President and government on the occasion of the archdiocesan Golden Jubilee in 1977. By contrast, it is said that President Kaunda made a point of shaking hands with every missionary present, before leaving the celebration.

Ter Haar notes Milingo’s own conviction that racism lay at the heart of the controversy in Lusaka, and that the Zambian bishops who opposed him were the mouthpieces of hostile missionaries. She shows how this conviction was strengthened when a Eurocentric foreign press misunderstood the story. She also notes Milingo’s belief that missionary opposition to exorcism was based on a scientific view of the world. This is not a view that Ter Haar, herself, shares. On the contrary, she believes that a spirit theory of disease is compatible at many points with medical science. However, she is obviously right to see the controversy as being fundamentally about inculturation. This term is used by theologians to describe the sympathetic adaptation to, and appropriation of, a local culture by the Church, in a way that does not compromise the Church’s basic faith. The heart of the discussion is therefore about this faith. While the Church has lived with syncretism since New Testament times, the threshold of tolerance is limited, and there is legitimate discussion about where to place the limits.

Although traditional Africa had no explicit belief in Satan, but saw human witches as the epitome of evil, early missionaries believed that pagan Africa was under the empire of Satan and they taught their converts to demonize their experience of misfortune. It was not long before Christian prejudice identified the unruly alien spirits of African religious tradition as devils or evil forces. This process was aggravated by the tensions of modern urban living. Milingo sees possession by demons as a symptom of the ills which afflict society: poverty, unemployment, inhuman living conditions, as well as of physical afflictions such as sexual impotence, sterility and epilepsy. He also brands traditional African communities of affliction as Satanic, and Ter Haar seems even to compare them with Euro-American Satanic cults. The African witch is also redefined, in terms reminiscent of the medieval European witch craze, as having made a pact with Satan.

Although she admits Milingo’s influence on the growth of the