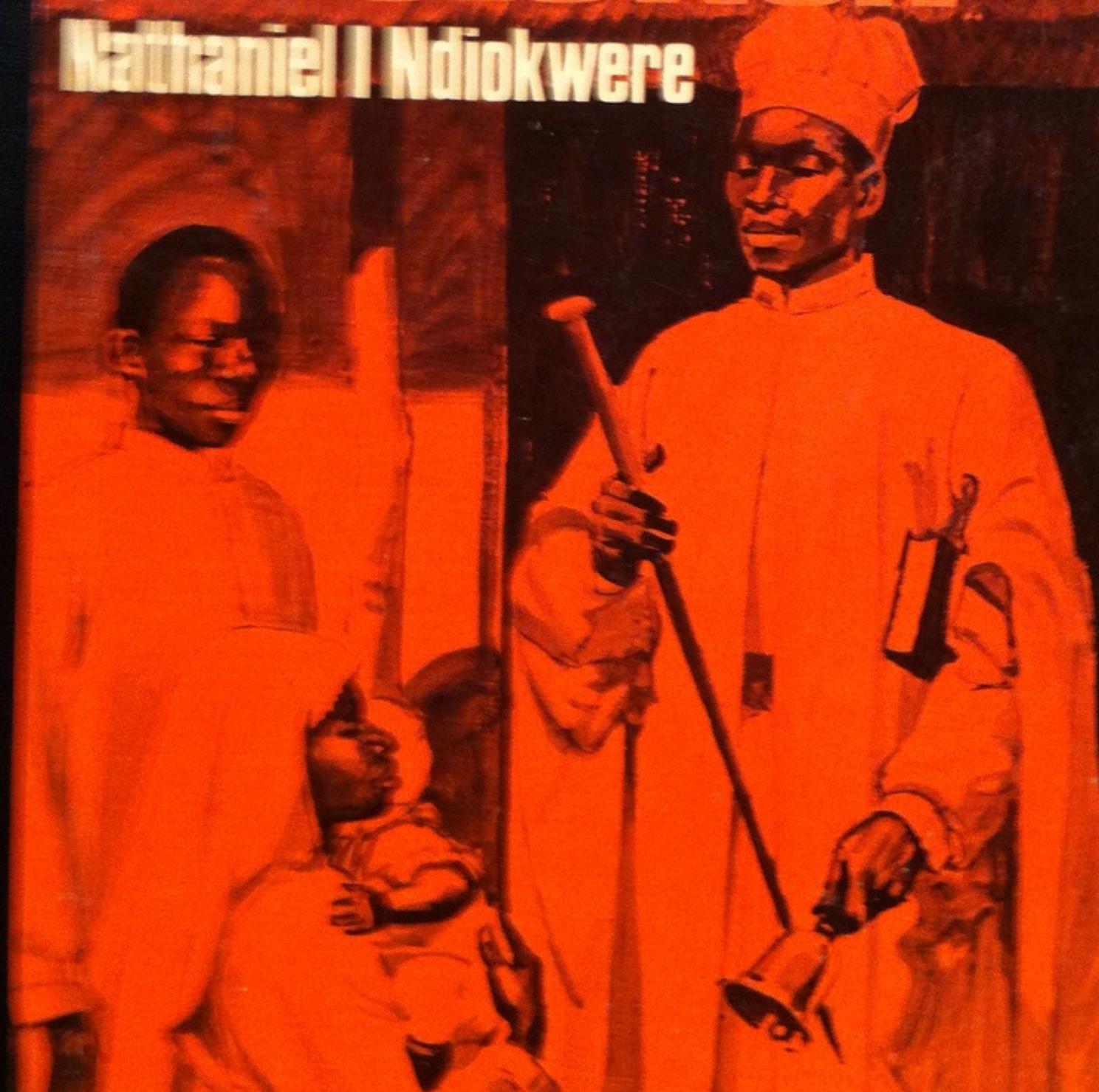


# PROPHECY AND REVOLUTION

Nathaniel I Ndiokwere



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### **PROPHECY AND REVOLUTION: Reviewed - NOW AND THEN! [1981 – 2010]**

**What a few selected reviewers and readers have said and written about  
‘Prophecy and Revolution’**

**“The Tablet”**, London,  
The International Catholic  
Weekly, London  
7<sup>th</sup> November, 1981.

**Reviewer: Adrian Hastings**  
**[British Theologian]**

This is an interesting book by a Catholic Priest concerned with an aspect of contemporary Church life in African. It deserves a warm welcome.

The title of Fr. Ndiokwere’s study of the prophets of modern Africa in comparison with those of the Old Testament is, perhaps, misleadingly named: there is not much about ‘revolution’ here. His survey of African prophetism is based on wide reading in recent literature and it is, I think, the first attempt by an African Catholic to look at this important subject as a whole. His book may well, as a consequence, be placed beside and compared with those of Sundkler, Barrett and others, and it has of course the advantage over them in being able to draw on some of the more recent studies unpublished when their seminal works were written. Unfortunately it is hardly possible to do justice to such a vast topic in a single volume, in this case a Roman doctoral thesis.

The author is a Nigerian and is best when treating of the West African material, where he includes some valuable first-hand information about the ‘Holy Chapel of Israel Church’ founded by his uncle, John Agbagboro, in the Orlu area of Eastern Nigeria. These pages may well prove the most permanently useful part of the book.

The survey of prophetism elsewhere is a little weak in places, and it is hardly possible to make helpful sense out of a comparison between these many movements and the ancient Israelite prophetic tradition, but much of what he says is stimulating and thoughtful.

The Independent Churches of modern Africa, especially in such countries as Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa, present a challenge to the older Churches which cannot simply be dismissed in a negative way. Why are they so lively and why do they spread so fast, capturing so many thousands of adherents of the mission Churches? There is much to be learnt from them, not least in regard to the small size of their congregations and the flexibility of their ministries. Fr. Ndiokwere quotes approvingly an Aladura leader who wrote in the SUNDAY TIMES of Lagos to ‘appeal to the Catholic authorities in Nigeria to re-examine the ministerial priesthood’ .....

**Professor Stefano Virgulin**  
**Dept. of Biblical Theology**  
**Pont. Urban University**  
**Rome, 14.10.1981**

‘On account of the numerous merits of **‘Prophecy and Revolution’**, we highly recommend and give our full approval for its publication and circulation.

Its very topical theme, useful insights and scientific seriousness present it to us as a work which must be consulted by all those involved in missionary activity both in Africa and outside. The questions raised in the work are a challenge to Christians, especially in Africa and it is a moment that calls for a serious examination of conscience with regard to Christian attitudes in the face of such spiritual movements as the Independent Africans Churches.

**E.A. Adeolu Adegbola (Rev. Dr.)**  
**Director, Centre for Applied Religion**  
**& Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.**

I have come across your new book *‘Prophecy and Revolution’* published by the S.P.C.K. I like to congratulate you on such a well researched production. I am thrilled that you have shown such an interest in the so-called African Independent Churches. Their significance as part of the religious phenomenon in Nigeria and Africa as a whole appears to me to be tremendous.

You have of course coupled this scientific study of new religious movements with a commanding grasp of contemporary Old Testament Scholarship. Congratulations, and we will wait for more from your pen.

**Sunday Statesman (May 17, 1981)**

**‘Prophecy and Revolution’** is a book that must be studied by all Christians regardless of religious denomination. It is very appealing to all interested in African affairs and missionary work. This book is so commanding and appealing that it has raised some fundamental questions which have constituted a challenge to our present day Christianity. The author has accomplished an important task by bringing to light this fascinating book.

For one thing, *‘Prophecy and Revolution’* is unique in its appeal as it reminds all that this is a moment that calls for a serious examination of conscience in the face of such Charismatic and Spiritual movements as found in the Independent African Churches.

**The Leader (16<sup>th</sup> May, 1981)**

By the publication of this Book **‘Prophecy and Revolution’** the Church in Africa is now blessed with the critique of a potential intellectual luminary who

in the spirit of authentic indigenization and Inculturation wants to see in practical life a ‘holy marriage’ between our Christian Bible and African cultural heritage.

It is left to us who intend to give hand-outs to our pupils to come now and join the trade union of ‘Thessalonial’ consumers and make good for ourselves and the Church, the thoughts provoked by Rev. Fr. N. I. Ndiokwere in his book, which can also be described as a ‘Biblical Christian Anthropology of African Prophetic Movements’ or a Scriptural Politico-Sociology of Religious Movements in Africa.

In ‘**Prophecy and Revolution**’ the author gives a fascinating description of different principal movements, but the originality of the book lies in the comparison of African Prophetic movements and Old Testament prophecy, bringing out similarities and differences and concluding that the movements in general have sought to establish the Christianity of the Bible, as they see it in harmony with Africa’s cultural heritage. This is a fascinating examination of prophecy as a phenomenon, as well as being of immense topical interest.”

**Prophecy and Revolution** commands the attention of all and sundry, and in fact, the attention of:

(1) **Religious Leaders:** For the book elaborately discusses a phenomenon which has come to challenge the authority of the Established Churches’ in commitments to God and Church, in Discipleship and Mission.-

(2) **Social Scientists:** **Prophecy and Revolution** identifies the root causes of the emergence and proliferation of the New Church Movements. Socio-political factors have contributed a lot to the emergence of the Independent religious movements.

(3) **Students of Religious Studies:** Can politics be separated from Religious interests in clear cut dichotomy? What of the South African Situation?

(4) **Pentecostals:** Including the African modern prophets and leaders of the Aladuras, Cherubim and Seraphim sects and the healing missions; Catholic and Protestant Pentecostals and all members of the splinter churches normally referred to as **Charismatics**

(5) **As a text book or reference book – Prophecy and Revolution** should command a special presence in Libraries of Higher Institutions of learning, Departments of Religion and Education in general.

(6) **Students of Scripture and Exegeses** will find the second part of ‘**Prophecy and Revolution**’ useful, especially in view of the modern biblical research methodology applied here.

(The author)



‘Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us.’

MARK 9.39-40

‘Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says: ‘Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.’  
1 COR. 13.3

‘Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.’

1 JOHN 4.3

## **Acknowledgements**

It is not possible to acknowledge here our indebtedness to all who in various ways have contributed to this study. But certain names must be mentioned.

I am very conscious of the privilege offered to me by His Lordship, the Most Reverend M. O. Unegbu, to study in Europe. I express my deep gratitude for his support and care throughout the course of my studies in Rome and England.

My sincere thanks go to the authorities of the Propaganda Fide and the Urban University, Rome, and in particular to Professor Monsignor S. Virgulin and Professor T. Filesi for their direction and moderation of this work. I alone am responsible for all its shortcomings.

I am very grateful to Fr. Bernard Connor, former rector of St. Peter’s major seminary, Transvaal, South Africa, for most of the books on South African independence which I used in the first part of this work.

I must not leave out of the list the rector of the Pontifical College of the Propaganda Fide, Fr. Pellegrino Ronchi (OFM Cap.) for his love and support during my stay in the college. My sincere gratitude goes too to Professor P. Bach (SJ), the chief librarian of the Jesuit Sacred Heart College, Frankfurt, for allowing me access to the college library.

I extend my deepest gratitude to Mr. E. O. Eze, to my brothers, and in particular, to Aloysius and Bob; to Frau Carole Schneider, Albert Klefenz and family, and Herbert Graesser (West Germany), and to John V. McCarthy and family (Detroit, U.S.A.), for all their wonderful collaboration, encouragement, and help. My thanks should also be extended to the students of Bishop Shanahan College of Education, Orlu, and the Bigard Memorial seminarians, Enugu, and all those who helped to complete our questionnaires.

My best regards to my superiors, tutors, and friends whose fellowship I have enjoyed immensely.

I will not fail to express a very sincere thanks to Doris Eke and Ifeoma Igbokwe for re-typesetting and proof-reading the entire book, since the electronic copy of the original publication in 1981 had been lost.

**N. I. NDIOKWERE**

## **PREFACE**

Revolutions, chaos, uncertainty, confusion! These are some of the terms being used by soothsayers and the so-called writers on African affairs to describe the trend of events in Africa today. As it appears to them, the outcome of the changes and movements taking place in the continent – whether these are political, economic, social or cultural – is unpredictable. Hence the questions: ‘Where is Africa steering to?’ ‘Whither Africa?’

It is not only these socio-political movements and changes that have attracted the attention of various speculators. In the religious sphere, the spread of Islam is described as alarming by many missionary bodies working all over Africa, as ‘islamization’ of the black continent from the north continues its advance into the heart of Africa.

But of very considerable impact in the chain of events is the rise and proliferation of the religious phenomenon known as ‘Independent Churches’. In various parts of the continent, the last hundred years or so has seen a remarkable series of corporate autonomous religious initiatives, which for number, influence, expansion, creativity and originality, have been described as ‘a phenomenon unprecedented in the entire history of the expansion of Christianity’. It is this phenomenon which constitutes our main area of study.

As the proliferation of these religious movements continues unabated, there has been a rapid growth in the vast corpus of literature on them. We find articles, reports, notes, essays, surveys, books, either concentrating on particular movements or on the general impact of the various movements on a continental scale. A bibliography compiled by R. C. Mitchell and H. W. Turner includes not

less than 1,320 studies in different forms. Among these, 217 deal with the movements in South Africa, 175 in Nigeria, 150 in the former Congo (Zaire), 81 in Kenya, 62 in Ivory Coast, 55 in Ghana, and so on.

As a result of this wide coverage, it may not seem that we can have anything particularly new to offer to our readers, who already know much about the independent movements. Originally presented as a thesis for the doctorate degree in biblical theology, in the Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Rome, with the title *Prophetic Movements in the Independent African Churches in confrontation with Old Testament Prophetism*, some minor changes have been made and some parts of the work pruned to give it this present shape.

Our thesis may not therefore be entirely popular. Again, there are already innumerable books and articles that deal with the biblical section of this study, most by abler scholars in the world!

Although the vast accumulation of material has made possible new types of analysis, only a small number of comparative studies on this subject has appeared. The method often employed is the so-called ‘depth study’, in which a range of problems is studied in great detail, in one small, non-representative area, such as a single district, village, or tribe, with the implication that any lesson learned there may legitimately be generalized to apply elsewhere. This method of analytical study of religion and society will not serve our purpose here. Though adopted by many authors this method leads to misleading generalizations and conclusions.

The ‘breadth and synthetic’ method, which differs from the first in that it ranges over a vast number of societies on a continental level, yet confines itself to some clearly defined problems, is our method. On account of the area covered, in fact extending to many parts of Africa – East, West, Central and South – we too may be accused of sweeping generalizations. We should like to point out, however, that we do not intend to give an exhaustive treatment of all the movements found in these places. It is in order to minimize these sweeping generalizations that discussion of the principal movements as they are represented in different parts of the continent is preferred: Our attention is directed toward an exposition of the important elements which serve our purpose of study, namely, comparison of the Independent Churches of modern Africa with the Old Testament prophetic tradition.

The principal movements considered include the ‘Zionist’, ‘Ethiopian’, and ‘messianic’ movements in Southern and East Africa. These are followed by Kimbanguism in the former Congo, and the ‘Aladura’ in West Africa – in keeping with our geographical limitation of Africa, south of the Sahara.

As far as the general plan of the work is concerned, the usual scheme for comparative study is followed. It comprises three main parts, of which the first

two follow a parallel development of themes. In the third part, the two earlier parts are brought together in comparison. The main elements of similarity between the African prophetic movements and Old Testament prophetism are brought out, as well as the basic differences between them. Only a summary is given, and the main points of such comparison stressed. It is presupposed that, to a large extent, the comparison would be evident after reading the parallel development in the previous two parts. The unique character of biblical prophetism is brought out; this stands as a fundamental difference between the Israelite prophetic movement and any such phenomenon found elsewhere in the world, including Africa. It is not possible to eliminate certain chapters from the second part, or to make them shorter, since this would jeopardize the purpose of our study.

The treatment is centered around the figure of the leaders or founders of the movements, namely the ‘prophets’. Although ideologies may differ (for example on political issues), faith and patterns of worship in the Independent Churches are strikingly similar in most areas of Africa. Worship and prayer meetings characterized by ecstatic manifestations and faith-healing are the usual features. It is here that the Independent Churches derive their popularity in the African milieu, as they endeavour to satisfy African religious longings. No elaborate descriptions of rituals are given. But ‘popular’ and common themes are treated together in the various chapters. Simply in order to compress the work, New Testament materials have been excluded from the first two parts, but where they served our purpose, indications have been made in the third part, and also in the final ‘Epilogue’ where we look briefly at the impact of the Independent movements on Christianity in Africa, and the challenge they present to the older Churches there and to governments of the day alike.

*Danger!* The dangers facing this type of work should not be overlooked – dangers arising from possible misunderstanding of our intentions, especially by ‘orthodox’ African Christians who are perhaps critical of the new movements. It must be emphasized that our study is not intended to approve or to condemn the movements in Africa; neither do we mean to degrade the Hebrew prophets through such comparison.

## **Introduction**

The emergence of autonomous religious movements, and the rate at which they expand, have continued to generate concern in many church circles, within and outside the African continent. Study of the movements has for many decades

now taken a prominent place in missionary science and in anthropological research. The movements have offered interesting material for research to the historian, sociologist, psychologist, ethnologist, liturgist, theologian, and to the student of African culture and religion. They are also of immediate concern to Christians, who ask themselves how clearly the Independent Churches' teachings reflect the Christian Gospel.

The African religious movements present also interesting material for *biblical* investigation. The Bible forms the foundation and belief of the new Churches, and the central figure is the prophet. The movements centre round the concepts of liberation, Messiah, Moses, Israel, Zion, the Spirit, baptism, and water. Charismatic gifts of the Spirit are experienced in abundance, and the high sounding biblical names of the Churches are not randomly chosen, nor are they simply ornamental. They reveal a deep-lying ideology.

Another significant point is that the entire movement has discovered and implemented some of the major theological concern being expressed elsewhere in the world regarding a reformation of the Christian community. Their beliefs, protests, religious and political longings are easily detectable from their sermons, hymns, and catechisms. Significant, too, is the fact that the renewal movement has arisen out of the African situation itself, in a spontaneous reaction against the old order. It has been stimulated by the same factors which have been responsible for numerous movements for reform and theological renewal throughout history. Traditional concepts touching basic institutions and ways of life, community structure, laws and taboos, religious leadership, symbolism, and ritual are interpreted according to biblical categories. There have also been markedly successful attempts to combine all that is valid in traditional society with the world of biblical faith.

But judging from the different names by which the Independent Churches are known, it seems that to many their motives are not yet clear. On the continental level, they are commonly called 'Independent Churches', 'prophetic movements', or simply 'new religious movements in modern Africa'. Cynically, they are referred to by some authors as well as by some Africans as 'separatist, schismatic, revivalist, pentecostal, ecstatic, messianic, syncretistic or apocalyptic movements'. On a relatively local level, Africans refer to them as 'mushroom' Churches, prayer houses, or healing homes. In Nigeria they are also known as 'psychedelic' Churches 'band-beating' centers, or, most frequently, 'Uka Ngozi Mmiri' (churches where water is blessed).

None of these names should, however, be dismissed simply as cynical. They may tell us more about the new Churches – what they do or what they are. In Africa, names are full of meaning.

But whatever these terminologies may really connote, what we are primarily concerned with here, and examine in detail in Part 1 of this book, are the phenomena on which these movements lean, and the various claims their leaders make.

Commenting on the nomenclature by which the Independent Churches are known, M. Wilson observes: 'On the one hand these Churches have been characterized as "schismatic" and "syncretistic", and on the other hand as an expression of the working of the Spirit ...' They are recognized as a growing point of indigenization in ritual, and are preoccupied with healing, which bulks so large in the New Testament."<sup>1</sup> But the question which Wilson poses is of radical importance: 'Is the explicit recognition of the "shades", the ancestors, and of witchcraft in the ritual of some Independent Churches, to be seen as "syncretism" or "indigenization?"'<sup>2</sup>

As H. W. Turner points out, 'In many of the prophet-healing Churches in West Africa, there is a most impressive and convincing breakthrough into dependence on faith in and prayer to the one living God of the Bible, as the biblical history of faith through struggle is being repeated in Africa.'<sup>3</sup>

African independency has also been described as having achieved a radical break-through from pagan idolatry and worship of a number of divinities, to worshipping the one, true, living, loving and all-powerful God of the Christian Scriptures.

As David Barrett also observes:

The moment the African could read the Bible and especially the Old Testament for himself, he found himself introduced to a world much more closely resembling his own than the world of the European. Inevitably he began to ask questions.<sup>4</sup>

The measure of this 'resemblance' between the world that gave rise to Israelite prophetism and the modern African situation in which the Independent Churches have emerged, and the influence of one upon the other, is the basis of our present study.

As far as possible, therefore, we follow in Part II the same pattern of development of themes as in Part 1, and shall be principally concerned with those aspects of Old Testament prophetism which most closely serve our interest.

In the light of such comparative study, it is interesting to note how some of the authors who wrote earlier are beginning to re-examine their formerly unsympathetic treatment of these Churches, especially in view of the political changes which have taken place in Africa.

Most of the older books gave the impression that *all* the African religious movements could be lumped together under the heading of ‘neo-paganism’, or what G. C. Oosthuizen refers to as ‘post-Christianity in Africa’. Sometimes *all* the movements are called ‘politico-messianic’ movements. A typical example of such a serious error of generalization is clearly illustrated by M. L. Martin’s earlier ideas about the Independent Churches. In *The Biblical Concept of Messianism and Messianism in South Africa*, the writer dared to extend the accusation of ‘messianism-frenzy’ to all the known religious movements in Africa. In *Kimbangu, an African prophet and his Church*, however, the same author endeavoured to repair the harm done, and the warning she gave may serve the interest of future authors on African independency:

From this point of view, it is certainly wrong to call the Kimbanguist Church a messianic sect, even though we have noticed here and there the danger of messianic tendencies. This may be true of many a Church in Southern Africa, but in the light of what we have observed among the Kimbanguists, the tendencies of the various ‘messianic movements’ in South Africa would have to be studied afresh every few years. What still appeared yesterday to be a messianic movement may today already be becoming a Church of Jesus Christ on the basis of the ever-renewing Spirit of God.<sup>5</sup>

It seems then that we have arrived at a period of re-examination of concepts, attitudes, and impressions. It is not too late to recognize what the Independent Churches truly represent.

To the missionary, particularly amazed at the massive withdrawal from the established mission Churches and the proliferation of new movements, the answer to that disturbing question – ‘Where is Africa steering to?’, is gradually emerging, and it is this that we discuss in Part III. Whether African political and economic independence can be assured is now hard to say. But in religious affairs, we are at least sure of one thing – Africans have taken the initiative!

### **The Problem of Terminology**

In the present study, the use of the term ‘prophet’ or ‘prophecy’ may present some problems, especially in Parts I and III, where they are applied to extra-biblical figures, and in particular to the so-called African ‘prophets’.

From a phenomenological point of view, no immediate attempt has been made to define the term ‘prophet’, or to distinguish, for example, the ecstatic from the prophet, the prophet-healer from the traditional diviner, the seer from

the man of God, or from similar roles frequently lumped together under the term 'prophet'. Our attempt, however, has two objectives – a further clarification of the problem, and, in Part I of this volume especially, to bring to light the elasticity with which the term 'prophet' is used today.

The tendency has always been to speak or think of the prophets of Israel whose work and utterances are familiar to us from the Scriptures. But the modern study of psychology and of the history of religion has shown that prophecy is not a phenomenon limited to Israel alone. The semantic evolution of the term 'prophet' has been recognized as a more complex problem, as has the origin of prophecy itself.

It has been shown that most world religions (past and present) have exhibited the prophetic phenomenon, either continually or at some stage of their development, and so prophets are found in many provinces of the world of religion, in ancient as well as in modern times. In the history of great world religions we find prophetic figures such as Buddha, Zarathustra (the fifth century BC prophet of ancient Iran), Mani, Muhammad, Mahatma Gandhi, etc. In Japanese Shinto, also we find such figures, and some elements of prophetism. The leaders or founders of many religious movements were regarded as great and charismatic leaders endowed with the conviction that special messages came to them from 'God', and that they had a special mission to accomplish among their people.

### **'Homines Religiosi'**

'Modern' prophets, or what Lindblom refers to as '*homines religiosi*', are said to be 'prophet types', and in the genuine sense of the word are real prophets of God, Lindblom describes these figures as prophets to whom religious experiences as such were the essence of their religious life. Personal communication with God, prayer, devotion, and moral submission to the divine will are said to be the main traits of their religious attitude. According to J. Lindblom, some of these 'prophets' include the inspired men in the early Church, a great number of medieval mystics, and, above all, figures like Joan of Arc, St. Catherine of Siena, 'Ranters' and Quakers in England, the prophets of the Cévennes in France, *die Inspirierten* in Germany, the crying voices in Sweden, the Pentecostals and other revivalists in both the ancient and the modern worlds. To this long list are added the diviners belonging to the Greek world and the prophets of the ancient Near East.<sup>6</sup>

In a wider sense, George A. Maloney calls on all Christians who are 'charismatics' in the best sense of the word to become prophets of God for the twentieth century. He sees the essence of the prophetic vocation in the ministering of the word of God. The Christian is not called to foretell future

events of history, but to inspire and to edify. He is an intermediary of God's salvific message.<sup>7</sup>

In this long list of prophetic figures, where do the Africans come in? It seems that Lindblom forgot to include the Africans in his long and representative list. Whatever the case may be, this is the problem with which we are here confronted. We shall see how the prophets of the Independent Churches compare with these prophetic types found in world religions, and with the biblical prophets. Whatever may be the limitations in the use of the word 'prophet', Vawter Bruce's remark on this issue is of great importance:

Our respect for the prophets of Israel does not require us to deny that many non-Israelite prophecies resulted from genuine religious experiences ... Since prophecy is a charisma, that of itself says nothing about the orthodoxy or moral character of the prophet, there is no reason to restrict the prophetic spirit exclusively to the normative channels of *Heilsgeschichte*.<sup>8</sup>

As we come to study the role of prophets in biblical tradition, we need to consider, not so much the etymology of the word 'prophet', as the elasticity with which the term is applied to different personalities, so as to establish a basis for our own use of it. As B. D. Napier has pointed out, the Hebrew word '*nabî*' has been applied to a remarkable range of characters appearing from Genesis (20.7) to Malachi (4.5), and to surprisingly disparate personalities from Aaron to Elijah; from the 'true' to the 'false' prophets, from the relatively primitive to the relatively sophisticated, from the highly visionary to the concretely ethical, from the seemingly objective perspective to the intensely participating attitude – only to suggest the breadth and range of the application of the term in the Old Testament.<sup>9</sup>

Abraham is called a prophet (Gen. 20.7). He is at the same time the 'God-sent' envoy, the intercessor before God. In the ancient Hebrew creed (Deut. 26.5ff), the wandering Aramean referred to was no doubt the same Abraham. According to A. Neher, the expression '*Avi*', my father, has not only patriarchal significance. '*Avi*' is a technical term which designates at the same time a prophet.<sup>10</sup>

During the centuries which followed the installation of Israel in Canaan, political power was in the hands of the prophets, and the Judges were, in short, nothing but these prophets. Men of the spirit, enthusiasts, patriotic war-mongers, bands or troops of ecstasies, military leaders (*nagîd*) and heroes, saviour-kings, Nazarites, the figure known as 'man of God' (*îsh ha-'Elohim*),

seers and diviners – all have been lumped together by various authors as prophets or prophet-types.

It is therefore evident that in the Old Testament, no recognizable interest was shown in the differentiation between those who were supposed to have exercised the various ‘prophetic’ functions. The translation ‘prophet’ (according to the Septuagint) is said to be just a matter of expediency. It was exceedingly difficult to decide whether *nabî* was ‘*habitus*’, or description of a function, or a sign of vocation. The saying: ‘Is Saul also among the prophets’, confirms this.<sup>11</sup>

Treated as a ‘seer’ by Amaziah (i.e. in a pejorative sense), Amos had to defend himself. He was no ‘seer’. Elsewhere (cf. 1 Sam. 9.9) ‘prophet’ and ‘seer’ are explicitly the same; the two terms are supposed to go back to different epochs: ‘for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a “seer”’.

### **Charismatics, also ‘Prophets’?**

How do we differentiate those Israelite leaders, purely charismatic in character, from those referred to as ‘prophet-types’? What are the decisive criteria? Even where anachronism in the use of the term ‘prophet’ is evident, it seems that the interest of narrators and editors has centered on the ‘popular’ figure of what in different epochs of Israelite history was conceived to have been a prophet.

As W. F. Albright points out, a discrepancy arises in the public role attributed to Samuel:

As a charismatic leader of Israel he was automatically also a ‘judge’, that is, a recognized arbitrator because of his inter-tribal role in the amphictyonic confederation of Israel. But as leader and patron of the ecstatic prophets, who had carried on their ancient function as oracular diviners, he was also a *rô’êh*, a ‘seer’. Furthermore, continuing ancient West Semitic and specifically Hebrew custom, he was a *nabî*, one called directly by God to his service, outside hereditary office and royal appointment. In Israelite usage both words had probably received meanings quite different from their original connotations.<sup>12</sup>

Judging from the figure of Saul as charismatic war leader (*nagîd*), and the figure of Balaam in relation to that of an ordinary *nabî*, R. Meyer sees a unity, but some fundamental difference in the use of the word *nabî*:

From this emerges a difference between ‘*Sehertum*’ and ‘*Nabiismus*’. No doubt, the seer (Num. 24.2) is a charismatic, as well as *nabî*, but in the last analysis, he exhibits a peculiar and

striking exterior characteristic in the form of possession, which separates him from his surroundings. The *nabî* is under the power of the spirit, which is identified as the Spirit of Yahweh or Spirit of God. This bursts out of him as a beast jumps on its prey and he is consequently changed into 'another man' (cf. 1 Sam. 10.6, 10).<sup>13</sup>

Whatever the case may be, it is not out of place to consider as 'prophetic-types' those 'men of the spirit', Judges and Kings, who in one way or the other played some important role in Israel's political and religious life. They were charismatic leaders, who put their rare gifts (spiritual or temporal) to the service of Yahwism. Their relationship with early nabism is not difficult to trace.

We may therefore retain the sense in which the term '*nabî*' has been used in the biblical narratives, and also observe the distinction often made between nabism and classical prophecy, but not forgetting that 'the great prophets did not fall from heaven'. They did not come into existence suddenly in the eighth century. They were sons of their fathers, children of one and the same tradition, men of their own age and milieu.<sup>14</sup>

### *A Typology for African Religious Movements*

The number of the Independent Church movements is great, and we have no intention of enumerating them, much less of describing them all. As we have already pointed out, we are concentrating our attention on the prophetic figures and on some few outstanding independent movements.

The nomenclature of the various movements is often confusing, and in literature and conventional usage a wide range of terminology is employed (see the Introduction above), describing what the present study calls 'prophetic movements in the Independent African Churches'. Establishment of a common typology for all the movements has proved a formidable task for many authors. But for our purpose here we are retaining the *three* terminologies developed by Dr. Sundkler in his pioneer work on the South African situation, which many other writers have continued to adopt, i.e. 'Ethiopian', 'Zionist', and 'Messianic'.

#### **1. 'ETHIOPIANISM'**

We retain the sense in which 'Ethiopianism' has been adopted as a general term for African nationalism. In Southern Africa, Churches of the Ethiopian type are known to represent such movements, which have seceded from the white mission Churches chiefly on racial grounds, and therefore exhibit strong race-antipathy towards the whites, expressed in the form of nationalistic or pan-

African ideas.<sup>15</sup> ‘Ethiopianism’ is also represented by what Willoughby refers to as ‘reaction against negrophobia’.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. ‘ZIONISM’

The Independent Church group called ‘Zionist’ in South Africa is known as ‘Aladura’ in West Africa. In this group are included the ‘Cherubim and Seraphim’ congregations and those designated by the term ‘Apostolic’. They are also called ‘Pentecostal’ Churches. Historically speaking, it is said that the name ‘Zion’ was borrowed from the Zionist Churches in the United States of America. We devote a separate chapter to further study of the implications of this ‘Zionist ideology’.

## 3. THE ‘MESSIANIC’ CHURCHES

Regarding the third group – the so-called ‘messianic’ Churches, a lot of controversy has arisen over the sense in which this term is to be employed. Sundkler, who first coined the term to designate those Churches in South Africa since called ‘messianic-type’ to distinguish them from the Ethiopian and Zionist groups, has himself strongly opposed the superfluous and indiscriminate employment of the term ‘messianic’ to include *all* the Independent Churches in Africa. He points out that the number of Churches represented in this group is insignificant, and warns:

It was necessary then, and it is necessary today, to emphasize the numerical point – one per cent only – against a tendency in the rapid expanding Western literature on the subject to lump the whole Independent Church movement together as ‘*messianisme africain*’ or ‘*messianische Kirchen und Sekten*’. I have become even more hesitant now to apply the term of ‘Messiah’. As sometimes happens, the caricature of a thesis can point up certain weaknesses in the argument.<sup>17</sup>

‘Judaistic’ is another term adopted by some authors to describe the ‘messianic’ movements in Africa. But H. W. Turner observes, rightly, that, within the Christian category, this type of movement is not widespread, for it seems to be almost entirely absent from the East and West African Independent Churches, and to be confined to those in Central and South Africa. It is therefore a mistake to use it as a general term for Independent Churches or for modern religious movements, as some have done.<sup>18</sup> As Lanternari points out:

‘Messianism’ understood in its current usage differs in its application to the African scene. In the history of religions, messianism refers to belief in the future advent of any being, singular or plural, expected by a community as a future Saviour who will end the present order of things and institute a new order of Justice and Happiness.<sup>19</sup>

According to the contributor of the article on ‘typology’ for religious movements in Africa:<sup>20</sup>

The term messianic, is used to describe groups which, centered around a dominant personality, claim for him special powers involving a form of identification with Christ. It should be noted that when this identification becomes substitution, the group in our opinion moves outside the sphere of Christian Church.

We consider the above view unacceptable and the definition of the term ‘messianic’ very inadequate. The prophet in the Independent Churches must surely possess *special powers*. It is the presence of such powers that makes him a unique figure among his people. In exercising his new powers, mainly in healing activities, he does not in any way usurp the authority of God, who has given him these powers during those mysterious encounters at the beginning of his new mission. Even in very extreme cases, no prophet is identified with Christ or Jehovah.

The ‘Jesus of Achalla’ and ‘Jesus of Ikot Ekpene’ in Nigeria are not ‘Jesus, the Christ’. They rather claim to be Christ’s or Jehovah’s messengers. In exercising their duties, they are ‘representing’ the One who has sent them, as a sort of ‘mask’, following Sundkler’s analogy:

Instead of the idea of a Messiah we suggest the biblical, and indeed, African, concept of the ‘*eikon*’, i. e., the mask, and in this case the mask of the Black Christ. The African prophet turning to God’s black people is privileged to wear that mask which they will recognize as of God ... What once happened through Jesus, among the Jews and for their salvation, is now being re-enacted through Shembe among the Zulu and for their salvation. God in his wisdom is now using his Bantu masks as he turns to his black children.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore the idea of identification with Jesus or Jehovah is out of the question. The ‘Prophet-Messiah’ heals in the name of Jesus; prayers and ‘*n’ aha nke*

*Jesus, Amen*’. (through the name of Jesus, Amen.’), and members are baptized in the name of the Trinity.

To Shembe himself and his followers, there was never any hesitation in their realization of the fundamental difference between God and his ‘Servant’. God remains God, the Exalted, also to them. But in his mercy God allows this Zulu Servant of his to reveal to his African children his power and love.<sup>22</sup>

In the above sense we retain therefore the term ‘messianic’ to designate those Churches or movements where the figure of the ‘Messiah-Prophet’ is prominent. Although sycophants may go to extremes, it does not mean that those prophets accept such titles.

A great part of this problem also lies with many Western authors, who exploit the ignorance of some of these poor, unphilosophical and inexperienced African prophets by assessing them by the same standards as sophisticated Western theologians and biblical scholars! One careless ‘dogmatic’ error they make becomes a yardstick for judging the authenticity of the movements, and in fact the Christian values of all the Independent Churches in Africa! This is the type of generalization that should be avoided.

We have no cause to pick a quarrel with anyone who decides to name any particular prophet, ‘Messiah’. There is nothing wrong in any prophet in South Africa assuming the function of the Messiah; specifically to ‘liberate’ his oppressed people from the racist climate of South Africa. That should be his ideal role, that of a ‘mediator’ between God and his people, for the ‘Messiah’ is prophet par excellence.

We have therefore found it necessary to modify this typology, and to include this third group as the ‘messianic-prophet’ movements or Churches.

## **Part 1**

### **Prophetic Movements In the Independent African Churches**

## The Emergence of Independent Churches and Prophetic Movements

The rate at which the Independent Church movements in Africa have continued to multiply and expand has been described in many Church circles as alarming, and at present it shows no signs of abating. Any attempt at compiling up-to-date statistics has proved impossible, as Barrett observes:

This massive proliferation is figuratively speaking only the top of the iceberg – hundreds more of such indigenous movements of renewal or protest remain in embryo inside the historical Churches at varying depths without the disaffection they represent having as yet broken surface in schism. The schismatic bodies are therefore only part of a much larger movement of dissidence, the bulk of which still remains in amorphous form within the Protestant and Catholic Churches.<sup>1</sup>

Founded either by direct separation from parent Churches or under the initiative of African leadership, the Independent Churches were by 1967 known to number some 5,000 distinct ecclesiastical and religious bodies in thirty-four African countries, with a total of almost seven million adherents, drawn predominantly from 290 different regions in all parts of the continent.<sup>2</sup> In an article in a German Church magazine, entitled '*Wohin steuert Africa?*', Horst Hohmann, in a review of the situation of the Church in Africa, has this to say about the Independent Churches:

The so-called Independent African Churches have at present about *eleven* million adherents. Today there are in the Black continent well over 5,000 Independent Churches. They are represented in 41 countries South of the Sahara. Every year, about 400,000 Christians desert the 'Big' Churches to join one of these many sects.<sup>3</sup>

In its own article on the subject, '*Mondo e Missione*', an Italian Church magazine, informs us:

In Africa, in 1972, there were more than 5,400 so-called Independent African Churches. These 'free Churches', claiming to

represent a 'native' form of Christianity, have in so short a time won adherents of over 15 million persons.<sup>4</sup>

The largest proliferation of these Churches has been reported particularly in South Africa (the 'Zionist' group alone numbering two million). But Kimbanguism was said to number about 4 million at the end of 1975. And in Nigeria, although no official figures are available, it is to be presumed that the number must be definitely higher than it is elsewhere in the continent.

Whether the statistics agree or not, however, one thing is clear – they have been overtaken by events. They cannot represent the actual numbers at present scattered all over Africa – South, Central, East, and West. Many of the principal groups of Churches have also been identified in Madagascar, all recognizable on a continental scale. Barrett informs us that 'the rapid overall growth of new separatist adherents had, by 1967, overtaken the expansion rate of the Protestant and Catholic Churches in at least sixteen nations in Africa. This fact alone makes the subject one of major import for the future of Christianity in Africa.'<sup>5</sup>

### ***Factors Responsible for the Rise of Independent Movements***

Certain factors are known to have contributed to the rise of independent religious movements in Africa. These include *political, social, economic, ethnic, liturgical, and theological factors*. Emphasis is often placed on the socio-political factors. The movements are described as a total reaction to the colonial situation, religious resistance becoming a substitute or safety-valve for forbidden protest. Such a reason, if true, may not be generalized. It cannot apply to all the Independent movements in the continent. If the rise of such movements must have been *influenced* by political situations, as in southern Africa or in the former Congo, how would one explain the Nigerian situation, where political factors have never exercised any influence on the new Churches, but where widespread separatism has been experienced since 1888?

But while not neglecting the socio-political elements, we are in agreement that the principal causative factors are also religious.

### ***Socio-Political Factors***

There is no doubt that the development of political struggles against colonialism and various forms of white minority rule in Africa did contribute, to a certain extent, to the rise of the numerous independent movements – political and religious. History is only repeating itself when in the dark hours of desperation and agony there arises the need for national heroes. Inherent in the concept of national liberation is the existence of a historically constituted national entity. In

spite of persecution and subjugation, through popular aspirations such an entity survives the struggle against the common enemy. In the colonialist conquest of Africa the old traditional system of life had been broken down. For some African countries, after bitter struggle freedom could once again be regained. But for some others it sounded like a fairy tale, as the situation of enslavement seemed to have assumed a perpetual outlook. In the case of Africans in the country of South Africa there is no doubt that the burden of existence is heavier than elsewhere.

Thus, to understand the reasons and justification for the separate formation of Independent Church movements in South Africa, it is necessary to have a look at the socio-political situation there.

### **THE STRUGGLE AGAINST TYRANNY AND OPPRESSION**

The African protest against tyranny and oppression finds its point of departure in that policy of the South African government which is expressed by the term, 'apartheid'. Walbert Bühlmann describes this policy as the 'shameful politics of certain white governments which, 200 years after the French Revolution and 25 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, seem still not to admit the fundamental principle of liberty, equality, and fraternity'.<sup>6</sup> It is a policy in which an indispensable qualification for citizenship is a white skin, simply expressed in clear terms. 'The people of the South African Republic desire to permit no equality between coloured people and the white inhabitants, either in Church or State.'<sup>7</sup>

In the programme of segregation, the advancing white settlement had pushed the Africans into restricted and densely crowded areas and impoverished rural ghettos, with no industries, major towns, or easy communications. Less than 13 per cent of the land of South Africa had been allocated to the Africans, who comprise over 70 per cent of the population. The policy of segregation was verbally confirmed and sealed by Cecil Rhodes, the then premier of the British Cape Colony. While introducing a 'Native Bill for Africa', he declared among other things:

My idea is that the natives should be kept in these native reserves and not mixed with the white men at all ... I prefer to call a spade a spade. Let us boldly say: in the past we have made mistakes about native representation. We intend to change all that ... We are going to be lords of this people and keep them in subject position ... They should not have the franchise because we don't want them on an equality with us ... These are my politics on native affairs and these are the politics of South Africa ... We must adopt a system of

despotism, such as works well in India, in our relation with the barbarians of South Africa.<sup>8</sup>

The racial segregation to which the later colonialists were equally devoted was to culminate in the infamous Land Act of 1913. Broadly speaking, the Land Act attempted to freeze the existing distribution of ownership as between the races (no European land to be sold to an African or vice versa). In Hertzog's policy, it was to give a comprehensive legal basis to the exclusion of the black man from the white man's world. It meant that two-thirds of the population would have no more than one-eighth of the surface area of the Union! The result was that the Africans were restricted to the so-called Reserves, which in apartheid theory are supposed to become Black States – the Bantus enjoying separate development from white South Africa.

On the labour front the situation could not but be most deplorable. The apartheid government, committed to keeping the Africans at the level of migratory workers with a few months' contract in white areas, was completing its programme of blocking the development of an urban black proletariat. White workers could strike, but African workers were prevented from striking by the Native Labour Regulation Act of 1911, which made it a criminal offence for them. Gold has been brought to the surface by the sweat of African contract workers. And confined to mine compounds, in prison conditions, the workers are not allowed even to bring their families with them during their period under contract. They are afterwards sent back to their homes. It is hardly worth mentioning the poor payment they receive, as compared with their white counterparts, skilled and unskilled.

## **EDUCATION**

The segregation policy extends to the field of education. It is reported that the South African government spends ten times as much per pupil on whites as on blacks. The student-teacher ratio is twenty to one for whites and sixty to one for blacks. Education is free and compulsory for the 900,000 white children in state schools, whereas the 3.7 million black children need not attend, but have to pay fees if they do.

## **THE CHURCH**

In 1957 a clause in one of the apartheid bills gave the Minister power to exclude Africans from any Church in a 'white' area. Though the races are, in practice, very generally segregated in worship, no Church, other than the Dutch Reformed, accepted segregation in principle. Recently, there have been attempts by the Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist Churches to integrate black children

in their schools, but the same Dutch Reformed Church (3.5 million) has remained strongly against integration. James Cone was right when he asked:

Can the Church of Jesus Christ be politically, socially, and economically identified with the structures of oppression and also be a servant of Christ? Can the Church of Jesus Christ fail to make the liberation of the poor the centre of its message and work, and still remain faithful to its Lord?<sup>8</sup>

In concrete terms, Cone sees liberation from oppression as the essence and meaning of salvation: 'White thought on the Christian view of salvation was largely "spiritual" and sometimes "rational", but usually separated from the concrete struggle for freedom in this world. "Black" thought was largely eschatological and never abstract, but usually related to their struggle against earthly oppression.'<sup>9</sup>

### **THE RESULTS OF INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION**

The first reaction of the humiliated Africans can be nothing far from an aversion to anything 'white', expressed in the slogan 'Africa for the Africans'. The real reason was that the humiliation burnt into the soul of the black man, like a brand on the body of a slave, by the treatment his race received from its white masters; oppression of course, but also condescension.<sup>10</sup> The manifold restrictions on his movement and even his right to maintain his own family clearly justify any and all remedial measures. Open violence was too dangerous, as the oppressed people were surrounded by the more powerful enemy, armed to the teeth. Barriers had been placed, too, on the common worship of the same Lord of heaven and earth. Public life was dominated by the colour problem. Everything from public conveyances and conveniences to national legislation is literally or figuratively stamped with that warning sign of racial segregation, expressed in the two official languages of the country: '*Net Vir Blankes*' – 'For Europeans only'.<sup>11</sup>

The open alternative for the rejected Africans was to accept the realities facing them, making out of them what seemed possible. The need to satisfy their religious and political aspirations saw the emergence of a multiplicity of Church movements, represented by the 'Zionist', 'Ethiopian', and so-called 'messianic' Churches.

### ***Religious Factors***

The tendency today, even in the South African situation, is to abandon most of the non-religious factors as responsible for the rise of Independent religious

movements in Africa. These movements are basically seen as religious drives towards the attainment of a satisfying religion. But in spite of what we have referred to as 'socio-political' factors, there are other elements which have influenced the formation of these autonomous religious movements. These are seen to be strictly religious or theological in nature, and include the attitude of the missionary enterprise in Africa, the results of the publication of the Scriptures in African languages, and the question of polygamy.

### **MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN THE AFRICAN CONTINENT**

As far as this problem is concerned there is no question of radical generalization, since the activities of most of the missionaries, especially the earliest ones, are well documented. Their attitude of indifference towards the social and religious needs of the Africans, whom they had gone to evangelize, no doubt raised certain doubts among Africans, and also caused some dissatisfaction. Most of the things we know about Kimbangu came from the Protestant missionaries, as well as from the Jesuits and Capuchins. Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese missionaries had already worked for a long time in the ancient kingdom of the Kongo before the rise of the first prophetic movements there. Methodist missionaries, who worked in Liberia, Ivory Coast, and the then Gold Coast, knew prophet Harris well, and gave testimonies of his activities in those areas. Both Protestant and Catholic missionaries working in the then Congo were directly accused of having contributed to the execution of the prophetess Dona Beatrice and to the imprisonment of Kimbangu. The scandals which most of the missionaries caused among the Africans are well documented. Mgr Cuvelier and Abbot Jadin inform us that 'where there should have been missionaries, there were often mercenaries bereft of virtue'. They participated in slave-trading.<sup>12</sup> We are told, moreover, that the whole missionary spirit almost died off, as Portugal was interested first and foremost in material gain rather than in missionizing. The greed and the scandalously immoral practices of the secular priests and missionaries, and, most of all, their slave-trading, really made any religious success impossible.<sup>13</sup>

### **MISSION AS INSTRUMENTS OF COLONIALISM**

As a result, there was an identification of the missionaries as agents of the colonial interest, since they struggled to establish Churches of national interest, and often failed to speak out against the injustices perpetrated by the colonial administration against the Africans.

Religious congregations were also regarded as colonial instruments for pacifying the conquered people, and it seemed that the missions, to a large extent, tacitly supported the power organization of the colonial governments.

‘The Church itself in Africa lived on imperial and political favour, and the Christian missionary was at times a pioneer of the white man’s penetration: Livingstone blazed the trail for Christianity and commerce.’<sup>14</sup> Bismarck’s statement after Germany had belatedly turned to Africa supports the suspicions of the Africans: ‘The missionary and trader must precede the soldiers,’ he declared.<sup>15</sup>

The disappointing aloofness of the mission Churches from the national aspirations of the people sooner or later led to an anti-white attitude, and consequently to a break with the established Churches and the formation of the Independent Churches. The Independent Churches so formed represent a protest movement characteristic of modern ‘Black Theology’. James Cone, one of the exponents of ‘Black Theology’, represents this feeling in this way:

People who want to know who God is and what he is doing, must know who black people are and what they are doing. This does not mean lending a helping hand to the poor and unfortunate blacks of society. It does not mean joining the war on poverty! Such acts are sin offerings that represent a white way of assuring themselves that they are basically a ‘good’ people. Knowing God means being on the side of the oppressed, becoming one with them and participating in the goal of liberation.<sup>16</sup>

The root cause underlying the entire movement of independence may therefore be seen in this single failure in sensitivity, the failure of the missions at one small point to demonstrate the fullness of the biblical concept of love as sensitive understanding towards others as equals, together with the African perception from the vernacular Scriptures of the catastrophic nature of this failure, and of the urgent need to remedy it if Christianity was to survive on African soil.<sup>17</sup>

## **SUPPRESSION OF AFRICAN CULTURE**

Another negative reaction to the missionary enterprise in Africa was contributed by the cynical attitude of the missions to African culture and ways of worship. The situation could be diagnosed in terms such as these:

Since the impact of Western civilization on this continent, and since the advent of the missionary, the real spirit of the African has been suppressed ... whatever there was in Africa was stamped down as ‘heathen’ ... the real question has been: If one accepts

Christianity, does it mean that everything in one's former culture has to die out ...?', asks one African Protestant minister.<sup>18</sup>

The opposition of the missions to some basic elements in African forms of religious expression, for example dancing, or use of local instruments, has also contributed to mass desertions from the established Churches.

Protestant Christianity has carried with it opposition to the basic elements of African religious expression. Its antipathy to emotionalism; its divorce from art, its lack of understanding of rituals through which the African apprehends religious truths ... are only a few of the things which have led to the arrest of the African religious genius. In consequence local Churches are introverted in their life, and deaf to the call of missionary encounter and outreach; hence too, the birth of pathological forms of African religions.<sup>19</sup>

So, whatever might be the message of salvation which the missionary brought, he was seen as a destroyer, making a caricature of the African culture and way of life. Opportunity to exercise their Christian service has been denied to Africans; or where such opportunity was given, it was subjected to missionary management and inspection. Under this strain and humiliation, Africans were sooner or later bound to react. In a short time they would assume leadership and found their own Churches, and make laws guiding their members. Small wonder, then, that when the door was thrown open, a multitude of Independent Churches took rise.

### **PUBLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURES IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES**

The appearance of the sacred Scriptures in the vernacular languages of Africa was an event of unprecedented importance. Hitherto, biblical translations had been only in languages foreign to Africa, and as far as interpretation of the texts was concerned, the missionaries, served by local interpreters and catechists, had the final word. 'But with the publication of African translations, a momentous change took place. It now became possible to differentiate between missions and Scriptures. Through these Scriptures, the Africans perceived, God was addressing them in the vernacular in which was enshrined the soul of their people. The vernacular Scriptures therefore provided an independent standard of reference that African Christians were quick to seize on.'<sup>20</sup>

The Scriptures were now widely read for various motives, and many African grievances began to find support in certain biblical themes. The Christian message as they now understood it was very different from what the missionaries had hitherto preached.

Dissatisfaction with the disembodied doctrine, prefabricated dogma, complex regulations, and harsh ecclesiastical discipline, all imported from Europe, became more serious among African Protestants than among Catholics, for the latter had less access to vernacular Scriptures. Gradually the Scriptures became for African societies an independent standard of reference to legitimate their grievances.<sup>21</sup>

Soon charismatic leaders and prophets would arise, all assuming the functions of their counterparts in the Bible, and thus 'biblical personalities became the archetypes of those who fulfill the aspirations of an oppressed people'.<sup>22</sup>

Arising from their aspirations, the various bodies or movements have selected biblical metaphors which would emphasize their vocation as small *remnant communities in a hostile world*: e.g., the Church of the Lost Christians in Zimbabwe; the Lost Israelites of Kenya; the African Remnant of Israel Church, Zimbabwe; the African Israel Church Nineveh in western Kenya; etc. Other leaders, because of political persecution or social discrimination, have founded *colonies* or '*New Jerusalems*' where their followers derive some sort of security. Enoch Mjima, founder of the 'Israelite Colony', near Queenstown, in South Africa, became at the same time the bishop, prophet, and *watchman* of those 'Israelites'. The belief was that 'Israelites' were Jehovah's elect, and that Jehovah would deliver his children from the bondage of their enemies represented by the Europeans.

### **A THEOLOGICAL FACTOR: THE QUESTION OF POLYGAMY**

Another important factor which has helped the rise and growth of the Independent Churches is a phenomenon which we could call 'theological'. Here the outstanding issue is that of polygamy in African society. This seems to have interested many authors as they evaluated the impact of the religious movements on some religious problems that are specifically African. The statement that 'Polygamy is allowed or not allowed in this or that Church', has not escaped some of these authors' descriptions.

Many Independent Church leaders and prophets, for example Simon Kimbangu and Mai Chaza, forbade polygamy, while others like Harris, Lekganyane, Josiah Oshintelu, John Mmuo-Nso of the Holy Chapel of Israel

Church, and Jahane Maranke of the Apostolic Church, Rhodesia, have encouraged the practice of polygamy in their Churches. While most other Independent Churches do not condemn monogamy, they are not defenders of the institution nor indifferent to its practice.

The 'polygamy question' has long remained one of the most serious problems which missionaries have had to confront in their work of evangelization in Africa. The Churches' refusal to baptize polygamists has often generated protests. Polygamists with their families could not be received into the Church, and were often not given Christian burial.

The brutality with which the missions denounced polygamy, in African society a high social order under which men could have a plurality of wives and thus earn a high social status, came as a profound shock to many Africans. Reaction to this inexplicable attack by the missions was inevitable: 'If the changes were pressed too fast, if the missionaries' denounced polygamy too fiercely, if the dances were stopped ... there might be a purely regressive and violent rebellion ... The African messianic movements testify to this danger.'<sup>23</sup>

### **THE ATTITUDE OF THE INDEPENDENT CHURCHES**

Most of the missionaries who were really impressed by the initial successes of the new prophets, especially in their attack on pagan worship, seem to have withdrawn their support for them where the prophets failed to condemn the practice of polygamy in their newly founded Churches, a practice which the missionaries equated to immorality.

The question thus arises: 'Are polygamists then condemned to everlasting punishment? Have they any place at all in the community of worship?' The problem gets further complicated as many good Christians at one time or another fall away from the Catholic and Protestant Churches on grounds of polygamy. There is no doubt that the real success of an African marriage, whether Christian or non-Christian, depends on the number of offspring that result from the marriage. Many African Catholics postpone the celebration of their marriage in the Church until they are sure they will not suffer setbacks, a practice popularly known as 'tested marriages'. Barrenness or sterility is regarded as a curse, and if it occurs in a marriage the 'procuration' of a second wife is the inevitable solution!

What then is to be done with the so-called 'fallen Christians'? The Independent Churches seem to have provided the solution by liberalizing the institution of marriage: one can take as many wives as one can maintain! A typical attitude of the Independent Churches is seen in the African Church of Israel, Zimbabwe, which in 1948 broke off from the Seventh Day Adventist Mission, with the expressed purpose: 'to help polygamists enter heaven'.<sup>24</sup>

## THE SACRED SCRIPTURES AND POLYGAMY

With the publication of the Bible in the vernacular languages, Africans were also to probe into the polygamy question. Judging from the Scriptures, they discovered no discrepancy between the biblical concept of religion and African ways of response to the Christian message which most of the missionaries had condemned. Many tribal customs and traditional ways of life seem to have wide support in the Scriptures, as well as African attitudes to such matters as land and property, laws and taboos, religious leadership, ritual, and symbolism. As to family structure, polygamy was widely practiced by the patriarchs and was nowhere condemned in the Old Testament. As it appeared to some of the African prophets who undertook this investigation, even promiscuity seemed to have been condoned.

King Solomon was known to have had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines! (1 Kings 11.3ff) As the story goes in 1 Kings 1ff, when David was old and advanced in years, although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. So the king's servants sought for him a very beautiful maiden, to be his nurse, to lie in his bosom, so that the lord king might be warm.

The slender biblical basis for monogamy was at once noted, and the reaction predictable. Isaiah Shembe declared that European monogamy was St. Paul's invention: 'It was Paul's legislation, but not God's. Had God not said: "*Zalani nande*" (be fruitful and multiply)?'<sup>25</sup> Elijah Masinde, founder of *Dini Ya Msambwa*, in western Kenya, after an exhaustive study of the Bible, came to the conclusion that the prohibition against polygamy was an arbitrary rule of the Church, un-supported by biblical testimony.<sup>26</sup> For *Watu Wa Mungu* (People of God), 'the Nzungu, missionaries, were not interpreting the Bible correctly ... they only adopted the system of monogamy to suit their own ends.'<sup>27</sup>

Prophet Jonas Iwuchukwu of the Sabbath mission in Nigeria did not think that the Bible was in any way against polygamy. He saw the white man's condemnation of polygamy as a result of selfishness and the inability to manage a large family. In the Ivory Coast, accused by the missionaries of altering the doctrine of Christ by permitting polygamy, Prophet Harris would say that 'the prophets can dispense, they cannot change'.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, he added, 'God did not intend to make the same law for black and white people. Blacks could take as many wives as they could look after!'<sup>29</sup>

To the Africans, therefore, it appeared that the Europeans based their hostility to polygamy not on the Bible, nor on reason, but on the belief that the institution implied sexual immorality, which in the African view is false. Thanks to translation into the vernacular languages, the Scriptures now provide

the African Christians of the Independent Churches with indispensable guidance at crucial periods.

Appeal to Holy Scripture has always been at the heart of reform as understood in the Christian tradition. The African Independent Churches have followed this traditional pattern, as Barrett observes:

In most cases of Christian separatism down the ages, the Bible has played a leading role, being wielded, fought over, argued about, appealed to, quoted and misquoted by an endless succession of protagonists both inside and outside the historical Churches. Throughout the history of the Church, too, all genuine movements of renewal have been begun and sustained by the rediscovery of the biblical witness. The Scriptures have played a vital role in effecting the radical transformation of nominal or stagnant Churches in past eras, and they have done so by thrusting up creative minorities who have formed renewal movements within those Churches. Often the reforming parties with the Scriptures behind them have won the day; often they have been forced to secede.<sup>30</sup>

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Taking all the factors together, we can see that strictly religious problems also have played a very significant role in the emergence of the Independent movements in Africa. The theological and hermeneutical problems raised by Africans, through their objections to certain religious principles, are still today points of religious reflection and investigation. The answers presented by the founders and leaders of the movements themselves demonstrate their own religious convictions, which cannot be overlooked.

Elsewhere, the struggle against oppression and for freedom from foreign domination has given certain of the movements, especially in the South African situation, something of a politico-religious outlook. Anything that threatened the life and survival of the community was also seen as a threat to its religious heritage. In such cases there is no absolute dichotomy between religious and political aspirations.

The factors responsible for the emergence of the Independent movements in Africa can thus be seen as two-fold: and can be described as 'politico-religious'.

## **INDEPENDENT MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THEIR TRENDS**

Having discussed the various factors which have contributed to the rise of independent religious movements in Africa, we shall consider in the following chapters some of the more influential movements and prophetic figures. Following our geographical division, we shall discuss the movements as they appear in Southern Africa, East, Central, and West Africa. We begin with South Africa, where we find three types of Churches – designated by the terms: ‘Ethiopianism’, ‘Zionism’, and ‘Messianism’.

## **‘ETHIOPIAN’ MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

### **ORIGIN OF ‘ETHIOPIANISM’**

The origin of ‘Ethiopian mythology’ can be traced back to history and the Bible. The successful military resistance of the Ethiopian Empire against the Italian colonial occupation in 1896 is said to have impressed Africans, and especially the blacks in South Africa. It brought a stirring of hope among Africans, who thought that perhaps, in a similar manner, the whites in South Africa would be faced with devastating defeat at the hands of those Africans whom they had for long oppressed.

The Ethiopian movement seeks to find the promise and actual beginnings of an African Church in the Scriptures, especially in Psalm 68.31 and in Acts 8.26-39. It finds further support in the Bible as it traces the origin of its divine election, which as legend claims sprang more than 2,500 years ago from the celebrated love affair between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The last emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, was said to have been the two hundred and fifty-first emperor of the Menelik line.<sup>1</sup>

The ‘Abyssinia ideology’ of the ‘Ethiopians’, shared also by the ‘Zionists’ is said to be in essence an attempt to give to the Independent Churches an ancient apostolic succession and a charter linking their Church with the Bible – which speaks of ‘Ethiopians’ – and with a Christian African kingship. The earliest independent Churches called ‘Ethiopian’ in South Africa are known as ‘Africa’ in Nigeria. The kingdom of Ethiopia with its ancient Christian Church has become a symbol for the wider Independent Christian Church which it is hoped will yet arise throughout the African continent.<sup>2</sup>

The origin of ‘Ethiopianism’ in South Africa is not of course unconnected with the socio-political situation in that country. We are told that the aftermath of the Boer War was characterized among the whites by insecurity and fear, and among the blacks by resentment, which was aggravated by what was known as ‘the Ethiopian threat’. ‘There was a tendency in Natal to see every educated African as a dangerous “Ethiopian” ready to drive the white man into the sea.’<sup>3</sup>

Before and after the First World War the African Church became the sounding-board for social and political aspirations expressed in an 'Ethiopian' myth. The noble name of 'Ethiopian' symbolized the whole of Africa, a free black Africa, liberated from colonial overlordship, and to be led by the Africans themselves.<sup>4</sup>

The extension of the colour bar even to the Christian Churches was a shock to the Africans; it added to the religious indifferentism among youth, and was to aggravate the aversion to 'white man's Christianity'. A Zulu politician is reported to have said in 1958: 'As from 1913 we knew one thing – there is no God with the white man.'<sup>5</sup> Another official added, 'Our greatest problem is this: never for one day to be treated as a human being.'<sup>6</sup>

Among people closely drawn together by common suffering and aspiration the result was the formation of autonomous independent movements. The 'Ethiopian movement' offers a challenge to enthusiastic Africans to react against that humiliation. The effort was to arouse the enthusiasm of Africans for the ideology of 'Africanization', *at least in religious affairs*, and was powerfully assisted by being a 'messianic' movement of pan-African character with politico-religious overtones. 'Ethiopianism' offered an outlet in which important theological ideas were to emerge.

### **'BLACK THEOLOGY' AND THE QUEST FOR LIBERATION**

Whatever may be the political overtones of the 'Ethiopian movement', we should not exaggerate the differences between the political and religious aspirations of a people. James Cone makes the connection:

A similar point is made in the Scriptures when divine revelation is connected with history, and salvation is defined in political terms. In the Old Testament salvation is grounded in history and is identical with God's righteousness in delivering the oppressed from political bondage. Salvation is a historical event of rescue. It is God delivering the people from their enemies and bestowing upon Israel new possibilities within the historical context of her existence. This means that man's spiritual aims are inseparably connected with the transformation of society.<sup>7</sup>

The theology of liberation, most advanced in Latin American countries and among the blacks in the U.S.A., has had a considerable influence on South African 'Black theology'. The theme of liberation has particular importance in theology today. In the context of the 'Third World', Black Theology examines and analyses the political, social, economic, cultural, racial, and religious background which has continued to stimulate the feelings, while at the same

time worsening the problems, of the oppressed people. In Africa in particular, the situation has been made worse by the domination and exploitation by Western powers at various levels. The Church of the West and its theology were – and to a certain extent, still are – tainted by this state of affairs. Hence the call for a theology of liberation from these evils, a theology which makes commitment the first act of theology, and engages in critical reflection on the reality of the situation.

Scriptural analysis of liberation, when compared with the concept of liberation as exposed by black liberation theologians, shows that liberation belongs to the essential characteristics of God. It is thus easy to see God's relevance in the problems of social, political, and economic liberation of Africa and elsewhere.

Among the elements which James Cone rightly considers as particularly relevant to the Black theology of liberation are the God of the Exodus liberating Israel, the suffering Christ who identifies himself with the oppressed, and the Holy Spirit who continues the work of liberation.

The Western critics of Black Theology have not offered any alternative theology which would respond to the urgent needs of Africans. Rather some have come to moralize on the traditional and spiritualistic aspects of liberation or salvation. Africans are reminded that the Christian love of forgiveness is better than 'tit for tat', than to destroy their enemy here and now by any means at their disposal. Non-violence is recommended, as supported by Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*:

If the demands of justice and equality are to be satisfied, vigorous efforts must be made, without violence to the rights of persons or to the natural characteristics of each country, to remove as quickly as possible the immense economic inequalities which now exist. In many cases, these are worsening and are connected with individual and group discrimination (No. 66).

It is precisely the removal of these evils 'as quickly as possible' that is the preoccupation of every oppressed African. Christian doctrine about love of one's enemies, about forgiving those who trespass against us, does not mean that the oppressed have to remain passive and not struggle against their enslavement. Love of the enemy, it is said, implies 'an active effort to help the enemy to relinquish his evil ways'. How is this 'ideal' state of affairs to be realized? This is the urgent problem to which all preachers of non-violence and all 'lovers' of Africa have been called to offer a solution.

One author gives some interesting advice:

If we are true followers of Christ we have to ask what means our Lord used to win back his oppressors – whether he raised military campaigns against those who tortured and enslaved him, or whether he tried by other means to attack the evil of oppression at its very roots, i.e. sin. Indeed, while this root remains, white oppression in its actual form might be abolished, but it is still liable to appear in other forms, from the whites again, or even from the blacks among and against themselves. Faith in Christ and his love help us to see that the white oppressor is also an oppressed creature, oppressed by the very sin of oppression, and as such he needs also a liberator. If this radical form of oppression is not resisted, it is idle to talk about liberation.

This is no doubt the type of action that the ‘lovers’ of Africa would like the oppressed to take in order to win ‘true’ liberation. For Western peace-makers, what is important is to save Africa from the attacks of communism, even if this noble exercise amounts to the destruction of the continent’s black population.

Whatever may be the defects of the Black Theology of liberation, it is not difficult to see that God always encounters man in a situation of historical liberation, and hence the invitation to participate actively, here and now, in the struggle for freedom. This liberation makes no distinction between ‘body’ and ‘soul’. It is one and total. It is the liberation of the blacks from white oppression in spite of the social and military supremacy of the oppressor.

In the quest for liberation and restoration of human dignity, in the midst of rapid social change, with its tremendous sociological, economic, psychological, and political problems, the hopes of a number of people are raised by a certain biblical vision of reality, and by the belief that such problems can be solved by supernatural means. These hopes include societal renewal, power, prosperity, peace, racial equality, and so on. Such hopes could equally lead to the formation of movements through which the hopes might be realized.

In *The Coming of the Third Church* W. Bühlmann exposes the issue at stake:

Such movements are reactions against a form of existence which has become burdensome to people aware of the advantages of civilization without actually possessing them, and are always accompanied by resentment against the white man, who has humiliated them, who dominates and despises them. The feeling of impatience drives people into the religious world and makes them

dream, usually under the figure of the Old Testament miracles and liberation stories, of a future Messiah, who will obtain for them all that they expect. A world lies open before them and they wait for salvation, as thirsty land waits for rain.<sup>8</sup>

In the face of insurmountable problems, the tendency therefore is to find answers which appear biblical, logical, and totally satisfying to the leader of a movement and his followers. The African's search is for black identity and power, and the Independent Church movement is a corporate attempt within the context of this search. The task of Black Theology, in the words of J. Cone, is 'to interpret the forces of black liberation as divine activity'.<sup>9</sup> The God of Black Theology is the same God of Israel who manifests himself through the liberation of the oppressed of the land. The South African Students' Organization commission on Black Theology (SASO), lashes the Christian Churches in South Africa for 'their over-emphasis on racial fraternization as a solution to the problems of this country, whereas they are fully aware that the basic problem is that of land distribution, economic deprivation, and consequently the disinheritance of the black people'.<sup>10</sup>

### **'BLACK' VERSUS 'WHITE' THEOLOGY**

It is wrong to accuse Black Theology of over-emphasizing the material and physical side of salvation. While accepting that salvation should be seen in its total context, namely as embracing freedom from sin, Black Theology does not conceive salvation in terms of abstract and spiritualistic reality.

Any theology of salvation whose point of departure is divorced from the 'here and now' – from this worldly reality – is bound to failure. It is becoming that the oppressed should taste happiness in this life before they are able to understand or imagine that type of life which awaits them in the 'beyond'. It is here that the heart of all theologies of salvation – 'black' and 'white' – lies, namely to make relevant the fact of salvation to believers. The apparent contradiction in the 'white' theology of salvation has been a source of confusion and distress to the black man.

At least to the oppressed blacks in Southern Africa, it does not seem that their 'Christian' oppressors are eager to 'go to heaven', otherwise these would have long ago repented of their hideous crimes. It does not appear to the black believers in South Africa that the type of heaven which the Dutch Reformed Church preaches has ever existed.

It is here that such groups of Christian Churches who support racism and oppression stand condemned, together with their allies. They have alienated the majority of Christian believers by promising equality in heaven while

supporting a highly stratified and economically exploitive life here on earth. In their midst, millions of the nation's citizens are denied the greater part of what by the very lowest standards are today called necessities of life. Millions are denied education, recreation, and the opportunity to better their lot and the lot of their children; over two-thirds of the nation are ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-nourished in a country where the white minority and their allies are living in affluence.

Christian humanitarian organizations in the West claim to be dispatching every year second-hand clothing and food worth millions of dollars to blacks in South Africa. Is that not a paradox, in a country where the advantaged have enough to spare? There is thus disequilibrium between economic development on the one hand and social justice on the other. Abundance and poverty have existed together in a country where all believers were thought to be brothers.

This is why Black Theology points to the 'here and now' elements as the point of departure for any meaningful theology of salvation. Black Theology does not think of the salvation of the 'soul', leaving the 'body' to perish. It is this 'dichotomization' of reality, this distorted interpretation of the Beatitudes and of the Christian precept of forgiveness, which has impoverished the 'white' theology of salvation. It is the enormous artificial gap created by 'white' theology between the 'here and now' and the 'beyond', that Black Theology seeks to bridge. It is false and deceptive to maintain that the oppressed will receive their reward in the 'next life', because that theory of life *beyond* which does not recognize the life *below* is a myth.

It is therefore unjustified to accuse Black Theology of being one-sided theology, especially of emphasizing physical liberation from evil imposed by the oppressors who once assumed the task of 'Christianizing' Africa and the 'pagan world'. Black Theology does not run any risk of 'reducing Christianity to a mere instrument for social and political advancement', because Christianity, unguided by such vital forces today, will surely degenerate into mere frivolous antics and spiritual caricature. Black Theology seeks to prove Karl Marx wrong by vigorously attempting to establish that religion should *not* be 'the opium of the people'.

Most of the recent literature on Ethiopianism has emphasized and exaggerated the political aspirations of the Ethiopian movement. In many cases Ethiopianism has been called an anti-Christian movement. But Michael Hollis's remark on this point is noteworthy:

It is a mistake to see the independent movements, especially the Ethiopian movement, as nationalistic enterprises with political aspirations. The Church cannot associate itself unconditionally

with the freedom movements and some of these movements have realized this very well. But Ethiopianism has been a reaction against what Willoughby calls negrophobia, and the inborn Western assumption of superiority...<sup>11</sup>

For many, the Church should not take part in any party politics, but it has a costly task, to put fearlessly in a prophetic way the principles of Scripture, right at the centre of the political arena. But the question Oosthuizen asks is an important one: 'If Christianity can utilize politics in its service, why can't the peoples of Africa utilize Christianity for their political ends?'<sup>12</sup> Alan Booth rightly accuses the Church of 'remoteness', which leads to 'estrangement of awakened Africans, who go in search of new possibilities in indigenous spiritual societies'.<sup>13</sup>

### **'ZIONIST' CHURCH MOVEMENTS**

As we have pointed out, the Church groups called 'Zionist' in South Africa are known as 'Aladura' in West Africa. They are 'Pentecostal' movements characterized by features which include baptism by immersion, faith-healing, charismatic manifestations, Sabbatarianism, African traditional elements in worship, seasonal festivals, prohibition of certain food, beverages, and Western medicine.

In the Zionist group there is also the unmistakable feature of a joint quest for a New Jerusalem on Mount Zion. We shall discuss the Zionist ideology in a different chapter. It may be necessary to point out some few fundamental differences between the 'Ethiopian' and 'Zionist' movements. According to Vittorio Lanternani:

The principal difference between the Zionist and Ethiopian Churches is in the fulfillment of their 'messianic' hopes: the Ethiopians promise a United Christian Africa, ruled by the Lion of Judah, King of Kings; whereas the Zionists look to the Judeo-Christian Palestine, to which Moses and John the Baptist lead them. The Ethiopian Churches are governed by men who fulfill the traditional role of king in the aristocratic hierarchy, whereas the Zionist, rejecting the concept of aristocracy, chose their religious heads from among preachers, healers, clairvoyants, or sworn enemies of withcraft.<sup>14</sup>

The 'Zionist' prophet has these charismata in a special degree, but many others may share in them, both through the prophet's ministry and by their own

experience of the Spirit. It is this emphasis which lies behind the concern for the second baptism of the Spirit and the value put on dreams, visions, the gift of tongues, and various signs of possession by the Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

Identical with the 'Ethiopians' in many respects, the 'Zionists' are less nationalistic. It is said that the Zionists of South Africa are despised by many young Africans, who describe them as 'useless elements of society', the reason being that they are not sufficiently militant, as the 'Ethiopians' are, in the struggle against the white man's oppression, domination, and conquest in southern African. The Ethiopians, for their part, have been criticized by the whites, who accuse them of being politically motivated.

In theological terms H. W. Turner summarizes the main trends, teachings, and belief of the 'Zionist/Aladura' Churches in his article, 'A Typology for African Religious Movements'.<sup>16</sup>

1. *Soteriological* : A rejection of both spirits and deities of the traditional pantheon and the medicine-man with his magical powers and techniques, means a return to the Christian God for salvation when in trouble, and for protection from the host of evil forces that surround man. The rituals, the fasting, the holy water, and all the other practices that may be associated with this deliverance are subordinate to this soteriological belief.
2. *Pneumatological*: It is the Holy Spirit who fills man with new power of prophecy, utterance, prayer, and healing. These charismata may be shared with the prophet who has them in a special degree, or members may share them through their own experience of the Spirit.
3. There are usually elaborate hierarchical features similar to the forms found in the 'traditional' Churches.
4. There may be a strong emphasis on communal life, the establishment of model villages or 'Holy Cities' (New Jerusalems), normally located at the prophet's home town.
5. '*Cultural syncretism*' in worship: This includes dancing, drumming and clapping, use of symbols, ritual avoidances, festivals and rites, some of which are reinterpreted or given new mandate through the Scriptures.
6. *Ethos*: The type of morality advocated is often legalistic and rigoristic, e.g. Sabbath-keeping, observance of hours of prayer, avoidance of alcohol and tobacco, practice of polygamy usually tolerated rather than encouraged. Some of these are derived from biblical literalism or traditional codes of morality.

## **'MESSIANIC' CHURCH MOVEMENTS**

We have seen the arguments concerning the adoption of the term ‘messianic’ to designate the third group of the Independent Churches in Africa (cf. Typology). A fundamental difference must be noted, however, between the concept of messianism in the African situation and its concept in biblical tradition. In the African context the Messiah is already in the midst of his people, leading them from their present state of slavery to freedom. The belief is that through the divine mission of the present messianic figure or his immediate successor, the enemies of Africa will be vanquished, and the new era which emerges will usher in a period of prosperity and tranquility. The fate of the long oppressed Africans will be radically transformed, as suffering and humiliation come to an end. It may therefore be wrong to describe these expectations as ‘eschatological’, that is, a projection to a remote future, to the end of time. The problems of the Africans need solutions here and now, and the present messianic figure is there to effect these changes.

The problem involved is not only a racial, cultural, or sociological one. It is above all a theological problem. Some features common to the Churches of the ‘Messianic’ group could be summarized thus:<sup>17</sup>

1. Those in which the prophet or a new ‘Moses’ becomes a Saviour, a ‘Black Messiah’.
2. Those in which an inspired prophet or leader promises liberation from suffering and slavery. Political freedom, material prosperity, and health become so important and central that salvation is expected from the prophet’s or leader’s activities.
3. Those in which the ideas of the coming bliss have been secularized, and a blazing hope of the imminent and complete transformation of all things fills the faithful. These movements also have their heralds, but salvation is not necessarily dependent on their activity.

Of the leaders who have been described as ‘messianic’, we shall consider here the figure of Isaiah Shembe. Other such influential leaders in South Africa include Cekwane, Khambule, Nzuza, and Lekganyane. Kimbanguism as a ‘messianic’ movement will be considered in a different chapter.

### **Isaiah Shembe – the Nazarite Prophet**

Shembe, the founder of Ama Nazaretha, is known to be the most influential Zulu prophet, a preacher, poet, and healer, and compares well with Prophet Harris of the Ivory Coast. Several visions which Shembe claimed to have had turned him into ‘another man’. He was compelled as a result to renounce his four wives, in order to dedicate himself totally to his new mission.

Described as a prophet well convinced in his vocation, Shembe soon became an influential charismatic leader, a *messianic figure*, to use the term which conveys the ideas of his followers concerning the ‘man of God’ in the midst of his oppressed people. He was described as the archetype of many biblical figures – *the Servant of the Lord*, wiping away the tears of his people, and in the real sense the *Moses of the Zulus*, rather than a mere national liberator.<sup>18</sup> He would share the burden of sadness and tears of his people, and sees himself as the ‘Servant of Affliction’. He laments over the fate of his people:

You lass of Nazaretha,  
cry like a flowing stream  
because of the shame which is yours  
in your own country.  
You lad of Nazaretha,  
cry like a rapid stream  
because of the shame which has come over you,  
you lad of Shaka. (Hymn 45)<sup>19</sup>

In other songs, hope and salvation are reaffirmed:

Today you are the laughing-stock of all the nations,  
So wake up Africa, seek thy saviour,  
Today our men and women are slaves. (Hymn 46)

We ourselves are saved; we all of Nazaretha.  
We shall drink at that rock of Sinai’s Mountains. (Hymn 83)

In these and other similar hymns the aspirations of the messenger of God, who had received a special mission to be accomplished among a despised and rejected people, can be summarized. That was Shembe, the Nazarite prophet, a consolator, a liberator, and a Messiah. For Shembe and his followers this salvation is already actualized here on this earth, at the centre of the Nazarite Church, Ekuphakameni, the Elated place. Here is the Nazarite Zion with its Paradise section. Like other Zions or New Jerusalems in Africa it is the scene of pilgrimages and great festivals.

Today the leader of Ama Nazaretha is Shembe’s third son, Johannes Galilee Shembe, who took over the management of the Church after the death of his father. But the young Shembe does not possess his father’s charismata. In an interview with James W. Fernandez, he declares, referring

to his father's healing powers: 'I do not have that power! I do not pretend to have that power.'<sup>20</sup>

Whatever may be the limitations of his charismatic ability, it is obvious that the young Shembe also enjoys much respect like his father. Those elements of *tremendum et fascinosum* which surround the African prophets are always there. Although not claiming to be a prophet type, he naturally 'serves a prophecy'.<sup>21</sup>

## **PROPHETIC AND MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS IN SOUTHERN AND EAST AFRICA**

The political and social climate in what up till the end of this study was still called Rhodesia, is little different from that of its neighbour, South Africa. Although the Africans in this landlocked Central African country may be divided among themselves about many things, one thing about which they all agree is that they do not want to be called Rhodesia. The name of Cecil Rhodes, the arch-imperialist, plastered across their land is resented as a daily insult and humiliation. To the Africans of all parties, therefore, their ancient land, with a history going back long before Rhodes's schemes, is known as Zimbabwe.

### **Movements in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia**

Right from the beginning of the white minority domination in this part of Africa, the missionary-imported religion has failed to meet the needs and longings of the oppressed Africans. There were protests made to the Church and to the British authorities against various atrocities and white-settler measures-plunder of African land, theft of cattle, burning of African villages, and other white misdeeds. But the indifference of both the government and the missionaries to injustice and oppression was to serve as a major factor in the development of the various African reactions into one with anti-white and revolutionary features. Matters of great moment affecting the lives of African between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers – and, for that matter, those in the remainder of Southern Africa – are now being weighed and evaluated.

Outnumbering the European settlers in Rhodesia by twenty-five to one, the Africans have seen their fate as even worse than that of blacks under apartheid in South Africa. To them, whatever government is imposed by Europeans without African consent constitutes dictatorship and treachery, and therefore to be brought down by all means. There is intense expectation of the 'Day of Yahweh', the arrival of a 'Messiah' who will liberate the Africans from this long and painful subjugation. But it did not seem that any immediate solution was in sight, for Africa's powerful enemies in Rhodesia were well armed and protected by those powers and their allies who handed power over to their brothers to rule and persecute the Africans. Although Britain acknowledged statutory responsibility over what was the colony of Southern Rhodesia, successive British governments did little, apart from

calculated noises about economic sanctions, to put down the illegal regime. How could people believe such hypocritical pronouncements when the self-sufficient minority government even gave economic aid to its poor friends?

In the face of such odds, what should the Africans do? Armed struggle has resulted in the hunting down of African women and children by Western recruited and supported mercenaries, and their radios happily report the deaths of thousands and thousands of innocent Africans, who are often buried in mass graves; while the injury of one or two white soldiers in possible armed clashes with angry Africans is regretted with deep feeling. The loud talk about their 'internal' and 'external' settlement has been tested, and proved to be one of the old and shameless tricks geared to the perpetuation of the white man's domination and supremacy in Africa.

How long will the struggle last? When will the oppressed attain the real freedom for which they have clamoured in vain for years? What are the signs of hope that one day the oppressor will change heart and 'let my people go'? In Zimbabwe this goal has at last been achieved, and elsewhere miracles are still possible. But Elechi Amadi was not joking when he warned against dangerous dreams:

In Africa the dream of the blacks is to assert their rights and put the whites in their place. Encouraged by the pious pronouncements of some humanitarian whites outside Africa, the blacks naively suppose that when they are sufficiently armed all they will have to do is to march on South Africa and liberate their brothers, with all the other white people of the world looking on. Well, we blacks are in for a rude shock. The other whites will not look on! They will not watch their brothers being routed. The herd instinct will certainly operate. Whites everywhere will gang up under one pretext or another and fight back. In America the whites have all but wiped out the redskins, and are currently engaged in a titanic struggle against the blacks whom they unwittingly brought into their midst. In Australia the aborigines are practically extinct. The yellow races are even now chanting war-songs and preparing for a global conflict with the other races, particularly the whites ...<sup>1</sup>

And there we are. The blacks in Zimbabwe are working out their own solution. There is nothing bad in turning to religion for inspiration. Religious and messianic movements represent this type of reaction. The most influential among the reactionary movements which have emerged is the so-called Kitawala, an Africanized form of the Watch Tower movement.

### **The Watch Tower Movement**

Said to have been founded in the United States of America in 1874 by Charles T. Russel, the movement appeared in Malawi in 1906, whence it spread to Rhodesia and to other parts of Africa. Under the influence of political tension in Rhodesia, the Watch Tower prophets preached the sweet message of the Day of Salvation, when the Europeans will be punished for their atrocities in Africa and consequently become the slaves of Africans!

Such aspirations were also reflected in the dreams of Enoch Mgijima of the Israelite Church. In one of his visions it was said that he saw a battle between two white governments; there was also a baboon which appeared, crushing and destroying these governments. The interpretation of this was that the white governments represented the Dutch and the English, and the baboon the Africans. This meant that the white people would be crushed by the natives.<sup>2</sup>

The Watch Tower movement also preached an apocalyptic doctrine of the approaching end of our epoch in the battle of Armageddon, to be fought between God and the devil. More interesting, perhaps for the Africans in Rhodesia, the Watch Tower prophets condemned both the state and organized religion as works of the devil, and predicted their downfall and common destruction. God's victory in the final struggle between good and evil would usher in an era of justice. To these elements were added an intensively nationalistic pan-African strain, legitimating resistance to European interlopers, and if that failed, offering hope of a coming Judgment Day, when they would pay for their crimes.<sup>3</sup>

### **John Masowe – the ‘Shona Secret Messiah’**

Masowe, a Shona from Rhodesia, preached his message of imminent judgment in South Africa also. In the characteristic fashion of the African ‘Messiah’, he ‘died and rose again from the dead’, after which he was imbued with new powers. After a short retirement period in the mountains he returned as a messenger of God, clothed in a white garment, and bearing a staff and a Bible. He became thus a new John the Baptist from the wilderness, with the message: ‘The Hour of Judgment has come.’ With his fanatical followers he anxiously awaited the fulfillment of his promises, which included the apocalyptic and imminent Day of Judgment, and even an assurance that his followers would not die. Because of his preachings he was expelled from South Africa; but he was to continue his preaching in Rhodesia.

Disappointed because followers were deserting him since his promises were not realized (most of his members died!), he invented the ‘theory’ of ‘Secret Messianism’. Masowe was thus able to modify his original statements and promises claiming that the dead did not actually die – they waited outside the gate of heaven till he, John Masowe, should come and bring them into the kingdom, their Promised Land.

Though his followers knew that the Messiah was in their midst, this Messiah remained unknown to many! ‘John is the “Secret Messiah”, of whom the outside world of “Philistines and Midianites” (Boers and Britons) remain ignorant.’<sup>4</sup>

### **The Messianic Church of Mai Chaza**

The founder of this Church, a married woman, Mai (Mother) Chaza, became ill in 1953 and later ‘died’. But she was afterwards ‘resurrected’ by God, who told her that her death was premature and therefore she ought to return to earth. Receiving her divinely-appointed duties after her sojourn in the mountains, she became a faith-healer, especially of barren women. The mountain was renamed Sinai ‘by the Spirit’, and it was there, as a new Moses, that Mai Chaza received her new power and revelation from Jehovah. She claimed to have become his envoy, as Moses had been God’s messenger to Israel, and even as Jesus had been sent by God into the world.<sup>5</sup>

On her return from ‘Mount Sinai’, Mai Chaza was able to heal the sick and had a strong conviction that she had been sent by Mwari (God) to preach and to heal. It is said that people went as far as from South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, and Malawi to ‘Guta ra Jehovah’ (the City of God), as her village was then called. This actually became a healing centre, where many people possessed by all kinds of spirits procured healing.

As her fame spread, Mai Chaza certainly earned many new titles, and was in fact held in high esteem by her followers as a messenger of God, a prophetess, sent to proclaim a new religion. ‘She rebuked strongly all heathen practices associated with ancestor veneration, and burned all medicines and medicine horns ... initiated a movement strongly orientated towards combating heathen practices, a movement which in this respect might be compared to Simon Kimbangu’s movement in the Lower Congo in its early stages, or to Alice Lenshina’s initial activities.’

Although only a woman, it is certain that Mai Chaza initiated a great ‘messianic movement’. But whatever extra influence she may have exerted on her people, her ability to heal, especially barren women – a charisma very much valued by Africans – must have added a lot to her fame.

### **African Independency in Kenya**

Among the East African countries, it is said that the greatest proliferation of the Independent movements has been in Kenya, where bodies of all kinds have emerged similar in form and character to those begun earlier elsewhere. The Independent Church movements in Tanzania and Uganda are in fact seen 'as part of the flowering of Kenyan independency'. The largest secessionist group from the Roman Catholic Church is said to be 'The Legion of Mary' Church. An enormous surge is also reported to have taken place after the Kenyan Independence in 1963.

Before independence, most of these movements were associated with political aspirations. Among the Lou tribe of western Kenya, it was said that independency arose as a reaction against political oppression and against the presence of missionaries. Against the missionaries – because of what has been described as their 'inimical opposition' to a handful of traditional institutions which did not conform to the white man's idea of morality – a movement called 'Mumboism' arose, which denounced the doctrines of the missions and predicted the expulsion of all white men. Although the 'Mumbo movement' was hostile to what it described as 'white man's religion', Christian influence was evident in its teachings.

In a similar movement, in 1947, a certain Elijah was said to have claimed that God promised him that a black Messiah would be sent if he, Elijah Masinde, would first kill all the Europeans!

Another group, called '*Watu Wa Mungu*' (People of God), described by Kenyatta, gave up property and believed that the Lord would provide them with all things necessary for their sustenance.<sup>6</sup> 'Spirit-possession' and healing activities were characteristics of this group.

### **The 'Malakites' –**

#### **'Anti-Medicine' Movement in Uganda**

This movement was founded by Malaki and Mugema, with the name 'The Society of One Almighty God'. Both men are said to have based their support for the medicine campaign on Deuteronomy 18.9-11 (where they translated the words 'charm, or medium, sorcerer, wizard, necromancer' as 'doctor'). Another formula was found in Jeremiah 46.11: 'In vain you have used many medicines, there is no healing for you,' 'No tests, other than subscription to the "non-medicine" formula, and acceptance that God is almighty, are demanded from the members'.

### **The Church of the Holy Spirit in Tanzania**

The Malakite Church is said to have had many adherents in Tanzania, where the Watch Tower movement has also exhibited its influence. Although these movements brought with them radical criticisms of the mission Churches and colonial activities, it is, however, said that independency has not been politically significant in Tanzania. Other than these, the Church of the Holy Spirit has been recognized as one of the few large groups within the East African Revival movement to form a separatist body.

### **Alice Lenshina and the 'Lumpa Church' in Zambia**

The influential 'Lumpa Church' in Zambia was founded by prophetess Alice Lenshina Mulenga, a peasant woman. The constant visions she had meant for her a confirmation of a prophetic call. With such a conviction, she set out on a mission of healing, proclaiming the observance of the Law of God as prescribed in the Decalogue. She composed hymns and baptized many, calling people to abandon and destroy their charms as a sign of repentance for salvation. 'Lumpa Church' is explained as meaning 'the Church which goes far', 'excels all' or 'hastens to salvation'. 'She does not reject witchcraft as nonsense, but claims to have power to neutralize it. Magic objects are voluntarily brought to her for destruction and people flock to her to confess their sins.'<sup>7</sup> Although only a woman, like Mai Chaza, it has been said that Lenshina exerted a lot of influence on her followers, who came also from Tanzania and Malawi to consult her. Her success in this field, where the missions often failed, was due to the eschatological message and the promise of redemption for those who surrendered their magic objects.

As far the Lumpa Church itself is concerned, it is said to be a multi-racial one, in contradistinction to most African Independent Churches. Later pilgrimages were undertaken to Lenshina's home village, which has become 'Mount Zion', the New Jerusalem.

### **Summary**

We have so far discussed the three principal Independent religious movements as they are mainly represented in southern and East Africa. It is not surprising that 'Ethiopianism', or the so-called 'Messianic Churches', should continue to have a great number of adherents, especially in Zimbabwe and South Africa where the political situation has continued to deteriorate, and the social and economic problems facing the Africans are ever on the increase. The new leader becomes a powerful man of the Spirit, the new prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18.15. The 'Messiah' may have the following functions:

To unite his people in a land of lost unity;  
To bring about a real change in the present situation and be prepared to  
suffer and die as Christ did;  
He is a new Moses, ‘bringing his people to their Canaan, in spite of the  
surrounding “Philistines and Midianites”’.

Like their prophet-counterparts, the Messiahs must also be healers, men of  
God. Their primary objective is to establish a theocracy, and ‘much of their  
force and appeal comes from the inspiration of the apocalyptic hope of a  
total reconstruction of society’.

## PROPHETIC MOVEMENTS IN THE CONGO

The prophetic movement which was inspired by Simon Kimbangu as a mass-movement toward Christianity and a religious revival, has become today one of the largest African Independent Churches – E.J.C.K. (*L'Église de Jésus Christ sur la terre par le prophète Simon Kimbangu*).

But the earliest messianic-prophetic movement south of the Sahara is said to have occurred in the seventeenth century, in the Lower Congo. Known as the 'Anthonian sect', it was founded and led by the self-proclaimed prophetess, Dona Beatrice, who claimed to incarnate St. Anthony. She was burnt alive in 1706 by King Pedro IV because of her revolutionary preachings, which included, among other things, the restoration of the ancient kingdom of the Kongo (then devastated by civil war), massive protest against Catholic religious practices, as well as a proclamation of a coming judgment upon her adversaries. Although the movement which Dona Beatrice inspired was to be suppressed by force after her death, the prophetess was venerated by her followers as a national heroine and martyr who fought for the restoration and unity of her country.<sup>1</sup> 'Anthonianism' thus long ago became the basis for an embryonic attempt, the first ever made south of the Sahara, to found a national Church independent of Rome.<sup>2</sup>

### **Simon Kimbangu – Prophet**

In 1921, a more positive Christian revival movement was to be born in the Lower Congo. The founder and leader of the movement was Kimbangu, born about 1890 in Nkamba, north of Thysville (today Mbanza-Ngungu), a village which has since then become the scene of massive popular prophetic and Church activities, and been renamed the 'New Jerusalem', the 'Holy City'.

Friday, 18 March 1921, was to be the most important day in the life of Kimbangu. It was the day when he had his inaugural vision. One account of his vocation has it that while still a youth, Kimbangu had felt the call, but sought to evade the summons with the explanation that he was not fit for the task. When, for instance, the 'stranger' in his dream attempted to give him a Bible, saying: 'This is a good book, you must study it and preach', Kimbangu replied, 'I cannot do that, I am no teacher or preacher.'<sup>3</sup> Like Jeremiah, therefore, Kimbangu seems to have been aware of the implications of that divine call. But with assurances and further experiences, it became

impossible for him to resist the divine voice. With a concrete order to go and heal a sick child in a village, Kimbangu eventually yielded to the call.

The results of that transformation of a village youth into a renowned prophet of God were to receive a nation-wide recognition on that day of March 1921. Rumours of the reported miracles done by the new prophet had meanwhile spread like wildfire, thus initiating a large movement of pilgrims to Nkamba – the scene of the fantastic stories told about Kimbangu. Hospitals and dispensaries were said to have been left empty as people sought help from the wonder-worker, now called *Ngunza* (prophet), messenger and Messiah. As far as his followers were concerned, nothing less than a new Pentecost had come. The Spirit had evidently descended on Simon Kimbangu, and had given him authority to heal and preach.<sup>4</sup>

### **Kimbangu the preacher**

The prophet of God did not confine himself to healing activities. He also preached the word of God. Like his counterparts elsewhere in Africa, he energetically opposed the cult of fetishes (*minkisi*), ordering the destruction of all fetishes. He preached faith in the only one true God, who is to be trusted and worshipped. Advocating the practice of monogamy, he condemned all acts of immorality and non-Christian dances which led to debauchery and lewdness. His message was as simple as that: ‘One should abolish and abjure all “*minkisi*”, practice monogamy, worship the one true God.’ His sermons had powerful and wonderful effects, and, motivated by a genuine zeal to preach the word of God, his campaign against fetishism was not a side-issue, but an all-important task of far-reaching repercussions. Walder informs us:

The words of Kimbangu had powerful and wonderful effect. They spread all over the country like a flood in spring-time and swept away the *minkisi* of the heathens. In some places, the young men went from house to house, collecting images in order to destroy them. All along the high-ways and by-ways were strewn the cast-off idols and bags used in witchcraft ... Aged traditional priests, who had hitherto been confirmed believers in the validity of their own doctrines, collected and destroyed the *minkisi* to which they had prayed. *Minkisi*-worship ceased as suddenly as though it had been dispelled by the wand of a magician. Even those who hesitated to take a decisive step, if any such existed, were carried away by the enthusiasm of the iconoclasts.<sup>5</sup>

**‘A saviour has risen among us ...’**

No doubt Kimbangu’s first campaigns had given the death-blow to old beliefs, and radical reforms had already been effected. But it was not only the rumoured miracles and the potent gospel which appealed to the imagination of the people and drew thousands to the village of Kimbangu, Nkamba-Yélusalémi, as it was from then known. Of radical importance was the emergence of a great prophet. He was a dominant figure, a far more significant figure than any ordinary village teacher; a prophet, a saviour, through whom God had visited his people!

The news that the despised blacks now had a prophet of their own swept over the land like a tidal wave, and their attitude towards Kimbangu was a ‘blend of religious awe and admiration’. They rejoiced to think that one of their members had become a prophet. Not only white people could be great and powerful, for a mighty one, a man worthy of note, could arise from the ranks of the Africans whom they scorned.<sup>6</sup>

For the Africans, Kimbangu was a saviour. They did not in any way reject Jesus Christ as the divine saviour of the human race; indeed, they recognized that Kimbangu had been sent by Christ himself. For them, the salvation which Christ won for the human race had now been made accessible to black Africans through the intercession of Simon Kimbangu. Moreover, not only had he preached the Christian religion to the blacks, as it was supposed to be practiced. He was also to alleviate their sufferings by delivering them from the domination of the whites as Moses did for the people of Israel when they were in the hands of Pharaoh.<sup>7</sup>

At this stage the incredible rumours which flew from mouth to mouth, the aura of sanctity which surrounded the prophet, the hopes and expectations of which he was symbol, inevitably came to the notice of the colonial administration. L. Morel, the administrative officer in Thysville, and the protestant missionary, Jennings, were to investigate the activities of the movement. In their eyes the movement seemed to be religious; but the fear that it could assume a political outlook was strong, as the activities of enthusiasts and the preachings of the emerging ‘lesser’ prophets, or ‘Ngunzists’, went to show.

Militant songs had continued to multiply, as well as ecstatic manifestations, and the activities of sycophants were getting out of control. Among Jennings’ reports: ‘I saw at Nkamba, Kimbangu and a school of prophets. Barriers were raised within which the sick folk were gathered’.<sup>8</sup> It

was estimated that as many as fifty prophets were at work, some of them preaching religious war; and at Ntomo, reports said, five prophetesses were reputed to be referring to the fire from heaven which would fall on the whites.<sup>9</sup>

### **The intervention of the colonial government**

Attempts made by the Belgian authorities to establish contacts with Kimbangu and the leaders of the movement did not prove successful. It was alleged that some agitators and revolutionary-minded followers urged the natives not to pay taxes, and organized propaganda for the establishment of a native Church. The situation was declared more serious as workmen on the plantations, employees on the railway, and others, were throwing up their work and pay to go to see the prophet and wonder-worker. A part of the preaching of the prophets was that the approach of the Lord was near and thus there was no need for planting gardens. The disfavour of the colonial administration had been aroused, and the consequent intervention to arrest Kimbangu sparked off further agitation and more aggressive anti-white manifestations. Some of the Ngunguzists' songs demonstrated their indignation against the colonial rule and its suppressive measures against the African nationalists. In the '*chefferies*' (chiefdoms) of Kimbanza and Biongo, people were reported singing. '*Maintenant le chef n'est plus rien, ni le blanc non plus. Nous sommes les maîtres ici*'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Kimbangu escapes arrest**

Kimbangu managed to escape arrest in the general confusion which occurred during the soldiers' intervention, and in the eyes of his followers a miracle had taken place. A luxuriant crop of legends began to spring up. Stories circulated that the administrators and all the soldiers had been incapacitated by the supernatural power of the prophet; that when Kimbangu fled, the soldiers were unable to lift a hand against him; and that even when his hut was surrounded by soldiers, Kimbangu was wafted up into the sky and set there singing!<sup>11</sup>

It was said that the prophet went into hiding for a period of about three months, but eventually decided to 'surrender himself voluntarily' to the colonial authorities, imitating the surrender of Jesus in the Garden of Olives and thus re-enacting the drama of Jesus' passion.

'In the dark, the village was rapidly encircled and the prophet was taken prisoner in the midst of his followers. The songs never ceased, but were continued throughout the night, and the following day still, all along the routes towards Thysville, they were to accompany the martyr.'<sup>12</sup> And having

been tried and accused among other things of having instigated sundry deeds of violence, sedition, and hostility toward the colonial government, which he was said to have described as '*I' ennemi abominable*', Kimbangu was condemned to death, which was later remitted to life imprisonment.<sup>13</sup>

### **THE RISE OF NGUNZISM**

The imprisonment of the prophet Kimbangu and the deportation of many of his followers, along with other suppressive measures taken by the colonial government, did not, however, entail the collapse of the movement. Such measures were rather to provoke massive resistance on the part of some of the more fanatical followers. The revolutionary activities of these emerging 'Zealots' were taking definite shape, and at the same time were developing along new lines. The new phase of this resistance movement was referred to as '*Ngunzism*', as distinguished from the more orthodox '*Kimbanguism*'.

It was through the activities of the 'Ngunzists', also called 'Ngunzismen', that the popular movement founded by Kimbangu continued to grow, while the search for a new Joshua, who would take over the work of Moses, or a new Saul, who would save the people of Israel from the menace of the Ammonites and Philistines, went on. There was a call for resistance amidst persecution, sustained by the vast literature dissemination by the Ngunzists. New prophets arose and divine calls began to multiply, as the new Congo Church preached hatred for the whites and took up the slogan of the 'Ethiopians': 'Africa for the Africans.' 'A racial consciousness and unity seemed to develop through the movement. The natives were made deeply conscious of the white man's domination. There was resentment in their hearts.'<sup>14</sup>

### **Ngunzists proclaim a 'holy war'**

Was the religious movement inspired by Simon Kimbangu to be sustained by force of arms, or were those expressions contained in the militant songs, called '*Chant du guerre au Blanc*' to be taken merely in a religious sense? They were no doubt meant for a religious war, as followers were called upon to prepare:

*Frères, préparez-vous, la guerre est proche;  
Le royaume du sang rouge est venu!  
Soldats, habillez-vous, et prenez les armes!*<sup>15</sup>

As the imminent return of the saviour Kimbangu, who would take sovereignty away from the whites, was being announced, one of the exhortations of a certain 'John the Baptist' was appealing enough:

Smear your houses with the blood of a lamb as at the time of the Exodus from Egyptian bondage. All those who fail to do this will perish in the imminent war. Only those who smeared their houses will be saved ... Rejoice when you pray, for God gives great power to triumph over all whites. The prisons will be shaken (as in an earth-quake) and our captives will be liberated ... Simon Kimbangu and all those who were arrested with him are already on their way back to your country to fulfill the task they have been given. Kinshasa is the place where the new kings, who will win the war, will unite.<sup>16</sup>

With the appearance of Kimbangu, 'the Kingdom of the whites will be overthrown and this will be preceded by signs of blood and rain ... This is the Holy War in which the whites will be judged because they have loved money and worldly fame instead of serving Christ.'<sup>17</sup>

### **Kimbangu, the expected messiah**

The exhortation of the Ngunzists, that Kimbangu would soon return after his arrest and imprisonment (miraculously or otherwise), was thus translated into an *apocalyptic expectation*. The return of the prophet was to bring about a total change of order and reversal of fortune-politically, socially, and economically. According to the Ngunzists, his return would be dramatic and catastrophic, and would also be marked by great events. In this atmosphere of intense expectation,

Kimbangu had become a kind of 'catalyst' for all the dissatisfactions and insecurity which had come through the social and colonial up-heavals in the Congo, changing the old order and partly destroying it. He was expected to bring salvation, liberation from sickness and witchcraft, but above all freedom from the yoke of colonial power. He would drive the whites into the sea – an ever-recurring motif of reaction in Africa against conquest and colonization.<sup>18</sup>

The messianic expectation receives its force and appeal from the inspiration of the apocalyptic hopes of a total reconstruction of society in which a total

change of fortune is envisaged. According to this expectation, the arrival of the Messiah will bring an end to the struggle with the 'pagan nations' and 'forces of darkness' (represented by the whites and the colonial administrators). The messianic era will usher in a period of victory in which the despised and humiliated Africans will conquer their enemies and take up the reins of government. The new order, the golden age of the 'new heaven on earth' will be preceded by a natural catastrophe in which the sky will crush the whites. The Africans will then live in eternal prosperity in a new paradise on earth! This was the sort of easy-going eschatological hope envisaged by the Ngunzists and many other 'prophetic schools' which had emerged, thus offering resistance in the face of colonial oppression and repression. As prophetic disturbances continued to mount it was estimated that, at that period, more than two-thirds of the population of the then Kongo were under the influence of the Ngunzist movement.

### **ANDRÉ MATSWA AND 'AMICALISM'**

So far, prophets and leaders had continued to multiply, but Ngunzism had not produced a very prominent leader to lead the people to victory in the struggle for freedom. It was at this material time that an influential figure, by the name of André Matswa, emerged. He had founded a movement known as 'Amicalism' in the then French Congo. This was a movement which in its beginnings was purely a political organization. Matswa was held by his followers as a Messiah who would bring about a change in both the religious and the political aspirations of the Africans. But as Matswa came into conflict with the colonial government, he was arrested, tried, and sentenced to imprisonment. His sentence was to renew the old wounds and thus sparked off further anti-white protests, as Matswa became a symbol of African emancipation and transformed in the mind of his followers into a saviour.

The political opposition to colonialism took a religious turn, as some leaders of the new movement began to disseminate certain literature called 'Lamentations' as a reaction to the events of 3 April 1930, the day on which Matswa was imprisoned.<sup>19</sup> A lot of myths began to grow up around the founder of 'Amicalism'. With Kimbangu, his return was expected. Both were expected to restore the old kingdom of the Kongo, thus transforming the fate of the Africans.

### **The Khaki Movement – 'Mission des Noirs'**

In September 1930 a more powerful movement, also inspired by Ngunzism, was founded by the one Pierre Mpadi in the then Belgian Congo. It was

known as 'Mission of the Blacks' or 'Mpadism' as well as '*Nzambi ya Kaki*', the 'Khaki Movement' (because of the colour of the uniform prescribed for its followers). The Khaki uniform introduced by Mpadia was said to represent the hope for victory. The red tie also worn together with the uniform was associated with the idea of 'vital force', in which connection blood is regarded as the sign of victory. Claiming to have been visited by God and given the power to work miracles, Mpadia became the second prophet '*de l' Eglise noire Congolaise*'.

Although Mpadia was arrested and imprisoned in 1949, his movement seems to have been one of the most influential during those turbulent days of religious and political agitation in the Congo. Mpadism was to bring about many radical innovations in the religious sphere, which included a complete rupture with the missions, and the introduction of some dubious features in religious worship.

### **Kimbanguism Today**

The movement founded by Simon Kimbangu was known to have taken a nationalistic and political outlook owing to persecution by the colonial government. The consequent emergence of Ngunzism was a reaction against such hostile attitudes. It was an organized force through which enthusiasts and patriots sought to defend their newly founded African way of worship as well as the national interest of the people of the Kongo.

Under the Ngunzists the unity and good organization of the movement were, however, not possible. These were to be achieved later through the efforts of the three sons of Kimbangu, and especially through the able leadership of Joseph Diangienda, who became the legal representative of the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the prophet Simon Kimbangu, as the movement came to be known from this period. The movement was thus purged of all Ngunzist and radical influences, and was accorded government recognition in 1959. It was disengaged from politics, having assumed its original religious character. Lastly, as the new Joshua who was to lead the people into the Promised Land has been found, it was reported that on 12 May 1963, during a feast in Thysville, a preacher addressed some words to Diangienda. The text was Joshua 1.1-9. In his sermon, the preacher recalled the sufferings of the people of Israel and the Exodus from Egypt. Such was the fate of the Congolese under the colonial regime after the death of the prophet. But God had raised among the Congolese one who was to lead them into the Promised Land.<sup>20</sup>

The Kimbanguist Church had adopted a Constitution which expressed its aims, statutes, and faith. A Catechism has been published which deals also

with the life of the prophet-founder, Kimbangu. The cornerstone on which the Church rests is the Law and the Prophets. Its message is what is revealed in the Bible, and it looks to the Holy Spirit to direct the Church in its teachings.<sup>21</sup> The Church's admission to the World Council of Churches and the recognition accorded to it in the International Ecumenical Dialogue with African religions have continued to increase the influence of the movement today. In September 1973, the Kimbanguist Church sent a delegation to the C.O.E. (*Conseil Oecuménique des Églises*), a conference held in Ibadan, Nigeria.<sup>22</sup>

In a wide range of Christian and social work this Church compares well with both the Catholic and other Protestant Churches in Zaïre. In the field of education, the Kimbanguist Church figures prominently today in Zaïre. Its evangelical message has continued to revolutionize the people's way of life. In organization and worship most of the earlier superfluties introduced during the Ngunzist revolution have been removed or purified, so that today the movement can truly be called a Church *Églises de Jésus Christ*.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

As we have seen, in the eyes of his followers, Kimbangu represents a 'charismatic' figure out of the Old Testament. In this respect he compares well with the West African prophet, William Harris, whom we shall study in the next chapter, as well as with other prominent prophets in Southern Africa. The product of the movement which he inspired is clear evidence of the prophet's religious intentions when in 1921 his movement arose as a dynamic African initiative in religion. Had the prophet really any political aspirations? Was he anti-white and nationalistic? Were the revolutionary activities of the Ngunzists to be deplored?

Whatever the case may be, it has been recognized that many African independent movements, at first strictly religious in character, were forced into anti-white opposition as the colonial governments attacked them as subversive political movements. Kimbanguism provides a good example of the complexity of the situation, as a contributor to the periodical *West African Religion* observed:

In very many ways the Kimbanguist movement was religious one forced into politics by the bungling suspicion of the Belgian colonial administration ... The attitude of the Belgians to Kimbangu is typical of the general misunderstanding of these movements ... The reason is simple: In those countries where the colonial government was brutal, authentic religious groups became

secretive, highly suspicious of the prying eye of a researcher ...  
Even in the period when they were considered as a politically  
subversive group, the evidence was scarce.<sup>23</sup>

## INDEPENDENT CHURCH MOVEMENTS IN WEST AFRICA

In the search for the factors responsible for the emergence of independent religious movements in Africa, emphasis has often been placed on socio-political issues. But it seems that in recent years this tendency is gradually being abandoned. Religious factors are being seen as the fundamental root causes of independency, and these movements are viewed as basically religious drives toward the attainment of a satisfying religion. The explanation of one of the leaders of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Nigeria seems to confirm this view:

We Africans feel insecure in many ways – health, success, money, etc. We have charms and witchcraft, and evil powers and influences. But the established Churches are institutions devoid of spiritual power to repel these evil powers. The Independent Churches did not come out of African culture but were formed to give spiritual power to individuals.<sup>1</sup>

Compared with other parts of Africa, it seems that in West Africa, and in Nigeria in particular, the Independent Church movements have taken a purely religious character. No strong influence of political pressure was recorded during the years of colonial rule. The explanation, therefore, that the phenomenon is primarily spiritual and religious, a striving toward cultural integrity and spiritual autonomy, has a firm foundation. While not denying the presence of some elements of nationalism, as often expressed in these Churches, the religious factors stand out as the primary motive. At least we are sure of this in the Nigerian situation.

Called by many different names in Nigeria – ‘mushroom’, ‘hand-clapping’, ‘band-beating’, or ‘vision-seeing’ Churches – any attempt at reaching the approximate number of the Churches or their adherents is impossible. There is, in fact, practically no little village in Southern Nigeria where one type of these Churches or another does not exist!

In Eastern Nigeria alone it is estimated that there were more than 1,200 prophets of all categories in 1974. The Nigerian Handbook of 1973 put the number of the Cherubim and Seraphim group alone at over 200 ‘Orders’ and 2,000 ‘Congregations’. But the above figures were taken many years ago!

Following our typology for the religious movements in Africa, it has been pointed out that, in West Africa, the term ‘Aladura’ corresponds to the South

African ‘Zionist’ type. The South African ‘Ethiopian’ type is also equivalent in intent to the Nigerian designation, ‘Africa’.

Ethiopia shall soon stretch her hands out to God ... It has pleased the Almighty Jehovah-God as of old to arouse spiritual consciousness in the hearts of his people here in Nigeria: in that Ethiopia or Africa shall raise up her own hands unto the Great Jehovah-God under the spiritual guide and lead of her own indigenous sons.<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere in West Africa, the ‘Zionist/Aladura’ Churches are referred to as ‘Spiritual Churches’ or simply ‘Aladura’ (in Yoruba the principal language of Western Nigeria, ‘Aladura’ means ‘One who prays’).<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, we shall discuss the principal Church movement in Nigeria, namely the Church of the Lord; the prophetic Church of the ‘Holy Chapel of Israel’, in Eastern Nigeria; and the figure of prophet Harris, the itinerant prophet from Liberia. Faith-healing, charismatic manifestations, leadership, the Zion-Jerusalem theme, and ‘false’ prophets, will be discussed under characteristic features of the Independent Churches, in Chapter 6.

### **THE ALADURA CHURCH-MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA**

The ‘Aladura’ is the largest Independent prophetic-religious movement in Nigeria. The movement emerged as a result of schism from the Anglican Church in 1918, following the dissatisfaction of its African members with the Church’s failure to help them. The emerging Church was later influenced by literature emanating from the Pentecostal Church known as Faith Tabernacle in Philadelphia, U.S.A.

The name Faith Tabernacle was equally adopted by these Nigerian groups, which were still without any dominant charismatic leader or prophet until 1925, when the emergence of Moses Tunolase and Christiana Abiodun gave rise to the group ‘Cherubim and Seraphim’, following a similar process of detachment from the Anglican Church. The result of a disagreement between another emerging charismatic figure and the leaders gave rise to a fourth group, with the name: ‘The Church of the Lord (Aladura).’ Josiah Oshintelu was the man who inspired the movement which gave birth to this large and influential Church. The Aladura movement thus comprises four main ‘groups’, plus splinter groups which have assumed new names for self-identity, but their dress, liturgy, and Church polity easily identify their origin.

#### **The Church of the Lord (Aladura)**

While most of the Independent Churches in Africa emphasize their 'Africanness', and seem to limit these movements to Africa and to the Africans, the Church of the Lord is said to transcend all ethnic boundaries. It is not the Church only of the poor, the afflicted, or 'unintelligent'; it embraces all social strata, and is drawn from all quarters and grades of people – politicians; professional men, and people of high social class have also been members. Most important is the Church's conviction that it has a mission to the whole African community and beyond. It spreads all over most of the West African countries – across Ghana, Liberia, Togo, Gambia, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone.

In 1961, after his studies in England, the successor of Oshintelu, Adejobi, gathered together West Africans and others in England to establish the first branch of the Church outside Africa, thus fulfilling the vision of Oshintelu over thirty years earlier, that the Church would 'reach to Europe and America'.<sup>4</sup> Even though catering primarily for West Africans in England, its ministry in the British isles has already extended to West Indians and to white citizens.<sup>5</sup> 'It would therefore be foolish', writes Turner, 'to dismiss this sense of universality on the part of such a very African Church, for in this conviction it reveals that it is not only African, but also "Church" in one very important sense, that of Catholicity.'<sup>6</sup> In spite of this conviction of a universal mission, the usual characteristics of Independent African Churches are not absent in the Church of the Lord. These include, 'spiritual vagrancy' and fluidity of membership, love of the Church for its economic support, and for the particular benefits it offers, especially healing and revelation.

## **ORGANIZATION**

Among the thousands of African Independent Churches, the Church of the Lord is one of the few with a good system of organization, theology, and confession of faith. Its Constitution makes the Christian basis of the movement explicit. Among its publications and documents are: *The Book of Rituals and The Catechism of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) throughout the world*. The Catechism, which contains fifty-one questions and answers, treats, among other things, the Trinity, Sin, Salvation, Eschatology, and the Sacraments.

A hierarchically organized Church, at its head is the Primate or Apostle, followed by ministers, the 'Army of Jesus', the Levites, or prophet-assistants and other ranks. The minister's duties range through preaching, healing of the sick, special 'consultations' and presiding over worship. Power is conferred through anointing and the handing over of a cross, which represents the 'key that carries the power about'. By anointing, the minister is 'separated for the Lord', to be the overlord over dark powers, Satan, the world, witches, wizards, and all spirits of disease and sickness to subdue and cast them out.<sup>7</sup>

## **SACRAMENTALS**

Sacred objects used in worship include the 'iron rod' for ministers, regarded by many as a symbol of the special powers of the prophet, or his 'magic wand', the Holy Rosary, both Catholic and Muslim types, crosses, and 'holy rings'. Candles are burnt lavishly at prayers, and in extreme cases this has developed into an elaborate private 'candle cult', associated with a hierarchy of angels, and often kept continually burning.

*Water:* As in all Independent African Churches, water is an indispensable sacramental in the Church of the Lord. It is used in ritual services, both within and outside the Church. As a new Moses, the minister or prophet consecrates and sprinkles holy water on the new people of God during services as a visible sign of sanctification. But its healing power is undeniable. Consecrated water is believed to be charged with magical powers, and is poured on charms or bad medicines to neutralize their effects. It is sprinkled around houses to protect them from evil powers, given as a drink for healing purposes, in exorcizing, and in baptism. It is one of the primary duties of the minister regularly to bless water, for storage in case of emergency. In thousands of containers, big and small, members bring water for blessing, and carry them back home after services. (See P. 62).

*Incense:* Incense (both 'thurible' and 'stick' types) is used in services. Its dense cloud of sweet-smelling smoke is intended to chase away evil spirits from every nook and corner. It creates an air of mystery, conducive to God's presence and the presence of the angels.

## **PROHIBITIONS**

Dealings with any kind of 'ju-ju' or pagan religion, and belonging to secret societies, are seriously forbidden. Offenders, if discovered, are heavily punished. Other prohibitions shared, not only with African religions and other Independent Churches, but also with Islam and biblical religions, concern the wearing of shoes in the 'house of prayer', shaving of the beard; rules concerning uncleanness and corpses (which may not be taken into the Church). Dog's flesh, rodents, snakes, and pork, together with blood or strangled animals, are prohibited for food.

## **SOCIAL AND MORAL EVILS ATTACKED AND CONDEMNED**

Widespread corruption and all kinds of dishonesty, touching people in all walks of life including government ministers in particular, are vehemently condemned.

Oppression of the poor and injustices in court and society are condemned in no less strong terms, with innumerable woes poured on the culprits. Official corruption, growing wings and feathers in almost every department of life, seems to cause the greatest anxiety, and a minister would not fail to exhort mankind: ‘... let us do battle strongly with faith and prayers to stamp out corruption by honest living.’<sup>8</sup>

Charges against corruption, injustice, and dishonesty are not limited to government officials. Heads of the ‘established Churches’ (Catholic and Protestant), mosques, and Independent Churches stand also in the list. They are exhorted to live up to the expectation worthy of their vocation by leading a decent and exemplary life. In the Church of the Lord, corruption may creep in during ‘inquiries’ or ‘consultations’ of ministers. Such leaders who succumb to ‘malpractices’, either by charging exorbitant fees or by giving out ‘false prophecies’ or mere ‘favourable’ prophecies are often reckoned among the *false prophets*, imposters, or even heathens. All illicit indulgence in sex and immodesty in dress is also strongly condemned.

## **PROPHET AND POLITICS**

There is no evidence that the Independent Churches in West Africa, including of course the Church of the Lord, arose as a result of political agitation. There is rather a tendency toward a total disengagement of the Church from politics. In the Church of the Lord, therefore, active participation in politics is not allowed, since, according to the leaders, political life seems incompatible with the ‘way of the Lord’.

Members would regard themselves as free from political passions, and busy about more important things: nevertheless many of them would vote in elections. At the same time it is common to reject the ‘world’, as being under imminent judgment, and to view the Church as the Ark of God into which the ‘children of salvation are called’.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of engaging in politics, the Church of the Lord exhorts political leaders to exercise their good offices ‘in the way of the Lord’. Its interest includes some concern for good government. The rulers of this world should realize the responsibilities with which they have been entrusted and should endeavour not to incur God’s judgment by irresponsible government.

Revealed messages are regularly sent to men in all walks of life, especially to those occupying political and official positions, kings, national rulers, chiefs and Obas, government heads and leaders, including those of the

other independent countries of West Africa, civil servants, editors of newspapers, and different grades of traders and citizens, all receive equal attention. The choice of these groups is not a random one. The existence of a 'Union of West African States' under a spiritual organization of this type would supply much-needed inspiration and guidance, as political independency without a spiritual national Church is a farce.<sup>10</sup> As Turner comments: "There is nothing "sectist" about this, and none of the Older Churches with experience of establishment could have spoken more positively."<sup>11</sup>

### **JOHN MMUO-NSO, PROPHET OF THE 'HOLY CHAPEL OF ISRAEL CHURCH' ORLU, EASTERN NIGERIA**

The prophetic movement inspired by John Agbagboro (uncle of the present writer), who after his claimed prophetic call attached 'Mmuo-Nso' (Holy Spirit) to his own Christian name, has over a long period given rise to hundreds of splinter Churches all over the Orlu provincial area of Eastern Nigeria. Although not as large as the Church of the Lord (Aladura), it has many things in common with the Zionist groups in South Africa, especially in organization, worship, and healing technique.

#### **PROPHETIC CALL**

A former local barber, and fairly literate, John claimed to have received his divine call while at work. The voice which turned him into another man, communicated among other things: 'Mmuo-Nso, you have been chosen among your people and constituted a prophet of Jehovah. Go, and preach the gospel of salvation to sinners.' Hearing this voice, John related, he was thrown flat on the ground, unconscious, and was later carried back home by young men. When he recovered from the spiritual experience, he felt charged with the Holy Spirit and was in fact ready to burst! Armed with a bell and a Bible, he set out for the village square, and later to the market place, proclaiming with all his force what he called 'the message of liberation from sin'. One of the most important commands which he said he had received during that mysterious encounter with the 'divine' was to put a stop to all pagan sacrifices, to destroy all '*agwu-ishi*' (fetishes), and to proclaim the worship of the one only true God.

In ecstatic frenzy he set out, burning all idols and charms, setting fire to all pagan shrines around, singing and dancing: '*John abiala! John abiala! Ichupu ekwensu; Muo-Nso abiala, izoputa ndi nke ya.*' ('John has come! John has come! To drive away the devils; the Holy Spirit has come to redeem his own.') He roasted yams in the blazing fire, calling people to eat with him, for

the power of the evil one present in those fetish objects had been broken and brought under control. One of his remarkable successes, he claimed, was the destruction of the dangerous medicine (*'Nsi'*), that is, the famous 'African poison', which people had hidden in their houses as offensive medicine for harming others. These evil 'medicines' he smelled out, and took them in his hand as a demonstration of their powerlessness. One more powerful than these was in the midst of the people.

As John's fame spread, many enthusiasts found the new movement a safety-valve for attacking former enemies, destroying their shrines, and cutting down trees dedicated to the evil spirits. The new prophet was declared insane by the local chief, who ordered his immediate arrest, and so John was in chains for days. At first he was calm, but later started to protest: 'I have no demon. I have been sent by Jehovah to break the power of the evil one.' Was it then not an irony of faith that the devil through the instrumentality of the local chief was putting the 'Holy one of God' under subjection? Frightened by the oracles which John pronounced, the chief ordered his release, and immediately he left for the market place and other public squares, demonstrating the credibility of his new vocation by acts of healing, ecstatic prophecy, and the preaching of the gospel.

## **ORGANIZATION**

In doctrine, polity, worship, and ethos, the Holy Chapel of Israel Church does not differ much from the Aladura groups or the Zionists in South Africa, as we have already pointed out.

## **HEALING**

This is the primary activity of the prophet. His first converts were those he cured, but today people from all walks of life are also members. Most are there, of course, for the usual motives; a search for security from evil forces. Although John promised to open the wombs of barren women, no such 'miracle' has so far been recorded. (His method of healing and the accompanying phenomena will be described in Chapter 9.)

## **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

Bible study is given strict attention in the Holy Chapel of Israel Church. There is a 'school' established for the aspiring prophets. Here, even the most illiterate members learn in a short time to read and 'interpret' the Bible. Very promising 'disciples' are later commissioned, so that they can open more branches in the little villages.

*Prayer Meetings* are regular. The day begins with morning prayers, normally at 5 a.m. The citation, in red capital letters, at the front part of the Church seems to emphasize the importance of prayer in the Church: *Aga akpo ulom ulo ekpere*, Matt. 21.13; Mark 11.17; Luke 19.46 ('My house shall be called the house of prayer').

At prayer meetings, one is free to pray according to the promptings of the Spirit. Sometimes the praying tends to be deafening and confused. A sample of such prayers looks like this:

Why have you, O Jehovah, left me childless, to be an object of ridicule for my enemies. Why have you closed my womb? Save me, O Jehovah, from this shame, if you have ears to hear ... I am needy and poor, and for a long time I have suffered from this malady. Why should it happen to me? What have I done to merit all the suffering? Please restore my health, O Jesus, son of God!

Sometimes either Jehovah or his Son is blamed for refusal to answer petitions. In the tense and noisy atmosphere one can hear the murmurings which begin as silent prayers, and reach the highest pitch in loud and angry shoutings.

*Faith* is an indispensable gift in the Holy Chapel of Israel Church. People who fail to receive what they ask for in prayers are blamed for their lack of faith; and often patients are turned back, after the prophet or 'seers' have discovered their lack of faith. Musical processions in white robes and with large crosses are regular features, and one of their pertinent songs emphasizes the importance of faith in Christian life, as members are exhorted to remain strong in the faith in order to gain eternal life:

*NNN ... Jisie ike n'okwukwe!  
Jisie ike n'okwukwe!  
Anyi g'enwe añuri  
mgbe uwa nkea g'agwu,  
Anyi g'enwe añuri n'enigwe!*

*NNN ... Persevere in the faith!  
Persevere in the faith!  
We shall rejoice at the  
end of the world,  
we shall rejoice in heaven!*

Another song which refers to the 'eschatological movement to Zion' is reproduced in Chapter 8.

## **CHARISMATIC MANIFESTATIONS**

Worship, as in other Independent Churches, is characterized by emotionalism and ecstatic manifestations. Drums and wild dancing help to stir up the spirit. Dancing, accompanied by singing and clapping of hands, ringing of bells, beating of drums, is an attractive moment in worship, and often draws large crowds of people when outdoor functions and festivals are held. Some of the great festivals include 'Harvest and Thanksgiving' (the New Year Festival), and the Church's annual feast, during which many 'branches' all over the country, including Port Harcourt, are invited to the moving ceremonies and music parades.

## **'SEERS'**

Many members claim to possess the peculiar phenomenon of 'second sight'. This is regarded as a proof of the depth of the faith of new converts. Some have complained about their inability to 'see' anything in spite of their ardent zeal to follow Christ and their contribution to the Church. The prophet normally dismisses such complaints as a sign of 'spiritual uncleanness'. The only remedy for such members is purity of life. Constant prayer and fasting are recommended if one hopes to reach this high spiritual standard.

Apart from the type of sporadic 'seeing-activities' which may occur at intervals during services, a special group of 'seers', mainly women, is of an immense importance to the Church. They assist the prophet, particularly in healing activities. They are responsible for determining, through their spiritual insight, whether a disease is curable or not. When a patient in grave condition is brought, the 'seers' go immediately to work. They shut their eyes and 'read' the patient's fate. In a moment, a member of the group may shout: 'Oh, he can't survive; there is no remedy.' Another woman may start weeping 'Oh, Jehovah, why have you decided to take away his life? He is still in his youth, look at the number of children he is leaving behind!' Another will confirm the death of the patient: 'Oh, I have seen his coffin and people laying him down into the grave. There is a black cloth before him.' While others may nod their heads in agreement, some may continue offering reasons for the patient's misfortune. He had been a sinner all his life, a 'poisoner' of his fellow human beings, in fact a murderer. In such cases the patient's death could be a welcome event!

Notorious sinners or those still hiding 'bad medicine' or protective charms may not enter the Church. On entering the Church, such a fellow may cause a commotion in the assembly. He cannot escape the 'hidden eyes' of the

great ‘seers’ there. A member may begin panting, indicating that an evil spirit has entered the Church to pollute the atmosphere of tranquility. In such cases, services are stopped, and all the singing and enjoyment. The victim must be detected immediately if he does not come forward himself in an open confession. A causal denial of the truth may result in the excommunication of the member.

What do the ‘seers’ see? Theirs is the work of the Spirit, who reveals the innermost parts of man for good and just purposes. Therefore the exercise of this gift may not be abused. The heart of man can be read and nobody can hide his innermost feelings from the prophet, who claims to know even what his critics say about him in their homes!

The prophet claims to predict future events, all of which must come to pass. He predicted the Nigerian civil war two years before it began. He was told by the Spirit that everywhere would be disturbed in Biafra; that there would be a lot of wailing and shedding of blood, but that Orlu, his home town, would be saved from destruction. That was of course true, since the war actually ended there. But to the disillusionment of some of his followers, some other predictions did not come true. For example, he predicted victory for Biafra and published a newspaper article in which he declared: ‘If Biafra lost the war, I would give up my “iron rod”!’ He promised the return of many soldiers who died during the war, and encouraged their relatives to persevere in prayer. Those who had fallen did not of course return. But the prophet’s encouragement to the wailing mothers did serve its purpose.

The Holy Chapel of Israel Church has continued to wax in strength and membership as the prophet raises more buildings for the sick. His particular interest in the study of the Bible has won him a lot of fame and admiration from those who go to dispute with him John Mmuo-Nso is a good preacher and above all a man of prayer. He has equally the imposing figure of an African prophet.

### **WILLIAM WADDY HARRIS – THE WEST AFRICAN PROPHET-REFORMER**

Described as one of the most influential African prophets, Harris no doubt inspired one of the greatest religious movements in West Africa. His movement is comparable to those of Kimbangu in Zaïre and of Isaiah Shembe in South Africa, or of Josiah Oshintelu in Nigeria. His imposing personality is vividly described by his admirers: ‘His long white robe, his white turban and white beard, identified him as a prophetic figure, an imposing figure out of the Old Testament; the black bands crossed over his chest and the tall cross of cane, which he carried in his hand, suggested that he was a Christian’.<sup>12</sup>

The events which led to his imprisonment (like those in the then Congo, Rhodesia, or South Africa) might seem to identify him as a political agitator in the eyes of his critics. But as these were later to admit, Harris's mission was rather prophetic and religious – as proved by his preachings and the religious movement which he inspired.

Although there exists today '*L' Eglise Harriste*', Harris did not himself found any Church, nor did he attach himself to any denomination. Today Prophet Ahui Jonas is the self-styled 'Pope' of an Independent 'Harrist Church', which now has numerous congregations in the southern part of the Ivory Coast.<sup>13</sup> But Harris in his preachings recommended his converts to join *any* Christian Church. He was described as a friend of the missionaries, and he won great admiration and awe from both blacks and whites.

Assessing the figure of William Harris in his little book, *Ethiopia Unbound*, Casely Hayford had this to say about the prophet:<sup>14</sup>

He is a dynamic force of a rare order. He will move this age in a way few have done ... You come to him with a heart full of bitterness, and when he has finished with you all the bitterness is gone out of your soul ... It is a greater miracle to drive bitterness out of one's soul than to calm physical agony. It is a miracle of miracles to turn God-ward the heart's aspirations.

## **HARRIS'S PROPHETIC CALL**

It was in the dark hours of his life in prison that Harris experienced his supernatural call to be a messenger of God. In the vision, in which God sent the Archangel Gabriel to commission him as a prophet, he heard a voice which commanded him to 'go' and 'preach'. For Harris this 'encounter' was like a new Pentecost, as he felt the Spirit descend on him and he was able to speak in tongues. He felt that God had called him to one of the highest missions a man might be given. And emerging from the prison, Harris became a different man, purged of all bitterness against his enemies; he took no interest in politics or the plums of government favour.<sup>15</sup> He was no nationalist or political Messiah, and to the surprise and disillusionment of his Ivory Coast converts, he organized no 'anti-white' campaign, nor did he preach the Black Christ or the everlasting and prosperous reign of the black man.

## **'A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS'**

When Harris was released from prison, he went about preaching: 'Prepare ye, Jesus is at hand, Repent ye... I say to all men, black and white, repent and

believe in Jesus Christ.’ A prophet of the new dispensation of Christ, and one of the twelve prophets commissioned by God to work in the modern world, Harris, having West Africa as his charge, had a severe message for his hearers, namely faith in one God, surrender and destruction of fetishes. The practice of witchcraft and magic was predominant in the traditional religion, and, in a word, it was ‘fetishism’ which the prophet set out to eradicate among his people. He seemed simply to be possessed by a horror of fetishism. Benoit writes about him:

But he never doubts it, above all he never derogates it. Neither money, nor threats, nor weariness deprive him of the pride he has in carrying through the world the message of the severe and just God, whom he announces. ‘Burn your fetish and idols, or fire from heaven will be upon you.’<sup>16</sup>

That was the voice of the ‘man of God’ calling people to repentance. ‘Repent, destroy your fetishes, worship the only true God and obey his commandments’, was the core of his message. He was to convince the people of the powerlessness of the spirits, which they had tried to pacify with endless libations, and exhorted them to abandon the pantheon of spirits and powers associated with the devil. With authority, he had to challenge these evil powers and spirits and those who practiced sorcery. It was reported: ‘The wizards are seized with convulsions, they try to flee, but cannot, they roll on the ground screaming.’<sup>17</sup> Having demonstrated his strength against these powers of darkness, Harris was then in a position to bring about the conversion of his people. After a good manifestation of repentance, he heard their confessions of sins and bestowed a baptism which was a remission of sin.

### **HARRIS, THE ITINERANT PROPHET**

From 1912, the year in which he began his prophetic career, until his death in 1929, Harris continually traveled among the coastal people, persuading them to abandon all false worship and to accept the only one true God. With his little group he made missionary journeys to the Ivory Coast, Ghana (the then Gold Coast), and Sierra Leone, appointing disciples on his itinerary. The ‘Harrist Church’, which took rise in the Ivory Coast, was a sure sign of the impact which his prophetic message made in that country between 1913 and 1915. Traveling all the time, bare-foot, with a few personal belongings, including his Bible and bamboo cross, a bowl of water for baptism and his music calabash, Harris was a true missionary-prophet and a baptizer.

But he was only a precursor, putting God's seal on those who repented. Asked if he was the great promised Spirit, he replied, 'No. I am a man coming in the name of God, and I am baptizing you in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, and you will be a people of God.'<sup>18</sup>

### **HARRIS, A PROTOTYPE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS**

Questioned, before his expulsion from the Ivory Coast, concerning the authority of his mission, Harris did not hesitate to reiterate his prophetic task: 'I am a prophet like *Elijah*, to destroy fetishes.'<sup>19</sup> Abused, mocked at, branded a dreamer, a fanatic, a madman, and 'false prophet', Harris did not fail to reassert authenticity of his mission by reading from his bible-Acts 5.39: 'If this work be of men, it will come to naught, but if it be of God you cannot overthrow it.'<sup>20</sup>

Like that of the prophets of the Old Testament and most of the Israelite charismatic leaders, the preaching of Harris was simple and emphatic – faith in One God, and repentance. His mission included the casting out of devils, cleansing their erstwhile tenements, and establishing God, holy and omnipresent, in their place. In Harris, therefore, the frightened or guilt-ridden people saw a personality strong enough to defy the malevolent spirits. Under his protection, they dared to banish all spirits from their villages, setting in their place the God of Harris!

Harris described himself also as the new *Ezekiel*, 'The watchman' in Ezekiel 33; and so commissioned, he had to warn the people against their transgressions of God's commandments, announcing God's judgment on the wicked. If he failed to carry out this task, therefore, the consequences surely rested upon him!

### **HARRIS, THE 'LIBERATOR'**

Prophet Harris was not only a 'liberator' of his people from both physical and moral evils, but a champion of freedom from the old and 'primitive' taboos then in force in the areas in which he worked. He condemned extravagant funeral customs, freed newly widowed people from the taboos which set them apart from community life, prohibited the pagan custom of keeping menstruating women segregated and restricted in their movements, prohibited lying with a woman in the open, no matter who the woman was. So also were his condemnations against the practice of the nubile maiden, who would go about clad in a little apron, thus arousing men to compete with each other in offering a high bride-price to her family.<sup>21</sup>

### **HARRIS AND POLYGAMY**

Opinions differ about Harris's stand on this burning issue and on his marital situation. One opinion represents him as having preached abstention from adultery, but allowing the practice of polygamy. According to this view, this was the worst criticism that the missionaries brought against him, a practice which they equated to 'immorality'. But Harris did not fail to defend his stand. Responding, he declared: 'Man, don't you see? The prophets can dispense – they cannot change. Like the prophets of the Old Law, we may grant certain dispensations until the reign of Christ is fully established on earth.'<sup>22</sup> As a new *Moses*, therefore, Harris had the power to dispense, maybe 'on account of the hardness of their heart'. The prophet of God had to dispense his fellow Africans in traditional African society from this controversial polygamy question.

Another view represents Harris as monogamous himself, even though he did not forbid polygamy in the case of people who already had several wives. The deaconesses or prophetesses who accompanied him were said to be his assistants. It seemed then that his critics described these as his wives.

### **HARRIS, THE LAW-GIVER**

Harris, the new Moses, was also a law-giver. Embracing all the ten Laws of Moses, there seems also to have been some further addition to the laws he gave, namely:

Consider suicide as an accident and pity the one who cut short his days; bury him decently.

If your wife dies, offer gifts to those who bring their condolences, but do not shave your hair.

While polygamy is not forbidden, monogamy is recommended.<sup>23</sup>

### **HARRIS THE WONDER-WORKER**

The miracles of Harris did not end with curing the soul's maladies. His powers enabled him to drive out demons and evil spirits. It was reported that with the simple command. 'Take up my stick, rise up and walk', cripples were restored to normal; that he could curse his enemies and make them blind, and cause supernatural thunder from the sky; that he was able to make rain and make the sun whirl about in a circle! Harris was even supposed to have raised the dead. At the sight of Harris's cross, people who were given to witchcraft cried out in agitation, some losing control of their excretory functions and becoming a piteous sight, while those who were very sick were cured on touching his cross.

Whatever these wonderful phenomena might tell about Harris, one thing is evident: they are part of those mysterious elements which surround the figures of the African prophets. But very remarkable is the fact that Harris was never presented as a prophet-healer, a phenomenon characteristic of almost all

the African prophets. It was his salvific message which merited him the name 'prophet' Harris. The weight of his achievements can be measured from what authors say about him:

The famous prophet Harris began as a religiously-inspired political rebel against the Americo-Liberian government, and then became a sincerely a-political leader of a mass movement from traditional religions to a latent form of Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

The Catholic missionaries were satisfied to see in Harris's case a typical example of the religious mentality of the West African Negro. And the Methodist pronounced their own judgment in the following words:

Harris is, in part, a figure from the Old Testament, but there is more than that in him. There is even more in him than in John the Baptist, who was not the last page of the Old Testament, but the first page of the New. Harris represents what a black Christian prophet could be. He symbolizes for the native ... all that revelation can be for him. He carries the law and grace to the heart of societies so little evolved as those of the Africans.<sup>25</sup>

## 6

### **SOME CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE INDEPENDENT CHURCHES**

#### **ECSTATIC PROPHECY AND SUPERNORMAL EXPERIENCE**

Charismatic manifestations, often accompanied by the phenomenon referred to as 'spirit possession', are distinctive features of worship and prayer meetings in the Independent Churches. One of the indispensable signs that one has been called to be a prophet or a leader, is the ability to see visions, talk in strange tongues, dream dreams, and hear extra-ordinary voices. The presence of the healing power is also an unmistakable sign of a divine call. It is not surprising, then, that the respect and credence given to the leaders are primarily due to their ability to manifest and make use of these spiritual gifts and at the same time impart them to others. The prophet-leaders are no doubt regarded as 'men of

God', and therefore sacrosanct. It is regarded as dangerous to offend them or to call into question the authenticity of their oracles, for God speaks through them.

There is in most of the prophetic Churches a mad rush to acquire these supernatural powers and to experience the divine. Some of the Churches and movements are strictly called 'houses of prophecy', 'prophetic assemblies' or 'seminaries of prophecy', where 'prophetic bands' are formed and the aspiring prophets trained for leadership. In these movements, there is complete freedom to make use of spiritual gifts thus acquired, and one may freely leave oneself to the promptings of the Spirit.

### **PROPHECYING**

One is said to prophesy when one passes on to others revelations or 'messages' based on what has been seen or heard through the special work of the Spirit. Prophecy may range from serious warnings and threats against sinful life, to calls to repentance and condemnations of injustice in government circles and in society as a whole. Prophecy includes forecast of wars, famine, outbreak of plagues, and the imminent fall of wicked heads of government and local rulers. Requests are made for intensive prayers that God may shorten the days of such calamities.

Frequent experience of the 'supernormal' could therefore be a 'true' sign of vocation to prophecy. Martin West points out that in some of the Zionist Churches in South Africa, most ordinary members experience 'spirit possession' to such an extent that it interferes with their daily activities, so that they have to consult a prophet healer. It is said that the diagnosis is generally that the Holy Spirit may wish to use such a person more fully than through the normal 'spiritual possession'. The solution may be for the person to become a prophet.<sup>1</sup>

In the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the prophetic vocation may come from a spontaneous conviction, or through the preaching of a minister. But more often one becomes a prophet after having experienced several manifestations of the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> In such cases, the person in question may feel charged with new power, and anyone who feels the call reports such a phenomenon. He then undergoes a period of trial under the care of a minister. After a period of intensive prayers and fasting, he is formally commissioned to begin his training as a disciple, which lasts between one to three years. The alternative method of 'recruitment' is through the establishment of the order of 'Nazarenes' or 'Samuels', in which the first born sons of the Church leaders are devoted to the Lord from birth in accordance with Exodus 13.2, 12 and 1 Samuel 1.27-28.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Media of Divine Communication***

In the Independent Churches, divine revelation is communicated to prophets in diverse ways, which include visions, auditions, and dreams. Trance – the state of profound abstraction or absorption in the beyond – is regarded as the highest pitch of the prophetic state in which supernatural experiences are undergone. Angels also are regarded as playing an important role in the communication of divine revelation.

## **VISIONS**

Since important messages are communicated in visions, the ability to interpret the symbols is of utmost importance. It is said to be one of the most trying moments of the prophet's career.

Prophet Theo informs us: 'Visions are the Photostat of what God intends doing or has done, handed down to us by his angels.'<sup>4</sup> For prophet Caleb, 'Visions sometimes take the form of conscious reproduction of past activities in the "astral plane" as happens in dreams.' A typical vision, according to him, comes after a long prayer. The body becomes 'charged' by the Spirit. The visionary is as it were intoxicated. He no longer sees with the material eye, but by the power of the international mind – the third eye. He also hears internal words – a 'still voice' which no one else but he alone hears.<sup>5</sup> Visions are possible at various moments, but it is said that the most solemn periods are the so-called 'angelic hours' – i.e. the three-hour intervals beginning from 6 a.m.

*Erring in Vision:* It is possible to err in vision, the prophets say, since signs and symbols or voices can present ambivalent and false interpretations. The primary task of the visionary therefore is, to interpret the phenomena seen correctly.

Prophet Hill reveals: 'Normally, the images differ: for example, a vision of a fierce animal is a sign of trouble in town. In times of war, a vision of an injured soldier means defeat of the party to which he belongs.'<sup>6</sup> For prophet John Muo-Nso, a coffin or a black cloth before a sick person means imminent death.

*The Unique Role of Visions:* For the prophets, therefore, visions play an important role in their prophetic career. Paul Hill says: 'Visions help to strengthen our faith. Ability to see visions and to interpret them correctly would be a sure sign of spiritual maturity.'<sup>7</sup> Small wonder, then that in the Independent Churches a considerable amount of energy is given to the interpretation of dreams and visions, whose representative symbols or images and the messages they contain are often previously worked out. 'Visions may occur in private meditation or prayer or during any part of corporate worship, and dreams and discerned clairvoyant objects are related to superiors for correct translation and interpretation.'<sup>8</sup>

## **DREAMS**

Dreams are equally regarded as important means of divine revelation. That which is not seen was thought to be revealed to ordinary men through dreams.<sup>9</sup> Often stereotyped in nature, these dreams are held to be the channels through which the angels (especially Gabriel) visit the aspirants to the prophetic office, and thus initiate what appears to be the biggest transformation in their career. The angels may indicate in the dreams the type of Church which the new prophet should found, and at the same time the name of the Church. The angels may even instruct a disciple of a prophet to break away from the ‘mother Church’ or from the mission Church to which he previously belonged.

That a particular illness is curable or not is often revealed in dreams, even before the arrival of the patient. The type of vestments that should be worn, colours of sashes, and the exact number of candles that should be used at prayers, are all revealed in dreams.

Therefore the ‘power to dream’ is an important phenomenon in the Independent Churches, as otherwise one had to be trained and schooled in dreaming, in order to achieve the right form of stereotyped dream.<sup>10</sup>

### *Stimulation to Ecstasy*

Prayer, fasting, and chastity are said to be among the important requisites for the acquisition of the ‘extraordinary’ powers in the Independent Churches, although music and wild dancing play their unique role in inducing ecstasy and ‘spirit possession’. The importance of these spiritual exercises are emphasized, especially in relation to visions.

## **FASTING**

Fasting is particularly underlined as an indispensable exercise in this regard. Ecstatic states stimulated by inhaling poisonous substances have not been reported in the Independent Churches; but, as a common feature, members who desire visions or hope to be possessed on any occasion are careful to fast.

Relating the circumstances which led to his prophetic call, Prophet Ikechukwu Esomeonu, founder of the ‘House of Prayer Sabbath Mission’, said among other things: ‘Then I kept on fasting and in constant prayer. I fasted for three good days, without tasting even a drop of water. On the fourth day I started seeing visions.’<sup>11</sup> ‘Surely, the prophet in question’, added our informant, ‘was right. He saw visions in fact, a noble result of hunger and starvation, a poor man with an empty stomach.’ Another informant was convinced that the prophets stimulate themselves to ecstasy and unconsciousness. He says:

These ‘fake prophets’ work themselves to frenzy and madness! I think that these epileptic fits and visions, which characterize their worship, are self-induced. There is no doubt that one can arrive at this state after fasting for days without tasting anything. The result is evident: The face is pale, the forehead and some parts of the body are bathed in cold perspiration, the individual becomes dizzy and a black cloud covers his eyes, he slumps, faints, and easily falls down unconscious. These things happen in almost all these ‘mushroom’ Churches here in Nigeria. These fellows are completely deceived individuals who work themselves to unconsciousness!

Such phenomena as our informants relate above are not of course limited to the Nigerian situation. In ‘Zulu Zion’, South Africa, a similar story is told of the prophet Sibiya, who for three-and-a-half years retired from the world, preparing himself for his spiritual task. All this time, ‘I fasted and prayed and went through purifications’. For ‘forty days and forty nights’ he had been without sleep or food. Then one day, at the end of his ordeal, he had a vision.’<sup>12</sup> Often visions as well as auditions are experienced during illness.

Prophetess Ma Nku, of St. John’s Apostolic Church, South Africa, had her vocation when she was twenty years old – she was ill and had visions, in which she saw heaven open.<sup>13</sup>

Whatever the truth about these ecstatic experiences may be, judging from the other requirements, namely, prayer and a chaste life, it seems that ‘the desire for visions is capable of encouraging a severe devotional and moral discipline, and cannot be dismissed as a cheap means of spiritual excitement’ as Turner rightly points out.<sup>14</sup>

### *Manifestations of the Spirit*

In the prayer meetings and prophetic assemblies, the unmistakable presence, or at least the nearness, of the Spirit is manifested by sporadic charismatic utterances, often accompanied by frivolous antics – trembling, groaning, and speaking in tongues.

### **PROMPTINGS OF THE SPIRIT**

It is the same story that is reported about these phenomena all over Africa. V. A. Nwosu described a typical ecstatic scene in the ‘Omenma Central Prayer House’ in Orlu, Nigeria, where the Spirit decided to move a group of human beings:

The petitioner rattles words breathlessly, rubbing his hands feverishly and swaying his body to the rhythm of his words. The other members, with shut eyes and seated, nod their approval to every petition. Here and there a member may squirm his body in ecstasy and utter an unintelligible word or two. Another may grunt, while a third may break into a fit panting as if suddenly struck with epilepsy ... The Prophet himself, who apparently is fully possessed by the Spirit, shouts out occasionally such meaningless words as '*mgbim*'! '*gbi-gbim*', '*gbaa*', according as the spirit of prophecy moves him. At times he whistles too.<sup>15</sup>

Sundkler describes a similar scene in the Zionist Church in South Africa:

The Spirit was present, this being made apparent by the energetic manner in which the prophet was sneezing. He bent himself with his hands, speaking in tongues: 'Hshii' or 'HMMMMMMMMMM', whereas the others replied with 'Amen' to the prophet's sneezing.<sup>16</sup>

At a Zionist service, reports Sundkler, one invariably experiences happenings of this kind; but failing more spectacular demonstrations of *umoya* presence, a Zionist prophet must at least produce the typical Zionist snort to show that the Spirit was very near.<sup>17</sup>

It is said that the singing of certain hymns helps to stir up feelings that the Spirit will soon appear. 'Come down Holy Spirit', repeated many times, and could be an ideal hymn serving to help the 'actors' to warm up and to get into the performance. Such a typical scene is vividly described:

'A' moves up and down on his feet, cutting the air with his flailing arms. 'B' performs the same rigid, mechanical exercise. 'A', with closed eyes, speaking in tongues: '*Eroy, roy, emeroy* (screaming now) *meroy, chura, churaa, era yisa, hura erie, amiray*' (screaming the whole time out of the depths of his subconscious) ... 'B' now starts to speak in tongues: '*Didi di di di ko ko ko ko ko ehe hehe he he popo he he he ...*'<sup>18</sup>

Ecstatic manifestations could therefore take any form – speaking in tongues, 'prophesying', or epileptic movements, but taken together, they are all signs of the promptings of the Spirit. As defined in its 1938 Constitution, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) discovers its charter in Joel 2.28-32. The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy is evident in the declaration: 'We believe in dreams and visions,

because those of the ancient days used to speak to God through visions and dreams. We are directed by the Holy Spirit.’<sup>19</sup>

### *Spirit-Possession and the Role of Music and Dance*

Signs of the promptings of the Spirit can often lead to real movement by the same Spirit, giving rise to a phenomenon referred to as ‘spirit possession’. Here the Spirit manifests its real presence by formally taking hold of the prophet, a member, or often the whole group. In its climax, the contagious phenomenon turns to an irresistible force in which one has no alternative but to give in to the grasping hand of the Spirit. Heightened by rhythmic music and wild dancing, this ‘fit’ is said to exhibit two different phases – a short opening phase of dazed, mute inaccessibility, and a second, longer phase of excitement with great activity – dancing, singing, leaping, running, miming, prophesying, etc.

M.J. Field’s description of spirit possession in Ghana is not very different from what obtains in most Independent Churches.

The dreamy first phase of possession is, however never absent, but is represented by a marked slowing down. Then comes a burst of energy. The excitement of the second phase is mainly motor. The subject is literally ‘moved’ by the spirit, sometimes to be driven into the wilderness but more often to be thrown into hours of ceaseless jiggling and dancing. Even when he is sedately divining and answering supplicants’ questions, a close inspection reveals that his fingers and toes are finely trembling.<sup>20</sup>

Martin West describes the phenomenon in the Zionist Church of Soweto:

The so-called ‘Baptism of the Spirit’ occurs in the Independent Churches in the form of the phenomenon of Spirit Possession ... In this situation, a person is believed to be possessed by the Holy Spirit and will show this bodily – in writhing, bobbing up and down, jerking rhythmically and sometimes running about haphazardly – and to a lesser extent verbally by shouting, groaning, sighing and so on. In this no specific message is conveyed to the congregation, other than that the Holy Spirit is present.<sup>21</sup>

It is said that spirit possession does not occur only during dancing. Occasionally a preacher will become possessed during a sermon – in which case a hymn is

usually sung until he is able to continue. Possession is also common after laying on of hands, particularly in blessing and healing, but also in exorcism rites.

In the African Gospel Church, South Africa, a typical congregational worship service is the scene of ecstatic manifestations:

The singing was deafening, followed by even more lively prayer. In the crowd of some seven hundred Zulu men and women, some here and there would suddenly jump and shout 'Hallelujah'! When all began praying at once, it was as though a tremendous African storm was gathering strength.<sup>22</sup>

Elsewhere, of a glossolalic scene, Sundkler remarks: 'To say that there was a deafening volume of sound, produced by the one hundred men and women in that little chapel, would be a gross understatement. Fierce screams and squeals are interjected with cries: "Jehovah, Jehovah", or "Moya Oyingowele".'<sup>23</sup>

The following vivid description of an ecstatic scene will surely attract the attention of any outside observer. It occurred in Timothy Cekwane's 'Church of the Light':

A hymn from the American Board Zulu hymnbook is sung, followed without warning by about ten minutes of corporate howling, concluded by repeated Amens, at which all raise their hands ... Some are jumping up on the chairs, crying. Aaron Mjwara in his yellow garment with a red sash begins to shake with his whole body. Describing a slow circling movement with his body, he eventually sinks down with his head against the floor, howling and grunting all the time. Another participant, fat and voluminous, jumps on a chair, shouting from time to time at the top of his voice ... Mr. Y now falls down, stiff and rigid, as if dead, his head bent backwards. Seven men take him and place him on the floor ... Now the women in their red garments, hitherto a silent mass, begin stirring ... All are weeping, sweating, throwing themselves backwards and forwards from side to side.<sup>24</sup>

Georges Balandier reports on the extravaganza, the outward show and confusion, with which the 'sacred dance' in the 'Khaki Movement' was associated:

The 'Sacred Dance' is 'rocked' with such an abandon that one feels taken up by an irresistible impulse which dominates and takes

possession of man. Men and women dance in a row. The prayers and clamorous singing intensify the atmosphere and excite the crowd. One is ‘digging’ it, while the other may enter into a trance, as the whole world seems to move. But that self-abandon does not call for order in the face of what seems to be an introduction of the old practices to the point of encouraging the loosening of sexual control.<sup>25</sup>

The Khaki Movement, alias ‘Mpadism’, was in fact known to be a ‘congregation of the Spirit’. Many of the adherents were known to have performed acrobatic movements. Seized by the Spirit while in the Church, they would begin to jump up and down, with violent shaking and rushing out, and even climbing to the top of trees. Some were said to have been seen howling like wild animals, bending back their heads and their bodies, trembling as if in a severe attack of ague, some leaping like great athletes or hopping on one leg for hours.

In the Church of the Lord (Aladura), worship is dynamic as elsewhere in the Independent Churches, and all the Aladura groups in Nigeria are described as exuberant in worship through tongues, revelations from beyond, trance, and frenzy.

The ‘shaking’ by the Spirit is manifested by ecstatic dancing, jumps, and bows. A typical ‘hallelujah-jump’ is described by Turner:

Dancing, accompanied by singing and drumming occurs at some points in most services; sometimes it is restrained and brief, in token form, at other times vigorous and prolonged, and some will pass into trance or possession and speak in tongues, while all, from the dignified Apostle to the smallest toddler, are caught up in a crescendo of noise and movements ... those upon whom the Spirit has fallen retain some measure of control or are protected by their friends.<sup>26</sup>

Peace returns as people take up their places after the strenuous exercise, and not even the continuing cries and jumps of one or two who remain still possessed disturb the subdued atmosphere that now obtains. There seems to be a great tolerance of what appears to be ‘disorder’, observes Turner, ‘but there is a limit, and sometimes only taking the possessed person out of the Church will bring this state to an end. On one occasion, it was recommended that several possessed people should be taken to the “mercy ground” and their heads knocked together.’<sup>27</sup>

## **EFFECTS OF SPIRIT-POSSESSION**

Some of the prophets give personal accounts of ‘spirit-possession’ or what they refer to as ‘spiritual grip’. One Zionist Bantu prophet relates:

A sharp wind blew. I felt that I was full, I was full indeed. I almost burst; yes I was ready to burst. I fell down, I threw myself in all directions. My whole body was shaking, not for fear, but because I was filled with *uMoya*. I got up and ran from the door to ‘*Emsamo*’ in my hut (the inner, sacred part of the hut) and back again. Next morning I went out on the hill top. But even though it was morning, my eyes only saw darkness, for I was ill and I had to sit down.<sup>28</sup>

Another Zionist leader describes his experience. As he prayed for a sick person, he felt currents of power streaming from head to feet.

Shocks of power came intermittently, possibly ten seconds apart. They increased in voltage until after a few minutes my frame shook and vibrated under these mighty shocks of power. Then Satan came and suggested ... it is only a psychic phenomenon.<sup>29</sup>

Asked to describe the effects of the ‘hand of the Spirit’ on him, Prophet Hill, of Nigeria, said:

When the Spirit gets hold of you, you are no longer an ordinary man, and falling down immediately is the first reaction to this ‘Spiritual Grip’. You may speak in tongues as the Spirit directs you. You hear voices and may be provoked to do strange things. It is the hallmark of the experience of the Spirit, a period of personal contact with the divine.<sup>30</sup>

Although, as it appears, some prophets or followers who experience possession feel some sort of physical pain or abnormality, or what authors refer to as hallucination, yet as Field observes, ‘Many subjects describe an aftermath of quiet, blissful euphoria after possession. This is of some importance in therapeutic procedures in the Independent Churches’, he rightly points out.<sup>31</sup> Spirit-possession has also its ‘social function’ in the Independent Churches. Possession endows the speaker with authority, and this makes his utterances acceptable. The possessed medium is exonerated from all personal

responsibility for his utterances. It is not he, but a deity who has spoken.<sup>32</sup> What is not attainable in normal circumstances is therefore accomplished in a state of intoxication! It describes the real state of a human being upon whom the Spirit has fallen. And this brings us to a highly debated question.

## **THE 'POSSESSING-SPIRIT'**

What 'spirit' is responsible for this 'movement' of human beings in the Independent Churches? Is it a demon, ancestors, or the Holy Spirit of the Scriptures? Talking about 'spirit-possession' in the African prophetic movements, some authors seem to have emphasized and exaggerated the 'traditional' elements found in this phenomenon. Sundkler, for one, seemed to have identified the 'spirit' of the Zionist Churches in South Africa with the ancestral spirit of the old Zulu religion. This tendency is well brought out in his treatment of the supernatural experiences of those prophets, under such captions as: 'new wine in old wine skins', or 'blend of old and new'.<sup>33</sup> In fact the result of his research on Bantu prophets in South Africa, as it appears in his first book, could be summarized in his own words: 'I shall endeavour to show how in sects of Zionist type, biblical and Christian ideas are merged into the old Zulu religion'.<sup>34</sup>

Other critics, like John Bond, pick up Sundkler's thesis. For Bond, 'Most Zionist Churches are a blend of garbled forms of Christianity with primitive tribal religion ... Dr. Sundkler (*The Bantu Prophets in South Africa*) has made an erudite and full study of these separatist sect.'<sup>35</sup> While admitting, however, that great similarities exist between the Independent Churches and Christian Pentecostalism, the latter having probably influenced the former in South Africa, Bond nevertheless insists: 'Pentecostals revolt from any identification with these Churches and would regard their ideas of "uMoya" (the Spirit) as more demonic than divine.'<sup>36</sup> John Beattie and John Middleton seem to agree with Sundkler and Bond. This is their impression of 'spirit-possession' in the African Churches:

Possession by the Holy Spirit is reported from Ghana and Kenya as well as from Zululand, and in all these countries the amalgamation of traditional and Christian practice has led to the emergence of Prophet-led Separatist Churches in which possession plays a major and culminating role.<sup>37</sup>

## **DISCERNMENT OF THE SPIRIT**

Whatever the critics may hold, the prophets of the Independent Churches have no doubts regarding the Spirit which inspires and ‘moves’ them. A sharp distinction is made between the Devil, the Evil one, the spirit that troubles and makes man sick, and the Holy Spirit who inspires, reveals, and fills one with power and spiritual gifts. It is precisely the Evil one that the prophet has been sent to conquer, and it is the demonic power which he claims to fight when he cures diseases. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he sets out to destroy shrines, idols, fetishes, and other symbols of diabolic influences, setting in their place the one, true, all-powerful God of the Scriptures. Is history not repeating itself then, if the ‘man of God’ is accused of casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils? The distinction which Raymond Firth makes may be appropriate here:

By common convention in many other societies a person regarded as possessed tends to be classes as a sick patient for whom treatment is necessary. But a possessed person who acts as a medium tends to be regarded as a hale person who is carrying out a special role.<sup>38</sup>

In any case, our prophets in question are not unaware of the danger involved in the exercise of spiritual powers. Prophet Caleb distinguishes between the Spirit of God and the evil spirits or demons. Each of these, he points out, strives to influence men, and are in fact worshipped by many. Here arises the need for the discernment of the Spirits. He warns those he refers to as amateur visionaries against the pitfalls. Nevertheless, he is sure of the truth: ‘The final judge of the veracity of any spirit is the result of their movements: “By their fruits, you shall know them”’.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Ecstatic Manifestations in Modern Pentecostalism***

Ecstatic manifestations are phenomena of course not limited to the Independent Churches in Africa. They are common occurrences found in many world religions, Christian and non-Christian, past and present.

As R. Firth points out:

Spirit-possession and spirit mediumship are among the most widespread and most intriguing phenomena in the occult field. Under these names, or as ecstasy, pythonism, demon possession, devil-dancing, shamanism, spiritism, spiritualism, they have been the subject of a vast literature, extending over at least two thousand

years. In the classical Greek period, accounts of Dionysiac cults refer to possession by the god in which worshippers saw visions and performed feats of an extraordinary kind. In Christian proselytization in the nineteenth century, possession and mediumship often presented problems for the missionary, who found himself opposed, as he thought, by evil spirits in persons.<sup>40</sup>

The problem is not limited in any way to the nineteenth century or to the second century when the Montanist movement almost shook the early Church. In the present day these phenomena have continued to generate fears and doubts also in the modern Christian Church. In literature and in Church circles, they are referred to in many terms – ‘a new Pentecost’, ‘baptism with the Spirit’, ‘falling of the Spirit’, ‘charismatic renewal’, etc., all purporting to describe such strange and often abnormal manifestations found in Christian circles today all over Europe and America in the so-called charismatic or Pentecostal movements. Anyone who has attended their prayer meetings will concur with the Nigerian pilgrim, who, shocked by the activities of Catholic charismatics in Rome, declared: ‘So these “mushroom-Churches” have also spread to Europe.’

It is the weird sound of glossolalia, spoken or sung and without any apparent meaning, which has caused great concern and disturbance among Christians outside the movement. The strange sound is described as a kind of Oriental music – the sort that is played in movies as sound effects for snake charmers or Indian bazaars.<sup>41</sup> What one beholds in their prayer meetings is in no way different from what obtains in the Independent Churches, a yearning and seeking after extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, viewing these as primary evidence of ‘spirit-baptism’. In what is described as congregational participation, the Spirit manifests its presence in diverse ways – in lusty and vociferous singing. Hallelujahs, ‘praise the Lord’, and amens. Every member is expected to fill his lungs and make a ‘joyful noise unto the Lord, as the spirit falls on people and actually moving upon them’. The Spirit can also manifest its presence in a dynamic way, and can suddenly fall on any individual, taking possession of him. Strange stories have been told of how the lights were switched off in Pentecostal meetings and people would roll on the floor in orgiastic frenzy. These should not surprise anybody, for they are nothing but sure manifestations of the Spirit found elsewhere in religious movements, and, here equally, they are the unmistakable characteristic of the neo-pentecostal movements in the modern Church.

## **CHARISMATIC MANIFESTATIONS – A MEETING POINT**

As the Independent Churches in Ghana would claim, so would almost all the prophetic Churches all over Africa (and also, we must add, the modern charismatic movements in the traditional Churches) their worship is in the manner of the Christian communities described in the Acts of the Apostles and they are possessed and moved by the same Spirit, in the same way, and in the same large numbers'.<sup>42</sup>

As J. M. Field reports: 'Anyone who has attended their meetings and also reads the Acts with an open eye, remembering that the general level of Galilean credulity of the period was about that often met in Ghana today, can have little doubt that he is reading about something he has seen.'<sup>43</sup>

Turner has no doubt about the 'possessing Spirit' in the Church of the Lord:

The widespread occurrence of possession in the traditional religions readily suggests that similar phenomena in the prophetic healing Churches must be attributed to this same source. We cannot be sure that this is true of the Church of the Lord. There are no signs of such behaviour in Oshintelu's early experiences ... This means that the main Aladura development did not exhibit such behaviour in its first decade, but acquired these experiences through the influence of Western Pentecostalism.<sup>44</sup>

Martin West makes a similar observation:

The description of the preaching of the French Camisard prophets in the seventeenth century, with shivering, foaming at the mouth and falling, far exceeds anything observed of a prophet's behaviour in Soweto; and a similar parallel could be drawn in the healing by convulsions in the Saint-Médard cemetery, the Wesleyan paroxysms, and the devotional dances of the Shakers' ... Important parallels can be drawn with the burgeoning Pentecostal movements in various parts of the world today ... And these are a few examples of the many that could be drawn from the history of Christianity.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Prophecy and Divination” ‘Inquiry of the Lord’***

In our treatment of faith-healing in the Independent Churches we point out some aspects of what seemed to be pagan divinatory practices of the prophets. In sickness and the general troubles in life, diviners of the traditional religions are

still consulted all over Africa. In the Independent Churches, the prophets are equally consulted regularly by members and non-members. But this is no longer 'pagan divination'. It is now referred to as: 'Inquiry of the Lord'.

In the Church of the Lord, we are informed that members as well as strangers make frequent 'spiritual inquiry' from the Primate. This includes seeking prayers or guidance on specific issues, representing the usual anxieties and problems in life. 'In casual contacts all over Nigeria', says Turner, 'it is possible to meet people who have made such inquiries, including some who have held high political offices or taught in a university.'<sup>46</sup>

The ability to give oracles is therefore a cherished charisma in the Independent Churches. It is the Spirit who works through the prophets, offering solutions to the people's problems in life.

### **'SEERS'**

Visionaries and seers in the Independent Churches are said to possess rare powers, including that of clairvoyance, the ability to perceive spiritual powers beyond the range of ordinary human perception. It is a form of vision, and is clearly a phenomenon of after-images, akin to the Scriptural visions in which objects of ordinary sight, such as desert bush or budding almond tree, give rise to visionary experience in which they play a symbolic part.<sup>47</sup>

Many prophets and followers claim to have the power to detect hidden things wherever they are hidden, even in a shoe. The heart of man can be read, and nobody can hide even his innermost feelings from the prophet. Prophetess Ma Mbele, of St. John's Apostolic Church, claims to possess a visionary attitude which enables her to 'read' people, to 'see' whether certain people are good or bad. She detects people who enter the Church with hidden native medicine. Her husband, a bishop, is not unaware of his wife's gift of the second sight: 'When I go to Johannesburg, she sees whether I met a lady friend and how she was dressed. When I return home, she will tell me all about it.'<sup>48</sup>

In the Holy Chapel of Israel Church, a woman was cured of her sickness and charged a moderate fee of ten shillings. But she complained that she was poor and therefore could not foot the bill. But in a moment the prophet and his Seers went to work to 'see' the truth. The result was soon out. The woman was a liar! A woman seer had just detected a black handbag in an inner room of the cured member and it contained the fabulous amount of eight pounds!

In Tanzania, we are told, 'The Nyakyusa believed that their prophets were able to foresee the future, and there were many stories about prophecies of war, of drought, and so on.'<sup>49</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that prophets who possess these extraordinary gifts should be approached by people who look for solutions to their everyday

problems. Their gift of the second sight acts already as a warning to people who have not yet learnt that they are dealing with a 'man of God', and not just with any ordinary fellow in the street!

## **CONCLUSION**

Ecstatic movement no doubt represents a major activity of the prophetic Churches in Africa, a phenomenon which registers accurately on the religious sentiments of the African. What may appear extravagant to the eyes of an outside observer, has to be seen as a natural part of communal worship. This has of course been recognized in the liturgical renewals of the Catholic communities in Africa today.

Whatever absurdities one may insist exist in such a phenomenon as 'spirit-possession', we only point out that it is no different from what obtains elsewhere in other forms of religious worship, both Christian and non-Christian, and therefore offers no cause for alarm. Answers to particular questions, such as those concerning the 'media of revelation' or the identity of the spirit who inspires, cannot be found without first of all taking recourse to the biblical parallels, as well as to other ancient religious practices from which these phenomena must have derived their origin.

In the last analysis, we emphasize that the problem of ecstatic prophecy, and the supernatural experiences of people who claim to possess extraordinary powers, should be considered in the whole context of the prophetic movement all over the world, past and present but in particular and in our case here, in the context of biblical prophetism.

## **‘False’ Prophets in the Independent Churches**

It is not only the increase in membership and the rapid expansion of the prophetic movements in Africa that have caused concern and disturbance to people outside these movements. Equally perplexing is the fantastic rate at which prophets multiply. The rate at which young school leavers in Nigeria join the Aladura movement, to become prophets after a short while, has been described as alarming. The inevitable question then is: How can these multitudes of ‘prophets’ all over Africa claim divine authority for their mission, and who is it that actually sends them?

Here again we meet a phenomenon not unfamiliar to religious movements elsewhere in the world, ancient and modern, namely, the problem of ‘false’ prophetism. It is not denied that among the so-called prophets in Africa there can be found some with relatively convincing ideas, but the question is, ‘How can the cockle be separated from the barley?’ For many uncommitted African masses, as well as for the elite who have been very suspicious of the activities and motives of these movements, this unprecedented phenomenon taking place in Africa today cannot be but an unmistakable sign of the end of this age! To ordinary Christians it seems that, ‘the end is approaching; the scriptural prophecies concerning the end of the world are gradually being accomplished; the appearance of “false” prophets (Mark 13.21) is one of the signs given, and here are the “prophets” in our midst, deceiving and leading many astray’.

The *Spear*, one of Nigeria’s national magazines, lashes the prophetic Churches in Nigeria. One of the ‘Spearmen’ writes:

I have had my doubts about the ‘religious’ leaders who sometimes christen themselves prophets ... No doubt we have all at different times come into contact with these self-proclaimed prophets who otherwise are nothing but cheats and morally decadent offspring of Adam and Eve ... the country is now littered with announcements of salvation revivals where the handicapped are promised ‘divine healing’ – where the lame could be made to walk, the blind see, the deaf hear and the dumb speak again.<sup>1</sup>

In very strong terms, the *Spear* condemns the activities of our ‘popular’ Church of the Lord (Aladura), whose prophets and followers it describes as ‘professional cheats’ with mercenary motives, ‘those morally decadent, sweet-tongued idiots!’ There is no type of accusation that has not been made against

the Aladuras – accusations ranging from the struggle for material wealth to moral debasement. The energy and frequency with which these Churches are attacked by the Nigerian press demonstrate the seriousness of these accusations. The saying goes, ‘If you want to get rich quickly, if you want to accumulate wives ... join the Aladuras’. In fact some Aladura ministers are known to be among the top business tycoons and ‘millionaires’ in Nigeria. It is therefore not surprising that prophets should multiply, even to the extent of outnumbering the ordinary adherents!

Some of the prophets seem to be aware of the predicament, and would accuse their colleagues of duplicity. They do not hesitate to classify them as ‘false’ prophets. Prophet Ezekwe of the Gospel Institute of Ministry of Reconciliation, Abagana, Nigeria, brings this charge against the false prophets, and he laments:

God’s purpose in giving His Pentecostal Spirit to some people in this perilous age of the world is to raise up spiritual revival of true Christian life through men. But now many have found in it a commercial line, an easy way of collecting money from the public and ‘too many cooks have spoiled pudding’.<sup>2</sup>

Accused of hypocrisy and of prophesying for the devil by one of our informants, Apostle Abel Nweke, of the St. James’s Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim, Uturu-Okigwe, Nigeria, retorted: ‘I am not among these false prophets all over the country, deceivers, who establish Church in order to collect money. They are no prophets of God.’ Apostle Abel was, however, encouraged, in spite of what seemed to him also as glaring contradictions in the face of the activities of most of his colleagues. For him Christ was also despised and even branded ‘devil’s advocate’.

### ***Criteria for Distinguishing between the Prophets***

Some of the terminologies adopted by certain African authors to describe most of these independent movements do not seem to be mere derogatory words, just invented to discredit and despise the African initiative in religion. Some of these movements are often described as enthusiastic, ecstatic, emotional, nativistic, syncretistic, ‘cargo-cult’ esoteric, even neo-pagan, and many other such names. Close examination suggests that these terms should not be dismissed as empty expressions, for they in fact describe most of the phenomena with which many of the ‘false’ prophetic Churches in Africa are associated. There have been attempts to establish criteria by which the false prophets and their movements

could be unmasked. The saying is 'by their fruits you shall know them'. Some of these movements may have the following characteristics:

1. Founded by 'local prophets', often with little or no education, and even without any Christian background, movements in this category are shapeless in form and organization. Little or no attention is given to biblical studies, or to the composition of Christian hymns and prayers.
2. Such movements where healing is the main activity can never be referred to as 'prophetic', how much less a 'Church'. Here the original 'prayer house' is completely converted into a 'healing home'. Does the Zulu prophet's remark not identify his movement: 'This is not a Church but a hospital.' Exploiting the gullible masses and basing their healing and divinatory activities on superstitious beliefs and occult magic, these ignorant charlatans and adventures succeed in taking the place of the traditional medicine men, who compound concoctions to drive out witches and demons.
3. In some of these movements of dubious character, the primary interest of the enthusiastic followers is the beating of drums and dancing which often stimulate them to ecstasy by which they can perform their discreditable and shameful acts. 'Vision-seeing', speaking in tongues, and quaking, and other similar manifestations are the rampant phenomena in worship and other spiritual exercises.
4. Hierarchically organized music-processions in gorgeous albs, sashes, hats, prophetic rods or staffs, and tattered Bibles are often the most striking features of movements led by 'prophets' of dubious character. Here the main interest and the life-blood of the movement depend on these external shows and pomp.

It is therefore not surprising that the interest shown in rank and leadership opportunities has helped to the increase and multiplication of thousands of 'false' prophets in the Independent Churches all over Africa. Often motivated by mere nationalistic interest, some of these prophets and their followers have been responsible for troubles in parent Churches. They often break away to form new movements. We are well informed about the activities of the 'Ngunzist' prophets, alias 'Ngunzismen', during the early development of Kimbanguism.

Some prophets who already appeared in the time of Simon Kimbangu and continued their activities after his arrest were very different from him. Some were adventures, rogues, and charlatans,

performing their healing for payment – contrary to all that Kimbangu had taught. They exploited the gullibility of the people and the name, the ‘renown’, of Kimbangu, and based their activity on the superstitious and the religious longings of the people. They were the chosen ones of the ‘Holy Spirit’ to replace the traditional *‘féticheurs’* the witch-doctors. They resembled the many South African Zionist healers who took the place of the non-Christian healers of earlier African tradition, the *‘e’dingaka’*, *‘izangoma’*, and *‘tinyanga’* who worked with magic bones and herbs in conjunction with the ancestral spirits.<sup>3</sup>

Kimbangu himself referred to some of his enthusiastic followers and the already emerging ‘Ngunzismen, as ‘false’ prophets.<sup>4</sup>

Now we are in a position to consider in detail some of the criteria for detecting the false prophets and their movements.

### ***Prophets and Material Wealth***

Quarrels over money have always created very formidable problems in most of the Independent Churches. A small misunderstanding over financial matters easily provokes schism. Small wonder, then, that one beholds an endless number of divisions and secessions in these movements. The aspiring adventurers are eager to pick a quarrel with the prophet-leader, as a mere pretext to break away and set up a fresh organization.

Those ‘prophesying’ for money are surely held to be false prophets, since their motives are not spiritual. These are interpreters of dreams, witch-hunters, fortune-tellers, who predict prosperity in business to please their desperate clients.

‘Struggle for wealth’ – that is one of the big charges against the Aladuras. They have been accused of deceiving gullible men into believing that their maladies could be cured and their fortunes improved only if they ‘donated’ generously to God, for the support of the movement and the already rich ministers.

The general belief in the efficacy of prayers has been the undoing of many innocent and honest but weak-willed citizens, who earn their pay the hard way. Very unfortunate incidents in their life have driven them to all sorts of extremes, and these have been the spring-boards of many of these preachers.<sup>5</sup>

A story is told of one Mr. X, who after his secondary education opted for a career in the 'service of God'. He founded an Aladura Church which has now a considerable membership. At the inauguration of his new Church he made himself prophet and bishop. A short time afterwards, he became an archbishop. His car is said to be one of the most costly around. Some of our informants have no good word for most of the prophets, in view of their avarice. One says of John Mmuo-Nso of the Holy Chapel of Israel Church: 'His whole intention is the collection of money. He makes a lot of money out of this Church business. He has now married three wives and raised magnificent buildings in his premises.' Another informant writes: 'I think these "prayer houses" should be better known as "hospitals". These "prophets" make use of all sorts of native medicine and occult magic. Their clients pay them fabulous amounts of money. They are in fact out to enrich themselves, these fake prophets"!'.

The now famous 'Jesus of Achalla', also known as the 'Black messiah', and the 'Holy Prophet', is said to harbour over 1,000 sick people of different nationalities in his home town, Achalla, now popularly called 'the City of God' (it is reported that there is an influx of disciples from as far away as Ghana, Sierra Leone, and the Cameroon Republic). People with mental troubles, business-men who are desperate to acquire wealth by all means, throng the 'City of God' – hoping and praying to God to answer them. 'Jesus of Achalla' is believed to be a wealthy man, Austin Akaeme, one of the *Spear's* reporters, tells us.

The struggle for wealth and other similar abuses are, of course, not limited to the prophetic Churches in Nigeria. In South Africa, responsible leaders of the Independent Churches are also worried about the situation in their own Churches. These oppose their less responsible colleagues who solicit money. The league of the African Bantu Churches of South Africa points out the necessity of having such activities checked. An outside observer equally deplores the situation:

'Christianity is dying out here, because it is only regarded as a money-making machinery.'<sup>6</sup> Similar stories are told about the Kimbanguists, some of whose ministers are said to be rich and to enjoy privileged positions in government circles.

### ***Prophets and Moral Life***

For a 'true' prophet of God, it is not just enough to heal and see visions or dream dreams. A strict harmony between his claimed religious experiences and his moral life is not to be overlooked. Is moral discipline a cherished virtue among our African prophets? Our most outspoken prophet, John Ezekwe, has

no good word for the thousands of ‘prayer houses’ springing up in every nook and corner in Nigeria. He writes:

Most of them are places of immorality, where men and women, even though they call themselves brothers and sisters, are free to do what they like, provided they contribute to the running of the cult, and these are places where immorality is never mentioned as sin, since the ‘prophets’ themselves take the lead.<sup>7</sup>

‘Moral decadence’ is an expression associated with the Aladura Church movement. Women are said to be seduced even during prayers and the ecstatic ‘hallelujah jump’. We are told:

Such prayers are never conducted jointly except for males. For females, the leader conducts the prayers in privacy and in nudity (*Spear*).

An influential ‘prophet’ particularly mentioned by name is said to be a notorious figure in this programme of infamous promiscuity during prayer meetings. Cases of incest have been reported, and these touching some of the top ministers of the Aladura congregations. The ‘Spearman’ adds: ‘Perhaps we will at this point accept that the most polygamous, promiscuous, and therefore, most morally decadent, are the members of the various Aladura organizations.’

Turner records the skepticism of some members of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) themselves. They question: ‘How is it that the Holy Spirit seems to fall (also) on some whose lives are bad?’ One member asserted: ‘If a man hears spirits’ voices, and yet proceeds to seduce a woman, then we conclude that the controlling spirit is not from God.’<sup>8</sup> It has thus occurred both to the elite as well as to the prophets’ followers to distinguish the Spirit of God from malignant spirits!

### ***Conclusion***

At last, an array of criticism has brought the Pentecostal revelation to the test, and perhaps is the best evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Independent Churches, observes Turner.<sup>9</sup> ‘False prophetism’ is a common phenomenon in many world religions, and the conflict between the ‘true’ prophets and ‘false’ prophets will always occur in any prophetic movement. Talking about the prophetic Churches he met in Ghana, Professor Noel King declared: ‘There is nothing you don’t find among these prophets and their

followers. One can, with every justification, put them in line with the Montanist prophets of the second century AD, whom Eusebius dealt with in his *History of the Church*.<sup>10</sup>

Whatever the case may be, it should not be forgotten that we are dealing with the ‘false’ prophets. There is no doubt that in the Independent Churches there exist responsible religious leaders who are convinced of their claimed divine call. To our questions, ‘Do the Nigerian prophets agree that among them “false” prophets have arisen? How does one distinguish between the “false” prophets and the true prophets?’ Prophet Aaron Ibe was not hesitant. By false prophets, he means, ‘those who are *not called*, but owing to their thirst for money or mere external show, move about, deceiving people, preaching *false doctrine*, and these do not live an *exemplary life*’.

Prophetess Stella Nwadike of the Apostolic Blessed Hope of Jesus, in her own reply, seemed to agree with Aaron. Prophet Mark Udeagwara of the United Church of Christ has also similar views. For both, ‘all the Nigerian “modern prophets” are not of the same caliber, because not all are “prophets” for the sake of spreading the good news.’

‘True’ prophets and ‘false’ prophets can easily be distinguished. Neither the prophets themselves nor their critics, deny that among the new African prophets ‘true’ messengers of God can be found. In the last analysis, the unmistakable criterion unmasks the imposters: ‘By their fruits, you shall know them!’

## **The ‘Zion-Jerusalem’ Concept in the Independent Churches**

In appropriating the term ‘Zion’ to designate certain groups of the Independent Churches, authors seem to limit its application to the ‘Zionist Churches’ in South Africa. ‘Zion’ ideology appears in many other prophetic Churches elsewhere in Africa, and its use need not be limited to the sense in which Sundkler applied it.

The attachment to the term ‘Zion’, ‘mount Zion’, or ‘Jerusalem’ is a phenomenon present in the Aladura Churches in West Africa, as well as in Kimbanguism. What one often notices in the emergence of the Independent Churches is the immediate renaming of the headquarters of the Churches or the home villages of the prophet-founders. To give some examples:

Isaiah Shembe’s Ama Nazaretha is located at Ekuphakameni near Durban, the hill upon which the Nazarite Church and its accessory buildings stand; Edward Lekganyane’s Zion City Morija, is in the Reserves, and remains the centre of his Church and the ‘new Jerusalem’; Timothy Cekwane’s ‘Church of the Light’ has its headquarters at Ekukhanyeni, ‘the place of the Light’, and was established on the slope of that very mountain. This was and remained their incomparable Zion where the whole Church would assemble every August for its yearly meeting. The famous Nkamba, the village of Simon Kimbangu, remains the spiritual centre of the movement founded by the prophet. It has long been regarded as the ‘new Jerusalem’, its centre being the mausoleum of ‘Kinlongo’ (i.e. ‘sacred object’, ‘temple’) which contains the mortal remains of Kimbangu and is opened twice a year. The ‘*Guta ra Jehovah*’ (City of God) of Mai Chaza in Zimbabwe is the centre of religious activities and healing, as well as the home town of the prophetess. In Nigeria, Ogere, the headquarters of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) and the home town of its founder, Oshintelu, has become ‘Zion City’.

The most distinctive features of these ‘new religious cities’ are that they have become the spiritual and theological centers of these Churches, scenes of great festivals and pilgrimages, where large-scale healing ceremonies are also held.

What are the ideologies behind this attachment to ‘Zion’? What can these tell us about the prophetic movement in Africa? What is the connection with the ‘Zion-Jerusalem’ theme in biblical tradition?

***Zion – Beloved City and Centre of the Life-Force***

In his booklet, *'The Beloved City'*, Dialungana K. Salomon, the second son of Kimbangu and director of the affairs of the 'Holy City', Nkamba, outlines the reasons why the Kimbanguists should love and cherish the 'new Jerusalem' in Nkamba. These reasons include the following:

1. It is the city of Simon Kimbangu, who was chosen by God.
2. It is the city promised by God through the mouth of his prophets, the new Jerusalem which was to descend from heaven.
3. Jerusalem is the city of blessing.
4. Jerusalem includes the pool of Bethesda, to cure the sick.
5. It is in Jerusalem that the power of God is seen, for there many people are to be heard singing songs of praise, night and day, to the glory of God.<sup>1</sup>

For the Kimbanguists, through the events of Nkamba as revealed by the hands of prophet Kimbangu, the city which the Lord God had hidden, Jerusalem had descended here in Africa. But unfortunately the 'hills of Satan' (represented by the 'prophets of Satan', the missionaries, and the Belgian government) stood up strongly to fight against the Church of the Lord on earth by his prophet, Simon Kimbangu.

In *Southern Africa*, the 'Zion' ideology reveals similar protests and the belief in an assured future transformation of present realities. Possible hopes emanating from socio-political aspirations find their expression in the 'Zion-Jerusalem' theme. Dispossessed of their land and property by the apartheid regime and made exiles in their own country, there are only two options open to these unfortunate blacks of South Africa, who are surrounded by a more powerful enemy armed to the teeth. The first is a humble acceptance of the realities which they are inevitably experiencing, and resignation to making out of the existing situation whatever seems possible. But secondly there is the view that while accepting the present state of affairs, hope should not be given up. This hope may be projected into the future, or expressed in other ways, such as are found in the biblical tradition. It becomes the sort of yearning for a homeland that was expressed by the Jews while in exile. In whichever case, it is important for Church leaders to bring their followers together on 'Church farms' or 'Church colonies' where they form communities in which the Church leader acts as king and judge.<sup>2</sup> The followers here derive some sort of security, and at the same time they do not fail to represent their communities as 'Holy Land', 'Zion', 'New Jerusalem', where life power is available.

### ***Mount Zion – Place of God's Presence***

Yahweh, the God of the oppressed people, dwells in their midst, and in fact his presence is manifested on the 'Mountains of Zion', the spiritual centers of the Independent Churches. The two great experiences inspired by high mountains are, firstly, the sense of nearness to God, a realization of his presence; and secondly, the ascetic aspect, so that returning from the mountain, one is filled with renewed strength of the spirit.<sup>3</sup> A sacred place, a Zion, as in the Old Testament – this was what the black Africans were longing for in the land of the whites where they no longer had any right to possess land.

### *Zion – Scene of Great Festivals and Pilgrimages*

The 'new Jerusalems' in the Independent Churches are primarily attractive centers for big festivals and pilgrimages. Long and colourful processions with bands and other musical instruments are often organized, with dancing and chorus singing as 'pilgrims' enter triumphantly into Zion. In Shembe's Ama Nazaretha, it is reported, all activity in the Church is determined by the yearly rhythm of the two great festivals – the January feast of the Tabernacles on the Inhlangakazi mountain, and the great feast of July at the Ekuphakameni headquarters. These festivals, which attract people and visitors from all over South Africa, are said to be marked by prayers, preaching, and teaching, followed by a 'sacred dance', in which thousands of followers participate in a moving and colourful parade.

The solemnity and beauty of the Nazarite 'Candle Service' – a mass worship connected with the great festivals at Mount Zion (Ekuphakameni) is vividly described by Sundkler:

... There were priests burning incense and huge candles in the middle of the temple. Everybody kindled his or her candle. Then, in a long row, they solemnly danced out, catching now the incessant rising rhythm of the drums. Eighteen big drums, four of them played by women drummers. Their rhythm carried and punctuated the whole performance, endlessly, relentlessly, eternally. Eighteen enormous drums, one beat per second. The men in their long rows, and the women and the girls all filled in with that slow and solemn beat. I counted some to thousand men and perhaps for thousand women, all in white garments, all in long rows, each right hand holding the lit candle, and the feet following the incessant rhythm: left foot touching; left foot stamping; right foot touching; right foot stamping; touching and stamping the good African soil – for hours and hours on end, without let or leisure.<sup>4</sup>

Anybody who has witnessed the Aladura festivals in the Lagos Bar-beach, Nigeria, or the Sunday parades of the Cherubim and Seraphim congregations, will surely follow the description of what Sundkler saw at Ekuphakameni. The great services bring them very near to heaven, and the gatherings also provide the necessary framework for the total worship in the Church.

In Kimbanguism, just as the Jews used to go as pilgrims to Jerusalem, so also all members of the 'Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the Prophet Kimbangu' should make pilgrimages to Nkamba. 'It is understandable, in the light of this theology of "Jerusalem-Nkamba",' comments Marie-Louise Martin, 'that great importance is attached to the visits of Christians of other nations and races. This is the fulfillment of the divine promises, which are transferred from the ancient City to the New Jerusalem – the promises that people of all nations will come as pilgrims to Zion.'<sup>5</sup>

### *'The River that Gladdens the City of Zion'*

Another interesting feature of the Zion-Jerusalem ideology in the Independent Churches is the significance of rivers, streams, or fountains situated in the Mountains of Zion and headquarters of the Churches. It is the presence of these rivers that adds to the splendour of the city, transforming it into a 'paradise'. It is the sacred mountain as a focus of purifying power which is the new contribution of 'Zionism', and without which it would not *be* Zion. Fountain and mountain belong together. Their functions are partly different, yet at the deepest level congruent. We are well informed about the story of 'Wakkerstroom' (rapid stream), in South Africa. This is the river at the side of which a little village was built and which gave the place its name. As Sundkler observes,

Wakkerstroom, to a million African Zionists in their white garments and with their wooden crosses, is no ordinary river. This is the Fountain, the source of Living Waters. This is the Jordan River, at least Zulu Jordan. It was by these waters that the movement of the Spirit began, in the very first years of this century, just after the Boer War.<sup>6</sup>

The rivers in the Zion Cities are the scenes of massive baptismal ceremonies and purification rites in the Independent Churches. The waters there symbolize the presence of God, and with their life-giving powers the sick are cured. It is

here that people draw their spiritual joy and force – from those rivers which ‘gladden the City of God’.

In the ‘Zion City’ of the Holy Chapel of Israel Church in Eastern Nigeria there is no stream or mountain around. Members therefore trek regularly for over five miles to reach the life-giving waters of a stream located in the hills of Ogidi in Orlu. There, new converts are baptized in the fresh-flowing water, and a good amount of water is collected in large and small vessels for blessing and storage at home.

In Kimbanguism, the importance of Nkamba-Jerusalem to the life of the Church cannot be appreciated without the mention of the ‘holy spring’ of Nkamba, where the souls of the members are knit together. By the arrest of the prophet and his followers the City of Jerusalem was transformed into the city of ruins. And as the ‘Hills of Satan’ arose against the ‘Cities of God’, so began the long struggle. With the ban on all meetings and worship, the leaders imprisoned or sent to exile, the Nkamba-Jerusalem destroyed, and all roads leading to it checked by military patrols, the ‘holy spring’ *strictly* guarded so as to make access to it impossible, it seemed that the colonial administration had recognized the unique importance of Nkamba and its spring.

The splendour of Mount Zion (Ekuphakameni) and its springs is well brought out in Shembe’s hymns of the Ama Nazaretha:

I remember Ekuphakameni  
where is assembled  
the saintly congregations  
of the Nazarites.

I remember Ekuphakameni,  
where the springs are  
springs of living water  
lasting forever

Ye all who thirst  
come to Ekuphakameni,  
there freely to drink  
from springs of water.  
(Hymn No. 102)<sup>7</sup>

***‘If I Forget You, O Jerusalem ...’***

The ‘new Jerusalems’ in Africa are unforgettable cities of splendour. Far away in their exile, the deported leaders and followers of Kimbangu could not forget ‘Zion’. Contacts were maintained with those still at home, as those leaders exhorted their members, by letter, to remain strong in the faith. It became a matter of life and death, as survivors at home decided to join their leaders and brothers in exile unless the colonial authorities met with their simple demand: a free access to Nkamba-Jerusalem! It was therefore natural enough that the Kimbanguists should sing the ‘Song of Zion’ quite readily when their cherished city and religious centre was restored to its original splendour and repopulated in 1960.

Nkamba makes the life and sufferings of Christ real today for the Zairians and beyond Zaire, for Africa and the world. The years 1921-60 are compared to Israel’s forty years in the wilderness. Just as Moses only stood on the threshold of the Promised Land of liberty but was not permitted to enter it, and had to hand over the leadership to Joshua, so Simon Kimbangu foresaw the day of liberty but did not experience it, and in this connection Joseph Diangienda is compared to Joshua. He led the Kimbanguists to freedom, in those eventful years of 1956-60.<sup>8</sup>

In Southern Africa, yearning for a return to ‘Zion’ finds expression in the expectations of leaders (call them ‘Messiahs’) who would lead the struggle for independence and restoration. There was the hope that just as God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage and led them into the Promised Land, so also would he free the oppressed black Africans, restoring their cities to them, their ‘Jerusalem’, that unforgettable land. To separate them from their God-given land by mere force of arms is a futile task, for wherever they may find themselves, they will always long to return to their land, the religious centre of their movements, and like the exiled Jews, with the song on their lips: ‘If I forget you, O Jerusalem ...’

### ***Going up to Jerusalem***

How much the Jews sought after Jerusalem is obvious from the songs they sang when they went up to celebrate the feasts of God in Jerusalem. Children were taught to know these songs thoroughly by heart. They were not to be sung for fun, but only on going up to Jerusalem. There are fifteen of these songs of David which you should know and understand, especially the contents of Psalm 122.

These are Dailungana's instructions to the Kimbanguists, as these are contained in his *The Beloved City*. It was also reported that a special booklet, *Going up to Jerusalem*, was distributed at Nkamba in 1965 to those who attended the Church's principal feast on 6 April, anniversary of the return of the prophet's remains.

What is this movement to Zion all about? One would ask. In the land of the oppressed, it no doubt reflects and re-enacts that longing for a repossession of land which has been lost to the enemy. In the apocalyptic vision, it is not unconnected with that eschatological movement to Zion, where a final reconciliation of all nations will take place, ushering in an era of eternal bliss and a vision of the assembly of the saints. It envisages a radical transformation of society, a reversal of fortune, when Yahweh rises in victory to put an end to evil, suffering, oppression, and all contradictions in life. It is also a vision of an era of judgment and punishment of enemies, the manifestation of God's justice and support for the poor and oppressed.

In the Holy Chapel of Israel Church, an important significance of the movement to Zion is brought out in some of the songs of the Church. Zion is the dwelling-place of Yahweh and there people can approach him to taste his presence:

*Jehovah bu Eze na Zion!*  
*Jehovah n'achi n'uwa nile.*  
*Bianu fee Eze Zion n'elu ugwu*  
*Ebe ya na ndi Nso ya no!*

Jehovah is King in Zion!  
Jehovah reigns in the world.  
Come and adore the King of Zion on the Mountain  
Where he dwells with his saints!

Another speaks of real movement to Zion, where Yahweh is to be 'seen'.

*Anyi na'ga n'ugwu Zion,*  
*Anyi na'ga n'ugwu Zion!*  
*Ebe anyi g'ahu Chineke anya,*  
*Duru m gawa n'enigwe!*

We are going to Mount Zion,  
We are going to Mount Zion!

Where we shall see God,  
Lead me to Heaven!

The 'Zion Ideology' in the Independent Churches borrows too from the passage in Hebrews 12.22ff. This is an ever-recurring passage during big festivals and worship services.

But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and Jesus mediator of a new covenant.

For them Christ has begun the cleansing of the 'heavenly sanctuary', where the just will reign with him in eternal happiness. Who will enter this heavenly sanctuary, if not only those with a clean heart! While the spiritual struggle to win this heavenly bliss continues, there is a conviction that a foretaste of that reality was already here, below, being experienced. The signs are found there in the 'new Jerusalems' and headquarters of the Independent Churches, where the presence of God is manifested in worship and prophetic activities.

## Faith-Healing in the Independent Churches

It has been well established that most of the Independent Churches practice faith-healing, and that this has been the centre of the activities of most of the new movements. Evidently some have been described as hospitals, rather than 'prayer houses': 'Blessed Hope of Jesus Healing Sabbath', 'Apostolic Healing Centre', 'Faith-healing Sabbath Mission', are some of the names which identify these 'Church-hospitals'. 'I was sick and have been healed by this prophet', is one of the stereotyped answers one receives, explaining why a member has joined a particular Church. Salvation in the African context has to do with body and soul, and it is therefore not surprising that healing should receive so much attention in the Church movements.

Among Africans, as among peoples all over the world, the problem of suffering remains a mystery. Why should one person suffer and another not? Who is responsible for misfortune in the world? These are some of the perplexing questions. As far as the African is concerned, God is good. He cannot be responsible. Who then? An *enemy* is often the assumption. The belief in *poison*, witchcraft, charms, and magic, is still very strong all over Africa. Christianity or modern discoveries in medicine and psychology may not succeed in eradicating this belief, for it is embedded in the minds of many, no matter what their status in society or even in Church circles. Even where the 'Western' diagnosis may be clear, it does not explain the 'why' or the 'who'. The *who* is particularly important for the African and must not be overlooked. Since the 'unknown' enemy is held responsible for almost every type of disease, misfortune, sickness, and death, the culprit must be unmasked by all means, in case he has decided to continue with his evil intentions. The 'Western' doctor here has nothing comparable to the prophet-healer's offer, and thus must give way to the one who claims supernatural authority for his activities. Often his prophetic call begins with a divine order to go and heal a particular person suffering from an incurable illness. He, the prophet alone, claims to work by the power of God.

The healing message is the pivot of the activities of most of the Independent Churches, and the emphasis on 'faith' has its own impact on the sufferers, since probably their ailments would not be cured elsewhere. 'There is absolute faith in God,' writes Iwuagwu. 'This is because the average African looks to religion for the solution of nearly every problem in his life. There is also that sense of absolute dependence upon God for final succour.'<sup>1</sup>

Some fundamental questions arise: ‘Why the African prophetic Churches are primarily linked with healing activities? What is the role of healing in these Churches? Is it only a recruitment technique invented by the leaders? There are no specific records in the biblical tradition, that the Israelite prophets and charismatic leaders were specifically given the mandate, during their inaugural visions, to go and *heal*,’ or that they ever engaged in massive healing activities. From where, then, does this ‘healing drama’, characteristic of nearly all the African Independent Churches, derive its foundation and support, and what is its relationship to the prophetic mission?

There is no doubt that the numerous miracles of Jesus, the healing activities and exorcisms reported in the New Testament, have influenced and encouraged the faith-healing mission in the Independent Churches. Certain biblical passages, including Mark 16.17ff; Luke 4.18ff; Luke 10; James are often cited as support, Jesus’ power over demons and over sickness, and the same supernatural power conferred on his disciples, the coming of the Holy Spirit, are but clear manifestations of God’s intervention in history, an intervention by which, at last, an envoy of God is able to confront all the evil and spiritual forces causing man so much anxiety in this life. Often, it may not be necessary for the new ‘man of God’ in Africa to be aware of the specific complaints of suffering individuals or to go into diagnostic complexities – the patients are healed by the power of the Spirit and by faith. It is the same Spirit promised by Jesus, which not only transformed the timid Apostles into new men, imbued with new powers to preach the gospel without fear, but also gave them power to cure diseases, and to drive out devils and all malignant spirits by mere command, also by laying on of hands on the sick ‘in the name of Jesus’.

### ***The Concern for Healing***

The concern for healing in most of the prophet-healing Churches certainly reflects the problem, unresolved for much of the population of Africa, of securing a healthy existence. The complex causes of sickness include the activities of enemies, sorcerers, witches, and evil spirits. This raises the important question of ‘African’ versus ‘European’ categories of illness, observes Martin West. This has to do with the ‘European diseases’ which respond to Western scientific therapy, and ‘African diseases’ which are not likely to be understood or treated by Western medicine.<sup>2</sup> These include many psychological conditions caused by superstitions, anxiety, and fear among Africans, which are not undestroyed by European doctors, and which African doctors can and do cure. But greater than both is there! He is in the person of the ‘prophet healer’.

## **EVIL SPIRITS**

A short survey of the spirit world in Africa reveals a deep belief (in spite of the influence of Christianity) in vital forces or spiritual powers which operate in secret. Generally these evil forces are believed to dwell in bushes, dark places, market places, odd corners, where they wander about aimlessly. It may be dangerous, therefore, for anyone without a resisting spirit to approach such places at odd hours. The spirits of those evil and wicked men who 'died bad deaths', are believed to wander about, and if they happen to attack the living, there is normally an immediate death. In Igbo language this is called '*mba-mmuo*'. There is usually no adequate remedy for such a misfortune.

## **POISON OR 'BAD MEDICINE'**

Another important point is the strong belief in '*poison*' in most parts of Africa. This is specifically speaking 'African type of poison' sometimes described as 'bad medicine'. There is much confusion caused by European authors in their attempt to describe this phenomenon. The usual terms used, sorcery, witchcraft, etc., do not describe well what the African means by poison (in Igbo, for example, '*nsi*' or '*ogwu*'). Turner's comment on the rejection of all types of medicine, whether European or African, by the Church of the Lord (Aladura), further clarifies this problem:

The rejection of Western medical treatment along with traditional medicine is also a more complex matter. The Yoruba word for medicine, *ôgùn*, covers not only herbal and similar remedies, but also *poison*, spells, and charms, thus revealing how difficult it is to separate the good from the bad; it is also used for Western scientific medicines, and for occult and magic importations from overseas.<sup>3</sup>

The same applies to the Igbo situation. The word '*ogwu*' is used for all types of medicine as well as for poison. To indulge in the act of 'poisoning' is called '*iko-nsi*' or '*iko ogwu*'.

Both the poison and the medicine-men who compound the substances are very much feared. Poisons are normally used for offensive purposes, and can be made from many materials – human hair, nails, clothes, leaves, liquids, powder, etc. It can be deposited on anything belonging to the enemy, who is immediately affected by contact with the poisoned object. It can be thrown on the enemy, put into his drink, or transmitted to him by mere shaking of hands. Sundkler describes (in a 'European' way) a similar phenomenon in South Africa:

“*u’uthakathi*” can be either witchcraft (*ukuphosa*) or sorcery (*ukudlisa*). This means that illness or death or some other calamity is either sent or “thrown” by a witch during the night or else transmitted by some poisonous substance, which having been duly treated is brought into contact with the victim’. He further describes the case of a man who suffered from tuberculosis, and whose wife was totally convinced that the illness had actually been ‘thrown’ by night by one of their enemies.<sup>4</sup>

### **MAN CRAVING FOR SECURITY**

Man’s life in society is not always secure. He lives in perpetual fear of evil spirits and mortal enemies. So also do most of our Christians find themselves in this situation. There is a general sense of insecurity and for this reason the African desires protection from God, from the good spirits of ancestors, and from his fellow man.

Some of the believers trust in God and entertain no fear whatsoever. Others use certain mixed religious means to support what they gain from Christianity. There are yet other groups of Christians who believe that security will come from a religious movement. And yet another group gets into other occult societies and some traditional secret societies. In these places they are looking for protection and for occult secrets.<sup>5</sup>

African society is one where man always craves for security! A little quarrel with a neighbour, a money squabble with someone, a land dispute will often immediately generate suspicion and a sense of insecurity. One disputant fears he will be poisoned by the other. Both may run to the diviner for protective medicine, or even look for offensive ones. If anything is lost or stolen what is important is the knowledge of *who* stole it, and not so much the restoration of the property. The diviner’s word is final, and he is regularly consulted by people from all walks of life at one time or another, especially during important crises in life.

#### ***Psychological Illness: Causes and Cures***

The claim made by many authors, that ‘African sickness’ is largely psychological or ‘spiritual’ in origin, is not without foundation. In general, an average villager believes that any type of tablet or herb can relieve his headache, backache, pain in the stomach, the eyes, or other parts of the body. The only important thing is that he succeeds in getting hold of one, and one should not be surprised if the sick man claims to have been cured after a short

while. The uncontrollable sale of patent medicine is alarming. This is true also of the number of fake 'village doctors', whose only medical instrument is often a crude injection-syringe. Like our prophet-healers, they are doctors of all diseases, and as far as they are concerned the word 'diagnosis' does not exist. Any type of liquid or powder will serve for filling the syringe, and the stuff is directly injected into the aching part of the body. In the past, stories that these crude village doctors injected liquids directly into the heads and stomachs of their victims were not without foundation. For their impatient victims, what mattered was that something was done to the sickness, and quickly! Little wonder that in a few days' time the patients claimed to be all right again!

One can generally assume that most of the maladies successfully treated in this way are of a psychosomatic nature. Psychical disturbances are usually ascribed to evil spirits, and devils are cast out through exorcism. Evil spirits are generally regarded as responsible even for bodily aches and pains in the stomach, possibly caused by bad food or drink. The types of sickness frequently treated by the prophet-healers include, 'evil spirit possession', respiratory troubles, gynecological problems or inability to conceive, worms, bad dreams, insomnia, internal pains, loss of appetite, epilepsy, etc., etc. 'All this is of course self-diagnosis by symptoms', observes Turner, 'and illustrates the medical problem of Africa as much as the achievements of the Churches.'<sup>6</sup>

### *Forms of Treatment*

The success of the prophet-healers of the independent Churches lies largely in the fact that they share completely with their fellow Africans their dread of witchcraft, poison, charms, and the influence of evil spirits, and the belief in their terrible realities. No doubt, the psychological side of the prophetic treatment has a salutary influence on many of the patients who suffer from these types of illness. Sometimes compromise solutions are sought in serious cases.

Membership in the Independent Churches comprises a considerable number of young women who claim that they owe the conception of their children to the Church. 'This has been supported by African doctors who recognize the crippling psychological effects of an African woman's anxiety over her sterility, or the slightest delay in conception.'<sup>7</sup> This chief medicament, the panacea, is water, supported by extensive prayer, good advice, and sometimes fasting. Oils, enemas, candles, ashes are often used or recommended. Visible physical treatment includes the imposition of hands or iron rod, beating with open palms, and rubbing the patient with potash or oil.

In the Church of the Holy Chapel of Israel, prophet John Mmuo-Nso beats his patients with the open palm all over the body, shouting at the same time: '*Ka O Puo! Ka O Puo!*' (Let it [the spirit] depart!), and taking no heed of

the patient's discomfort and pains. Often the patients are given castor oil to drink or are 'powdered' with potash or oil. When potash is used, to behold such a patient is a sorry sight and ugly spectacle! Sometimes after the 'beating' the sick people are exposed to the direct rays of the sun.

Another method of healing is by strange symbolic actions. The above prophet used this method one day in a typical dramatic healing of an epileptic girl of about fourteen years old. In an ecstatic fit, he brought the girl to a public square, and pulling off her clothes, he left her completely naked. Then stooping down, he began passing between her legs to and fro, and after the exercise shook the girl violently, blowing air into her ears and eyes. Questioned about this shameful public show and magical symbolism by the curious and angry native bystanders, the prophet was infuriated. He was only obeying the 'divine voice', he explained.

Martin West cites some interesting samples of treatment prescribed by a prophet-healer in Soweto, South Africa. A patient troubled by evil spirits or devils would be prayed for, while those with marital disputes would be given holy water. People looking for work are generally made to wash and are given water to drink. If a house has been bewitched, water and ash and salt would usually be sprinkled around.<sup>8</sup>

During exorcism in the Church of the Lord, the evil spirit is addressed with authority: 'Come out! Come out! In the name of Jesus, loose your hold, you cruel devil. Today terminates your existence in N... in the name of Jehovah, the Superior Spirit. This is the property of my Father. N ... you are healed.'

### *The Old and the New – A Meeting Point?*

#### **THE AFRICAN PROPHET-HEALER, A 'NEO-TRADITIONAL DIVINER?'**

Has our 'prophet-healer' succeeded in replacing the old traditional diviner and fortune-teller? To describe our honourable prophet in such terms does not destroy his position as a 'messenger of God'. It is by no means a derogatory term, since in fact that is the role he assumes in his mission, a healer of mind and body.

Like the traditional diviner who smells out the witches who have cast spells on a person, the prophet is able, thanks to the supernatural powers he has received, to counteract diseases and death. He has already demonstrated the impotence of the most feared charms and shrines by destroying and burning them. But he is careful not to fall into the old mistakes of the missionaries, who destroyed, but offered nothing in substitute. It is here that he surpasses them by providing his new converts with new elements which reassure them of their

security. While his new remedies do not represent an exact ‘photocopy’ of those of the traditional diviners, they adequately serve his ever-superstitious clients.

Since diseases are seen as having a religious nature, they can be cured by prayers, mere laying on of hands, or through purification rites, confessions, and exorcisms. Sometimes the prophet may be required to demonstrate the cure symbolically, or at least to convince his patient that there was something really going on, something more than the human imagination could reach. No medicine, strictly speaking, is required, since the emphasis is on faith and on God’s power to succour and to heal. This answers a crucial religious question which the missionaries neglected to answer. It is an offer of divine help, in this world; an offer which provides a functional alternative for the activities of the traditional spirit-diviner.

### **HOLY WATER**

The frequent use of holy water is common in many Independent Churches. It may be given to members for specific cures, or else it may be drunk to purify and protect against illness and misfortune. One often sees members carrying bottles, buckets, and tins of water to the prophets for blessing. Many cannot stay or sleep in their houses without blessed water. They are advised to sprinkle holy water in their homes to drive away evil spirits. With faith, holy water sprinkled on charms and poisoned materials renders them ineffective. It is used to consecrate otherwise profane places. Sick people are advised to drink blessed water regularly, as an antidote against all diseases which drives away the demons of asthma, stomach gas, and fever, ear-ache, influenza, weakness, and general pains. Turner reports the case of a boy with eye trouble, in the Church of the Lord, who had consecrated water poured into his eyes.

The Nkamba-Jerusalem in Zaïre has its ‘Pool of Bethesda’, a reference to the sacred spring through which many believers have been healed (John 5). The frequent use of blessed water in the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through Simon Kimbangu also catches the attention of Dr. Martin when she asks: ‘What does this water mean today? Does it have a purifying, magic power so that it works automatically, *ex opere operato*, in healing and blessing?’ Meanwhile, ‘not only is the Nkamba water used symbolically, but soil, too, is taken from Nkamba as a kind of pledge that the events of Nkamba, which took place here on earth, will also have their out-working at home in the daily needs of life. There is a biblical parallel to this in the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5.17).<sup>9</sup>

### **CRUCIFIXES**

In most of the Aladura/Zionist Churches in West Africa members are obliged to carry crucifixes about with them. Prophet Harris carried his bamboo cross with him during his missionary journeys. One often sees very large crucifixes mounted at the entrance of large compounds or villages, as protective instruments against evil spirits.

Among pagans, public magic is seen in the charms used to protect houses, compounds, fields, and villages. One sees bundles of feathers, bunches of leaves, packets wrapped in cotton thread, or great 'parcels' hanging from the ceilings of rooms to protect their occupants. Shops have packages or magic brooms nailed above the door to repel burglars or to attract trade. Fields are protected by anything from a wisp of straw to a complex package containing teeth, blood, and other organic substances.

To an outside observer, these are often the most obvious signs of heathenism. But it is these magic instruments and charms which our prophet claims to have come to destroy. Most of them he has 'smelled out', attacked, and destroyed. His mission, however, does not end there. He must provide 'substitutes' or 'alternatives'. Replace what he has destroyed, that he must do!

But danger! Have the crosses become new fetishes for the followers of our prophets? Was this what some of the earliest prophets set out to fight against? It is known that as the seventeenth century, the prophetess Dona Beatrice ordered her followers to destroy crosses. She wanted to see crosses, crucifixes, and images of the crucified Christ destroyed because the cross had become for many a new, more powerful fetish (*nkisi*). Pierre Mpadi (founder of the 'Mission des Noirs') and his disciples also preached against the cross and images.

### ***Conclusion***

We have seen that healing plays an important role in the Independent Churches. Whatever may be the objections to the 'supernatural' aspects of our prophet's power to heal, it is evident that in this healing context he has to a large extent succeeded in replacing the pagan diviner. His achievements lie primarily in his personal charisma and ability to understand his followers' predicaments. He has no intention of reintroducing paganism or any other form of traditional religion, which has been condemned by Christianity and which he personally has fought against. His achievements in the 'rehabilitation' of mentally deranged persons or his successes in sickness of psychosomatic nature have been tacitly recognized even by his strongest critics. The 'prayer-healing Churches' are surely responding to the problems and needs of most Africans.

As a recruitment technique, healing has of course its vital role, but most important is the prophet's conviction that the prophetic mission includes the

liberation of man from bodily hindrances. There is no dichotomy between body and soul. Whether his success comes from the enlightenment of the 'Holy Spirit', or merely from his own ability in pastoral counseling, what is very important is that in the midst of his followers he stands now as a man who has openly declared war on sickness and evil.

## **10**

### **Leadership in the Independent Churches**

In the introductory part of this work we pointed out that it was the claim of the Independent African Church leaders to prophetic vocation and functions that principally inspired our comparative work. We are by now familiar with the titles and roles associated with the named prophets. Either by self-arrogation or by popular acclamation these Church-founders and leaders are known to have

exercised certain functions identical with those of some biblical personalities. These functions are taken over by their sons or successors after the founder's death.

Apart from the general function of the Israelite prophets, here we find, too, great emphasis placed on the unique roles of Moses, Joshua, and the Israelite Judges and Kings. In the New Testament the unique role of Christ is assumed as well as the functions of the apostles, evangelists, bishops, pastors, and the charismatics of the primitive Church.

### *Traditional Patterns of African Leadership*

Many authors have pointed out that the influence of the leadership patterns in traditional African society is seen in the patterns of leadership in the Independent Churches. A typical example of this pattern of leadership is that illustrated by kingship in Zulu society. There is an elaborate discussion of this system of leadership by both Sundkler<sup>1</sup> and Parrinder.<sup>2</sup>

We learn that in this *system*, rank is a fundamental pattern of Zulu society. The harmonious life of the nation depends on a balance of interest between the kings, chiefs, and people. The position of the king is of central importance to both *land* and *people*. The king is not merely a head of the tribe but is the symbol of unity. He is *priest* and *magician*, *ruler and law-giver*, *war leader*, and a source of wealth. The king listens to important legal cases and is in short a judge. Tracing the sense of the word '*Ngunza*' (prophet) in Kimbanguism, in relation to its original meaning in the ancient kingdom of the Kongo, Etienne Bazola observes a similar phenomenon:

In the traditional society, the chief Mukongo was at the same time priest and judge. The administrative authority and the Christian Missions came to divide these two powers, desecrating the theocratic Kongo society, where the religious power of the chief guaranteed his power as judge. Since then the people found themselves without a guide.<sup>3</sup>

In other parts of Africa, e.g. Uganda and Nigeria, similar patterns of old traditional leadership are said to have existed before the old order broke down, giving place to the new.

In this pattern of leadership, some authors also see great similarities between the system of leadership in the Independent Churches and that in the traditional religions of Africa. As Sundkler observes, the kingship pattern of Zulu society is imprinted on the leadership in the Independent Churches in South Africa. According to him:

The leader, whether ‘Bishop’, ‘Overseer’, or ‘President’ is a king, ‘inkosi’, and the Church is his tribe ... But it is characteristic that in other cases this Zulu kingship pattern is being Christianized by being combined with the Ethiopian Abyssinian mythical charter which shows thoroughly especially in the Bishop’s regalia.<sup>4</sup>

Concerning the Church of the Lord (Aladura), H. W. Turner observes: ‘The great attention given to the matters of rank, insignia and privilege, is similar to that found in the traditional Yoruba religions and in African society in general.’<sup>5</sup> It is said, too, that the head of the Christ Apostolic Church in Western Nigeria was also the king of Ibadan City.

Whatever these similarities may imply, it is evident, too, that the leadership patterns in the Independent Churches reflect to a large extent those of biblical religion. These other aspects include the ‘dynastic’, ‘hierarchical’, and ‘charismatic’ characteristics of leadership.

### **DYNASTIC LEADERSHIP**

The success or the failure of any Independent Church or movement is strongly linked with the presence and dynamism of its founder-prophet or leader. But when he dies the choice of a good successor is of utmost importance. The mantle must be passed to one of his disciples or sons so that the movement continues. Such characteristics apply to the ‘second generation’ of prophets and leaders of whom we have knowledge; men such as Joseph Diangienda, Kimbangu’s third son and present leader of the E.J.C.K.; Matapoly Moses Jehu Appiah, son of the founder of Musama Disco Christo in Ghana; and Johannes Galilee Shembe, Isaiah Shembe’s third son and present leader of Ama Nazareth. The three sons of Kimbangu have been called ‘*Princes héritiers*’, or in Kikongo, ‘*Zimvawala*’, that is ‘bearers of the prophetic and royal staff or scepter’. The term can mean that prophetic and royal functions are theirs within the Church. In the Church of the Lord (Aladura), succession is also effected through a similar pattern, by the establishment of the order of ‘Nazarines’ or ‘Samuels’.

### **SUCCESSION BY ORDINATION**

Another form of accommodation is also found for succession to leadership. Although based on charismatic endowment, a member who claims to possess rare gifts, such as those of prophecy, vision, or the ability to heal may aspire to

leadership. Other prerequisites for ordination or conferment of spiritual authority by imposition of hands or by handing over of the sacred rod may include such talents as are necessary for pastoral work, e.g. preaching, and for administrative purposes. With such a spiritual authority bestowed on the young aspirant, he can succeed to the throne or he can found a new Church or branch of the movement.

### **HIERARCHICAL LEADERSHIP**

Interesting to note are the hierarchies that are so often found in the polity of the Independent Churches, with clearly defined rights and duties. On the highest rung is the founder-prophet, surrounded by ministers and other officials in a descending order of magnitude. On the lowest rung of the ladder, apart from the ordinary members, are often found the Army of Jesus, acting as stewards or porters. The Levites are the young men who assist the ministers at Church services and prayer meetings.

A well-trained music band group is in a special way the live wire of an Independent Church. As far as leadership is concerned, women are on an equal footing with men. Very influential prophetesses have emerged in Africa, demonstrating special charisma in leadership.

While healing plays a vital role in the recruitment of members, the leadership opportunity provided by this system is another factor pointing to the secret successes of these movements – opportunities in leadership which have been denied the Africans in the Mission Churches.

### **CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP**

Whatever importance these aspects of leadership may retain in the Independent Churches, it is clear that in the last analysis, leadership is strictly charismatic in nature. Although a large number of ‘impostors’ or ‘false’ prophets may be found on the periphery of genuine religious movements, the characteristics of true leadership are unmistakable. What makes the Independent Church leaders strong and influential leaders? One would ask, if they have so much in common with the ordinary members of their congregations and do not outshine them, either in terms of education or economic achievement. ‘The answer lies in their *charisma* and organizational ability’, affirms Martin West.<sup>6</sup> Strengthened by the new powers claimed to have been received through a divine call, the merging prophet or charismatic leader is ‘turned into another man’, imbued with supernatural powers inaccessible to any human being whom God has not visited in a special way. The village prophet becomes an admirable figure, God’s envoy, while his little remote village becomes a place of pilgrimage, a scene of cosmopolitan gatherings, in the ‘City of God’.

Whatever may have been the sources of his inspiration, or the experiences and convictions which he must have had, it is the prophet himself who is mostly responsible for the emergence of a new religious movement. He may be a visionary, a wise man, an ecstatic, a judge, or even an impostor; nevertheless, some of his new qualities do impress his followers and clients. For them, there must really be something in their leader which others have not got. He must have some task to accomplish, both for his people and for Africa as a whole. As he consolidates his position in the community with 'miraculous' acts of healing, acquiring new titles and functions, the 'Hills of Satan' may arise to disrupt his divine mission. He may suffer persecution, be imprisoned, deported, or even executed. But such set-backs had already been foreseen, since his counterparts or those whose functions he had assumed suffered similar ordeals. Where he eventually survives, his unique role in the prophetic mission appears within a short while. Among the numerous offices which he may now claim to hold, one shines out most brilliantly, namely, that of a 'liberator'. It is a function which has many implications, and which can be summarized in the type of function held by one of the greatest Israelite prophets and charismatic leaders. Our prophet is, in short, the *New Moses*, an African Moses, in fact.

In our study of the different movements and their leaders, we have seen how some of them exercised or claimed to be exercising the functions of Moses. Here we shall consider further what these functions are and how they are realized by the 'Mosaic figures' in the Independent African Churches.

### ***The figure of (African) Moses***

In the 'messianic' Churches of Southern Africa we have seen in particular how prophetic figures such as Isaiah Shembe and Mai Chaza are said to have assumed and exercised functions reminiscent of those of the biblical Moses. The same is true of William Harris, and of other 'minor prophets'. These functions so assumed include those of Moses as 'prophet', 'liberator', 'founder of religion', and as 'law-giver'. Here we shall examine these functions in general. In particular we shall see how they were accomplished by Kimbangu – also called a 'new Moses'.

### ***'Moses' – the Prophet***

First and foremost, the emerging religious leader is a *prophet* in the manner in which Moses was. His experiences in the 'Burning Bush' or on the mountains in Africa (often renamed Sinai) become carbon copies of those of Moses, the Israelite. He receives the same commission as Moses did. Simon Kimbangu was a prophet, 'Ngunza'. E. Bazola informs us that the sense in which the word 'Ngunza' is used here designates its biblical equivalent: '*prophetes*' or '*nabî*'.

According to the Kikongo Bible, the term gives an idea of one who speaks in the name of a chief. It is in this sense that Kimbangu is called 'Ngunza'. 'Under the influence of Christianity, Kimbangu was called "Ngunza", because according to the faith of his followers, he was the one who spoke in the name of God.'<sup>7</sup> According to Balandier, the term 'Nzunza' appears also to be equivalent to 'Messiah'. It is distinguished from 'Mwaluma', which specifically designates a prophet, it comprises 'visionaries', often considered less in importance. It was in this sense that the movement (Kimbanguism) was sometimes referred to as 'Ngunzism'.<sup>8</sup>

Thus Kimbangu was called by God for a special task. Like Moses and the other prophets, he had become the mediator between God and his (black) people – 'Simon Kimbangu, *premier Ngunza chez les Noirs*'. One of the documents circulating between 1949 and 1959 specified the unique role of Kimbangu as a new Moses, a prophet chosen by God.

The document compares the apparition of Yahweh to Moses in the desert and the trails of Moses in view of his new office and responsibilities (Exod. 3-4) with the experiences of Kimbangu.

It is also the same for us. Our fathers have had a lot of trials and we, too, up to the present time. It was thus that we have been informed through the Sacred Scriptures, what was to happen in our midst. Kimbangu is the prophet who has appeared among us.<sup>9</sup>

Other documents extol the unique figure of Kimbangu as comparable to other founders of world religions. Kimbangu was the saviour of the blacks in the same manner in which Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and Buddha were for their respective peoples. 'Dieu nous a donné Simon Kimbangu, qui est pour nous le Moïse des Juifs, le Christ des étrangers, le Mohamet des Arabes' (God has given us Simon Kimbangu, who is for us, the Moses of the Jews, the Christ of the Gentiles, the Muhammad of the Arabs).<sup>10</sup>

For his followers, Kimbangu was a messenger, a prophet of God. His visions and auditions are compared with those which Moses had with God on Mount Sinai. In the last analysis, it can be said that the 'African Moses', like his other biblical counterparts, belongs to the same prophetic line which in biblical tradition has derived from the prophetic office of Moses.

### ***'Moses' – The Liberator***

While exercising his prophetic office, the 'African Moses' assumes the office of a liberator. In area where political and social oppression has influenced the rise of religious movements, the prophets do not fail to appear as Moses, leading the

Israelite slaves out of the Egyptian bondage into the Promised Land, to Canaan, their cherished land from which their very powerful enemies, the whites, have driven them. The white government representative is 'Pharaoh', before whom Moses presents the case of his oppressed people, imploring that his majesty 'let the people go'. In 'Ethiopianism' the 'king' of the Church is this new Moses. He may be able to show his people that he has dared to write to the government in an official letter: 'Your law-abiding black subjects are *repressed, humiliated* and *stigmatized* under your honourable justice, the Union Government.'<sup>11</sup> The fears of the followers of such an out-spoken leader may be genuine, lest 'Pharaoh' harden his heart, and give no consideration to their requests. As Moses for the 'Israelites', the leader of a new movement must therefore be brave, conscious of freeing his people from slavery, and this bravery is tasted mainly in his struggle against white domination, which constitutes the great trail of his career. The struggle for the re-conquest of the Promised Land may be long and difficult, but since it is the Lord who sends Moses, victory will eventually be on the side of the oppressed people of God.

That Kimbangu was a possible political liberator was manifested in the aspirations and messianic expectations of the Nguzists. The prophet's return was to mark the end of the white man's domination in the Congo. He would take the sovereignty upon himself, restoring the old kingdom of the Kongo. In this way, he becomes prophet-king. Commenting on the sense of '*le bâton*' as it appeared in the '*Chants du Ciel*', Balandier informs us that '*le bâton*' is an allusion to that staff of Moses which was transformable into a serpent, and through which God permitted Moses to manifest his power as a prophet. In the traditional context, the carved staff was an insignia, symbol of authority, and in this case reveals Kimbangu as a prophet-king.<sup>12</sup>

In a different sense altogether, liberation from 'Egyptian bondage' also becomes a recurring theme. It is understood in a spiritual sense, in which 'Egypt' stands not only for the bondage of the colonial rule, but also for persistence in sin, lust for power, personal aggrandizement, disunity, and tribalism. In Zaïre, in 1963, having read a text from Leviticus 18.1-5, one preacher went on to say:

What happened at that time also takes place among us today. Many of the Israelites never entered the Promised Land because the fleshpots of Egypt were more important to them. We cling to the past, although we think we have fled from Egypt, we shall not enter the Promised Land if we do not let ourselves be led by Tata Simon Kimbangu. Let us follow his example and make no distinction between Bakongo, Bangala, and Baluba.<sup>13</sup>

The hard-won political and religious independence must be consolidated, as another preacher warns:

Congolese, you forget that this land has been chosen by God, as with the people of Israel. God has also entrusted it into the hands of Papa Simon Kimbangu to guide it. But the men of this land have forgotten this. This is why they shall not eat of the fruits of this land and their fields shall be devastated by strangers.<sup>14</sup>

‘Egypt’ is the image of the colonial oppression, and the departure from there signifies national independence. But according to the preachers and the prophets, the Promised Land has not been reached. To arrive there, it was necessary to leave behind the old ways of sinful life, and turn to God. Total conversion is to be achieved above all by listening to the prophet’s teaching, and in practice by joining his Church.

#### ***‘Moses’ – Founder of Religion (Monotheism)***

Among the many-sided functions of a prophet, one appears to be most outstanding. The messenger of God in Africa has been sent specifically to destroy the power of Satan and establish God’s reign among his people. He is to free them from the spiritual bondage of sin, superstition, witchcraft, thereby destroying the power of the malignant spirits which cause sickness and death. He is a saviour of both soul and body, since for the Africans, as also for the Hebrews, redemption is for the whole man. The individual is thought of as a totality as no dichotomy is seen between body and soul.

In their all-out campaign against idolatry and superstition, the leaders of the Independent Churches have so far succeeded in destroying the belief in the multitude of spirits adored by villagers, putting in their place the One True God of the Hebrews and the Christians. Whatever may be the shortcomings of the Independent Churches, this singular achievement has been appreciated even by their critics. To a large extent they have succeeded in many places where the missionaries failed, thus introducing monotheism among their formerly pagan people, and baptizing them in the name of the Trinity.

#### ***‘Moses’ – the Law-giver***

Like Moses, the African prophet is also a law-giver. The Ten Commandments, as they appear in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, are observed in the Independent Churches, but the prophet may prescribe new laws, or make additions, which are adapted to some particular needs of his followers. A typical example is the

problem presented by the polygamy question. William Harris, the prototype of the Old Testament prophets, was also a law-giver par excellence. He not only prescribed new laws for his followers, but like Moses he had also the power to dispense.

Despite some deviations from the original teachings of Kimbangu during the Ngunzist revolution, it was said that most orthodox Kimbanguists continued to observe the teachings of the prophet. Today the teachings and the laws of the Church are specified in its Constitution. These include the Commandments as set out in Exodus 20.1-7. In addition, the Kimbanguist Church requires all its members to observe the following laws:

Obedience to State authority, in accordance with Romans 13.1-3; mutual love and love for one's enemies, in accordance with Matthew 5.43-5; abstinence from alcoholic beverages, abstinence from smoking, avoidance of obscene dances; no swimming or sleeping naked; abstention from fetishism; payment of taxes; non-retaliation; confession of sin before specially appointed members of the congregation; abstention from pork or monkey meat. Polygamy is prohibited.

These injunctions are surely based on the original teachings of Kimbangu. As with the Mosaic Law, his teachings were, however, to be remodeled and adapted to changing circumstances. But the essential prescriptions of law based on the Scriptures are there.

The 'Church of the Blacks' is an exact copy of all 'prophetic Churches': Kimbangu handed over to his followers new religious laws. He is Moses bringing to his Hebrew people the Pentateuchal Revelation. All the laws were to come from him. He was their founder, in permanent communication with 'Nzambi a Mpoungou', the All-Powerful God. The chief of the Apostles must remember the rules emanating from the Founder of the Church. He cannot give a commandment which does not come from him. The Founder of the '*Mission des Noirs*' has received the laws from God.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

At last the Africans have come to see the liberating hand of God manifested through the activities of their new religious leaders. Attention is now given to their personal problems and yearnings. In the midst of the needy people stands now an ideal charismatic leader, king, saviour, judge, and above all a healer,

taking care also of their bodily ailments. He is in short an embodiment of all their spiritual and worldly longings, a new Moses, that unique prophetic figure in biblical tradition.

Through chance encounter, by the introduction of a friend, or impelled by the desperation of some great anxiety, contact has been established with a prophet... Now, for the first time, a man of God has listened to their individual woes, and then held his iron rod of office over them while they knelt before him ... On the other side there was the man of spiritual authority and power, with strong personal conviction as to his divine resources, prepared to give repeated assistance, and easily accessible. In this situation, the African capacity for faith is revealed and the pastoral relationship issues in many tangible results.<sup>16</sup>

It is not difficult to see how the Independent Churches, localized and involved in the community life, struggling for both religious and political liberty, should need this type of leadership, for it has helped to fill the great vacuum in personal care and guidance of individuals, and what is lacking in enlightenment is made up in conviction.

There is need for a Pastor who is one of the people, desired of, and not imposed upon them; their head, because he is their father, authoritative by virtue of dignity and purity of life; a priestly mediator whose power to bless flows from continual intercession for his people; a shepherd who care for the little goats and she-goats that they may survive their maladies; their ritual representative, who administers the Sacraments in their midst.<sup>17</sup>

## Summary and Conclusion to Part 1

Before passing on to Part 2 of our work, we summarize the points we have discussed so far. The emergence of independent religious movements in Africa cannot be dissociated from those factors which have been responsible for different reformation movements all over the world, past and present. In some cases, movements have arisen as a reaction to certain forces in society which had come to threaten the life of a people. Such could be represented by the 'Ethiopian and messianic' movements in the Independent Churches. African nationalism, as expressed in some of these movements, has been a reaction against colonialism. No doubt after the colonial era these movements quickly disengaged from politics. But where political tension still remains in Africa today, it is not surprising that political aspirations and anti-white campaigns will continue to exert an influence on the Independent Churches, which would otherwise have been purely religious bodies.

We have already pointed out that the idea of attributing the rise of all the Independent Church movements in Africa to political factors is unacceptable. This has also been rejected by some authors who may seem to have left such an impression in their writings. Sundkler would observe:

Claims that political reasons are behind the separatist Church Movements, miss the mark. The few instances of radical party affiliations of certain Ethiopian or Zionist groups do not offer a sufficient proof of any definite political trend; and even admitting of much outspoken anti-white propaganda in most Independent Churches, one should not forget that the attitude of the leaders and masters of these Ethiopians and Zionists has on the whole been loyal, not least during the trying experiences of war.<sup>18</sup>

Criticism of the nationalistic aspirations of these movements does not even seem to have any strong support, especially when it is remembered that in the Yahwistic religion, for example, there did not seem to be any distinction between religion and the state. In our own era, Christianity has accepted nationalism almost as a sacred principle of the life of the Churches.

Following geographical divisions on the continental scale, we have discussed the three principal groups of movement represented by 'Ethiopianism', 'Zionism', and the 'Messianic Churches'. The Ethiopian and messianic Churches are mainly represented in Southern and East Africa, while

the South African ‘Zionist’ group is known as ‘Aladura’ in West Africa. Kimbanguism and the movement inspired by Prophet William Harris have also been represented.

In the second division of the first part of this study, the five popular themes common to all the movements have been discussed. These include ecstatic prophecy and the problem of supernormal experience among the prophets, ‘false’ prophets, the Zion-Jerusalem ideology, faith-healing, and leadership in the Independent Churches.

So far there has been great awareness of the existence of these Church movements and the impact they have made on the religious sentiments of the Africans. In their ability to present their fellow Africans with a more satisfying and dynamic mode of worship in the African way, the prophets and leaders have registered a considerable amount of success in their mission. It is an attempt to bridge the gap between the ‘imported’, lifeless, often boring and abstract, indigestible liturgy of the mission Churches and the lively and emotional African way of expressing religious sentiments.

In their prophetic mission, their claim to be ‘followers’ of the biblical prophets, charismatic leaders, Apostles of Christ, and Evangelists is a very challenging one. For them prophecy has not ceased. God continues to manifest Himself in diverse ways; in the past through the Hebrew prophets and leaders, ushering in the Christian epoch through Christ and his Apostles. But in the ‘last days’, God has also come to manifest himself to the Africans through their leaders and prophets!

## **Part II**

### ***Old Testament Prophetism***

### **The Rise and Function of Prophetic Movements in Israel**

The rise of prophets and charismatic leaders in ancient Israel was surely a gradual process. In tracing the origin of prophecy in Israel, it has been well established that the most important analogies in Old Testament prophecy are to be sought in the ancient Near East, especially in Mari, Egypt, and Canaan, where early prophecy was known to have existed before it spread to Israel.

Tracing this complicated origin of prophecy is not our main objective here. We want to examine the factors which brought these personalities into existence and gave them their sphere of influence. These factors were both political and religious. They also throw light upon the type of function which these prophets and leaders exercised.

In times of national emergency and catastrophe, of political and religious persecution, hopes are raised of leaders and national heroes who will bring about salvation. The ability of the emerging leader to rally his people together in time of crisis, and his possible successes, mark him out as a God-sent saviour.

The struggle which the 'men of the spirit' were to champion in Israel was two-pronged – both political and religious, although there is no clear-cut dichotomy between the two. The first aspect of this struggle had to do with Israel's security. Constantly menaced by more powerful enemies, Israel had suffered one disaster after another. The urgent question is well illustrated in 1 Samuel 11.1ff: 'Who will save the men of Jabeshgilead from the humiliating assault of Nahesh, the Ammonite?' The second front had to do with the discrepancy which had arisen between Yahwism and Baalism. There was need for champions of Yahwism, men who would guard the covenant deliberations and at the same time warn Israel against the grave consequences of defection and rebellion.

### *Socio-Political Factors*

As in all nationalistic struggles everywhere in which patriotism plays a leading role, there is no doubt that hopes incarnated in the Israelite national heroes and leaders had been enormous. Although they owed their charisma and military successes to Yahweh (Judg. 4.15-23), what forced these patriots and enthusiasts into their policy was not unconnected with the struggle for political and religious freedom.

### **THE STRUGGLE AGAINST TYRANNY AND OPPRESSION**

Whether it came from the outside or was found within Israel's own borders, it is certain that the Israelite patriots rose to power in the face of an increasingly cruel misuse of power and the oppressive rule of the leaders and foreign masters, a phenomenon which they saw as a threat to the very existence of the nation. They would soon rise against such evils, and against the tyrants, if need be with force of arms. Israel could not but have wished to have her own and only one master, indicates L. Ramlot. The Exodus event was lived essentially as a definitive liberating experience from pharaonic tyranny.

In Israel, the Charismatics and Prophets appeared, from Moses to John the Baptist, as opponents of tyrants ... That long rejection of tyranny occasioned the vocation of Moses, the Judges, Samuel, the two charismatic Kings, Saul and David. And soon, the prophets were to rise also against the despotism of their very rulers.<sup>1</sup>

Harry Orlinsky sees the value of the Judges for the history of Israel's social and religious evolution as obvious, especially during the period of settlement in the midst of an alien population, which for the most part they seemed to have been unable to subdue.<sup>2</sup>

When, however, a period of oppression at the hands of a foreign foe and of desperate misfortune supervenes, the man whom the crisis produces as leader and deliverer and who at least in some cases (cf. the Song of Deborah, Judg. 5) succeeds in rousing the scattered tribes to such a measure of common action as foreshadows the later unity of Israel as a nation, acts in the name and at the instigation, not of some local Canaanite or Israelite Baal, but of Yahweh.<sup>3</sup>

As Martin Noth points out, the occupation of the 'Promised Land' by the Israelite tribes was not an easy and peaceful one, and went on for a long stretch of time.

But the most important result of the victory from the point of view of the Israelite tribes was undoubtedly the experience which they gained of being, with the help of their God, a match for and even superior to the might of the Canaanite chariots. This meant the disappearance of their feeling of insecurity and fear of the military technique and power of the earlier inhabitants of the land; and so it became possible for the tribes to attain a position of superiority over the Canaanite city state-system.<sup>4</sup>

In the period of the monarchy by righteousness of the king includes first of all the ability to 'save his people from their enemies round about' (1 Sam. 9. 16; 10.1). With his mighty scepter he rules from Zion in the midst of his enemies; Yahweh makes them his footstool (Ps. 110.2, 5f). All his enemies will be clothed with shame (Ps. 132.18). His hands find out all his enemies. At home and abroad he secures to his people justice, prosperity, and salvation.

With the Books of Esther and Judith, and the Books of Maccabees, Jewish thought developed the capacity of resistance of the poor of Yahweh in the face of imperialism. With the Book of Daniel, it forges into an apocalyptic hope and an eschatology of victory over every type of imperialism. The Apocalypse of John appears from the outside to be a point of meeting of all the forces of spiritual resistance, gradually accumulated in biblical propheticism.

One result of the Maccabean revolt and of Roman rule was a growing intolerance of everything foreign, which made foreign domination over the Jews seem increasingly obnoxious. In such circumstances, hope for the future was to concentrate more and more on deliverance from alien rule. The Messiah would be primarily a royal deliverer, the enemy of Rome, a Zealot.<sup>5</sup>

The world power which is to be destroyed is often called Gog and Magog with reference to Ezekiel. In nationalist circles it was, of course Rome that was meant; and it was also called Babylon or Edom, and identified with the last of the four world empires mentioned in Daniel 7.<sup>6</sup>

Although the authenticity of the accounts reflecting Samuel's opposition to the monarchy has been questioned by many scholars, K. H. Bernhardt,<sup>7</sup> has strongly defended the antiquity of that critical attitude in Israel with regard to the monarchy: Here one sees the two lines of the prophetic protest clearly standing out – criticism of autocracy and despotic actions, as well as the condemnation of religious syncretism.

### **NATIONAL HEROES AND THE 'HOLY WAR' IDEOLOGY**

Victory over the 'heathen nations' was thought of as an act of religious war. One of the factors that actually brings a charismatic leader to a position of prominence is therefore distinction for his ability in warfare. It is emphasized that it was a warrior chosen from among the people that Yahweh exalted when he made David king (cf. Ps. 89.20ff). There is no doubt that the same could be said of Saul, the Judges, and the unnamed 'Sons of the Prophets'. The spirit which sets them to action is described as Yahweh's, and the legends often emphasize that they were called to the task of liberation by revelation from Yahweh himself. When the spirit seized them in the hour of crisis, the effect was ecstasy, a high tension of all the powers and faculties of the soul. They 'went in their might', with Yahweh as their protector and helper. There is no mention of a permanent endowment with the Spirit, but of an abnormal communication of power from time to time (Judg. 6.14; 1 Sam. 10.1-9).

## THE NAZARITES

The Nazarite sect (literally, the ‘separated ones’) was a group of charismatics known to have been directly connected with the defensive struggle against the Canaanite religions, the ancient Nazarite was also a warrior. ‘The way in which he served Yahweh was by warring against the nation’s enemies as the champion whose daring feats of arms should inspire his compatriots to heroism in battle.’<sup>8</sup>

The charismatic character of the Nazarite is clearly indicated by the fact that these warlike feats are described as the effects of the spirit of Yahweh (Judg. 13.25; 14.6; 19; 15.14).

As in the case of Samson (Judg. 14.19ff), being possessed by the spirit of the Lord is not comparable with being with human anger, but is clearly differentiated from it. Here we have a new description of the Lord’s nomination which reminds us of the way in which such acts of deliverance were introduced in the time of the Judges. Once again God has brought his help in a time of need as he did before.<sup>9</sup>

According to A. Neher, following the suggestion of Max Weber,<sup>10</sup> it is remarkable that the Judges arose among the Nazarites principally to wage wars. The spirit chooses and constitutes the ‘*chefs militaires*’. For this hypothesis, primitive Hebrew society comprised two classes of warriors – the *guibborim*, the heroes, identified as ‘*guerriers professionnels*’, and besides these, the ‘*guerriers occasionnels*’. In this second group are the Nazarites. It was not political considerations which pushed them into the struggles, but the enthusiasm of faith. Their purpose was the defense of the religious community, observes Neher.<sup>11</sup> Eichrodt sees the direct significance of the Nazarites in their contribution to the strengthening of the sense of nationhood and of the religious basis on which that was built. They were a major factor in keeping the religion of Israel from drifting into a compromise with that of Canaan, and in urging it to assert itself and to develop its unique character to the full.<sup>12</sup>

Their dedication to God and uncompromising allegiance included abstention from wine and guard against all ritual impurity. The stories of Samuel and Samson give us our clearest pictures of such lifelong consecration.

## NABISM

Most early scholars associated the rise of nabism in Israel with the national feelings aroused by Philistine oppression. In this respect, it is asserted that the ‘Sons of the Prophets’ arose as a result of the political conditions of the day and that their chief purpose was patriotic.

They were bands of religious devotees moving throughout Palestine, awakening the patriotism of the people. The Philistine oppression in the time of Samuel gave rise to the prophetic institution.<sup>13</sup>

According to this concept, Saul's meeting with the bands of prophets was for the purpose of permitting these enthusiasts to arouse his patriotic and religious spirit.

The case of 'Saul among the prophets' (1 Sam. 10.19) and the sudden appearance of the ecstatic movements must also be considered from this point of view, namely 'functional purpose'. It seems that it is the psychological and emotional aspect of this meeting which has chiefly interested scholars. But as W. F. Albright rightly points out, 'After many failures [in explanation], it is clear that we must approach this phenomenon from a functional, rather than a genetic point of view.'<sup>14</sup>

According to the above suggestion it follows, then, that nabism in part seems to have developed in the enthusiasm of Israel's Holy Wars, as its activities were most prominent in the days of the Philistine oppression.

What we hear of most exponents of nabism in the time of Saul and David bears witness to their participation in the national struggles. According to von Rad, the legend of 2 Kings 6.8-23 shows that the 'man of God', Elisha, did in fact on occasion engage in enterprises of war whose sacral character was still discernible. The prophets as authorized spokesmen of the people had also an important role assigned to them in warfare (cf. 1 Kings 20.13ff, 22, 28; 22.6, 12, 15; 2 Kings 3.16ff; 6.9). At the same time, the description of the prophet as Israel's true defense is a very forthright slogan, almost suggesting a religious programme which preserves a memory of the Holy War.<sup>15</sup>

Referring to the three passages which report Saul's rise to power, and four more which similarly refer to David, Albright points out that the appearance of *nagîd*' (military leader or king) in the formula of Saul's installation, instead of *melekh*' (king) was intentional. In other words, Saul and David were not meant by Samuel or the tribal heads of Israel to be enthroned as kings or to found dynasties, but only to be anointed as military leaders of the tribal confederation. Of course, observes Albright, in practice, the distinction rapidly became impossible, and the appellation '*melekh*' may well have been used by admirers and sycophants from the beginning.<sup>16</sup>

That the *nagîd* remained a charismatic figure is proved by the tradition concerning the elevation of a *nagîd* from humble origin to command Israel. Saul

the liberator of the men of Jabeshgilead was proclaimed king, and once again we have an impressive description of a day of deliverance.

### **A SAVIOUR, RAISED BY POPULAR ACCLAMATION**

Popular acclamation and rise to power mark the initial successes of the emerging charismatic leader. God's intervention in history is once again manifested through the heroic acts of his chosen ones and the people's security is once again assured, at least for the moment, as the liberation struggle continues. We often see such popular acclamation after Israel's victories over her enemies: By the hands of Gideon, Yahweh delivered Israel from the Midianites' menace – the acclamation: 'Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson, for you have delivered us out of the hands of Midian' (Judg. 8.22). After Saul's victory over the Amonites – the recognition of his popularity: 'Who is it that said: "Shall Saul reign over us?" Bring the men, that we may put them to death' (1 Sam. 11.12).

After Jehu's successful *coup d'état* – 'then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed: "Jehu is King"' (2 Kings 9.13). Even in the New Testament, when the people saw the signs that Jesus did, they were convinced that he was the prophet who was to come into the world, and the natural consequence was that he should be proclaimed king (John 6.14), so strong was the influence of such figures who had gone before him.

### ***Religious Factors***

As we have already pointed out, the circumstances which brought about the rise of charismatic leaders and prophets in Israel have two poles – political and religious – which are not strictly separated. As S. Mowinckel also points out, we must not forget that to the ancients these were not two separate departments of life, but two aspects of the same thing. Even in politics man had to do with the will of God; and it is God who is at work in historical and political events. This may be the outcome of experience of God and of devotion to Him; but it may also arise chiefly from an interest in the temporal, in one's own well-being and power, or those of one's nation.<sup>17</sup>

### **MOVEMENTS AGAINST BAALISM**

The seduction exercised by the cult of Baal on the Israelite settlers constituted one of the fundamental themes of biblical history. It was the great prophets who later named the phenomenon Israel's 'prostitution' or harlotry.

The liberation from Egypt had received its definitive interpretation at the covenant-making at Sinai. The Decalogue sets out the basis of the alliance. It

was an expression of a conviction that moral action is inseparably bound up with the worship of Yahweh. And to spell it out concretely, it was *ethical monotheism* with which Israel was confronted. This constituted the heart of the prophetic message from Moses to the last of the prophets. It was a burning centre of controversy which brought the ‘true’ prophets and ‘false’ prophets into conflict, prophets and kings, priests and in fact, every Israelite who did not walk in the way of Yahweh. The results of the fast-sweeping prophetic campaigns against Baalism are well illustrated in the movement led by Elijah and Jehu (1 Kings 18; 2 Kings 9). ‘How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him.’ It took, however, a Herculean effort to drive the hard facts into the conscience of Israel, forcing the people to make a decision for which no one saw any need.<sup>18</sup>

In the account of the anointing of Jehu and the fall of the reigning dynasty, Elisha was this time directly behind that act of horror. ‘It was he who designated as king this eager partisan of uncontaminated Yahwism, and it is hard to imagine that he could have been blind to the fact that in the struggle against Baal and his worshippers, Jehu was to wade through a sea of blood.’<sup>19</sup>

### **CONDEMNATION OF SOCIAL EVILS**

The incident of Naboth’s vineyard was surely seen as a sign of ‘social crisis’ in Israel. One has there a confrontation between two conceptions – on the one side, the right of the Israelite to private property, property inalienable, since it had to do with the heritage from the fathers; and on the other side Jezebel, who for G. Fohrer represents the discretionary monarchy of the ancient orient which gave to the king, Ahab, the ruling hand over the lands, the resources, and the labour of his subjects.<sup>20</sup>

In the confrontation of Elijah with Ahab, as in that of Nathan with David, King and Word are brought together in a moving conflict. In the Word, through Nathan, is involved the dual indictment for adultery and murder. To Ahab, through Elijah, it is murder and theft – ‘Have you killed and also taken possession?’ (1 Kings 21.19). As B. D. Napier writes:

The divine life confronts beautifully, is involved in, decisively qualifies the life of history. To repudiate it (the people of Israel have forsaken thy Covenant), to delimit it or run in the face of it (have you killed and also taken possession?), to attempt to compromise with it (‘how long will you go limping with two different opinions?’), is not mere folly, but unqualified disaster, the loss of meaning and fulfillment, the imposition of chaos and death.<sup>21</sup>

Isaiah in his day would confront the kings in similar terms:

You! You have devoured the vineyard,  
the loot of the needy is in your houses!  
How is it that you crush my people,  
and grind the face of the needy?  
oracle of the Yahweh Sabbaoth! (Isa. 3. 12 – 15).

‘Troubler of Israel’, that was the Israelite prophet. But the response of the ‘man of God’, ‘I have not troubled Israel, but you have ...’, was an open challenge to the king (1 Kings 18.17f).

But as Ramlot comments, this aggressive dialogue is not one that could be invented. It introduced us into the role of the prophet in Israel. That is no evil word pronounced just to elude the harassed monarch, for God himself would declare to Jeremiah:

I have made you an assayer and tempter (*bahôn*) among my people,  
that you may know and assay their ways (Jer. 6.27f).

The word ‘*Bahôn*’, says Ramlot, is a ‘*hapax*’, but its sense is clear from Jeremiah 6.29-30:

The bellows blow fiercely,  
the lead is consumed by the fire;  
in vain the refining goes on,  
for the wicked are not removed.  
Refuse silver they are called,  
For the Lord has rejected them.<sup>22</sup>

Assessing the ‘permanent religious value of the Judges’, Orlinsky has the following to say:

If it be objected that the editor of Judges is reading into past history the standpoint of his own much later time, and drawing conclusions as to Yahweh’s moral government which could not been drawn by Israel in the time of the Judges, it may be replied that the lesson as deduced by the editor would remain for the instruction of subsequent ages, fortified by the teaching of the later prophets and of our Lord himself, as well as by the experiences of history.<sup>23</sup>

### *Summary and Conclusion*

As we can see, from the two main factors (political and religious) which contributed to the rise of charismatics and prophets in Israel, the functions of prophetism can equally be defined. In the struggle for national independence and freedom from foreign domination and oppression, religious enthusiasm has played a significant role.

The prophets through their messages demonstrated opposition to whatever threatened the life and survival of the nation Israel. In a more dynamic manner the classical prophets continued with the same struggles, but perhaps from a different outlook. The originators, however, are those ancient heroes and charismatic leaders! In many respects they were able to furnish the colours for the portrait of the one great Redeemer, who is to bring order out of life's chaos and set up Yahweh's rule over the sorely pressed land.

Redemptive acts sustained hope and assured security in time of emergency. Although such struggles had had their religious aspects from the very beginning, their political motivations are unmistakable.

As S. Mowinckel points out, these struggles and hopes did in fact influence later Jewish messianism. Prophecy is the true bearer of future hope, and together with the law this hope becomes the leading element in Judaism. By it the pious lived; from it they drew strength when oppressed by time and circumstance.<sup>24</sup>

Ultimately it is rooted in the experience of God which came to an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, or a Deutero-Isaiah. In the East many people had a national religion and a national god whose favour or wrath occasioned the good or bad fortune of the people. Many of them lost their freedom and their country. But none of them produced a future hope and an eschatology which survived for thousands of years and became part of the world's spiritual heritage. It was the religion of Israel, not its national and political aspirations, which created the future hope.<sup>25</sup>

The survival of Israel and her future hope were no doubt the preoccupation of the classical prophets. Jeremiah did not threaten his own nation alone with disaster. In his oracles against nations, he prophesies the destruction of a number of foreign peoples, which include Egypt, Philistine, Moab, Amon, Edom, Syria, Elam, and Babylon – these representing Israel's mortal enemies (cf. Jer. 25.15-38; 46-51).

The prophetic oracles against foreign nations represent also the Holy War ideology. Curses are poured on Israel's enemies and what cannot be executed practically is symbolically demonstrated! (cf. 1 Kings 22; 2 Kings 13.15; Jer. 27.2ff; Isa. 20.2).

The disasters which these oracles picture are always those of wars [observes von Rad]. Since these oracles contain still further elements which derive from the usage of the old Holy War, it becomes all the more probable that this form, the war oracle, belongs to the earliest prophetic tradition. This was the way in which the prophets of Israel who functioned in these wars had once actually spoken when Israel, or rather Yahweh went into battle against the foe.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Figure of Moses in Biblical Tradition**

In view of the prominent position which Moses occupied in the Independent African Churches we have thought it necessary to give a separate and detailed treatment of this unique figure, in the light of modern biblical research. It seems that the old dogmatic presentation of Moses has been entirely accepted by the 'prophetic' Churches in Africa, whose founders are leaders and prophets in the manner in which Moses was. In this chapter, therefore, we want to examine what modern critical investigation has made of the man Moses, and how he now fits into those categories traditionally attributed to him, so as to be able to prove the case of our African prophet-leaders.

When one departs from the theories which present Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, the founder of the Israelite nation and religion, it is natural to consider all the accounts about him therein as historical. As Georg Fohrer points out, the theory that the Pentateuch does not derive from Moses has raised the question of how in fact it came into being. The attempts to answer this question, he observes, have given rise to Pentateuchal study and criticism which have always constituted a significant portion of Old Testament scholarship. The negative conclusions of these attempts have been demonstrated since the eighteenth century by a wealth of studies and arguments of the most varied sort. 'The Pentateuch in fact turns out to be an anonymous work without any suggestions as to its author and without even any indirect hint that Moses was responsible for its total contents; tradition therefore claims more than does the Pentateuch itself about its origin.'

Traditionally, Moses has been seen as a unique figure in the entire history of Israel as it began from the Exodus. He is depicted as 'faithful in the house of Yahweh', and is given a rank above every prophet in Israel (Num. 12.6-8). While Yahweh makes himself known to other prophets only through visions and dreams, he spoke with Moses 'mouth to mouth', and Moses alone was able to behold the form of Yahweh (Num. 12.8).

The magnetic power of the man attracts attention from every stand of biblical material, early or late, which sets its story in the Exodus period. The great variety of roles which this same material ascribes to Moses is an equally impressive phenomenon. He performs almost every function attached to the offices and callings that were subsequently known in Israel. Condensed into this one man are the figures of Prophet, Priest, Judge (a foreshadowing of the future king), a Law-giver, Intercessor, Victor, Exile, Fugitive, Shepherd, Guide, Healer, Miracle-worker, Man of God and Rebel. Moses does not merely assist at the birth of Israel: in him Israel is born. So in closest parallelism, it can be affirmed that God 'made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.'<sup>1</sup>

But with the rise of modern criticism almost all these prerogatives have been removed from Moses. Even his historicity has been doubted, or that anything of historical importance could be said with certainty about his personality and role. It was on this basis, namely, as the normative Old Testament authority, that Moses became a centre of attention from a number of different perspectives since the Enlightenment, with its keen ethical interest particularly in the legal parts of the Old Testament, and the historical-critical approach to the Pentateuch, the 'Five Books of Moses'.

In our present study we shall be concerned mainly with the roles attributed to Moses, with those of the prophet, liberator (saviour), founder of religion and initiator of monotheism, and his role as law-giver. But first we shall summarize the main objections which critics have raised against the traditional figure of Moses, especially as far as his historical position is concerned.

### *The Question of Historicity*

The historicity of the traditions which attribute the multiplicity of functions to Moses has been strongly questioned and in most part rejected since the rise of the critical views associated with Julius Wellhausen. For first-hand information about Moses we depend almost entirely on the biblical narratives. The literary categories which could put these stories in line with our '*geschichtliches Denken*' are said to be saga. It is, however, not denied that in saga '*geschichtliche Erinnerung*' may be preserved. Without doubt it is not chronicle, but it is certainly not 'free fiction' either. It is described as '*Geschichtssaga*'. But we then face the difficulty – 'how is the nut to be separated from the shell?'<sup>2</sup> It is generally accepted that these narratives cannot reveal any sequence or origin of events. Moreover (contrary to former

conceptions), these are now said to date from a later period, very much later than the periods to which the stories were purported to have belonged.

Not only has the authenticity of these narratives been questioned or rejected; that Moses was even a historical personality has equally been denied by some critics. According to the secular historian Eduard Meyer, the historicity of Moses is to be regarded as no longer demonstrable, completely irrelevant, and in the final analysis unacceptable. For Meyer, the figure of Moses as presented in the biblical narratives was not originally linked with a historical personality. Moses belongs exclusively to Kadesh, and is in the genealogical saga the ancestor chief (*Ahnherr*) of the priests of Kadesh and not an historical figure.<sup>3</sup> For J. W. Colenso (one-time bishop of Natal), Moses is 'a personage quite as unhistorical as Romulus and Remus in the history of Rome or as our King Arthur'.<sup>4</sup>

Following the results of his analysis of the traditions of the sacral league of twelve Israelite tribes, Martin Noth's evaluation of the figure of Moses became a radical reversal of the traditional views. For Noth, the federation of the tribes having been constituted only in Canaan, the figure of Moses, with its marginal connection with that land, cannot but be blurred. According to this theory it follows that anything concerning the Mosaic tradition finds firm ground only after the settlement of the twelve tribes in Canaan. The result of Noth's tradition-historical analysis of the Pentateuch was a diminishing of the figure and role of Moses in the biblical tradition. For him Moses was originally not connected with the themes 'guidance out of Egypt', 'guidance in the wilderness', 'revelation at Sinai', or 'guidance into the arable land'. It was only in the course of the elaboration and compilation of the Pentateuch narrative that Moses gradually achieved the commanding position which he now holds in it.<sup>5</sup> Noth was convinced that Moses was originally not a leading figure with Aaron and the Elders of Israel (Exod. 18.12) just silent bystanders. He points out: 'If the person of Moses belongs originally to these materials, it is nevertheless obvious that they already presuppose the rise of Moses to be the great leader between Egypt and the Promised Land, and hence cannot contribute anything further to answering the question of the original provenance of the figure of Moses.'<sup>6</sup>

However, Noth's sceptical judgment as regards the figure of Moses has provoked adverse criticism from some other scholars, as we shall further see, and in his subsequent works, it seems that he has given a more positive evaluation of Moses's place in the Pentateuchal tradition. In his *History of Israel*, he recognized that 'in view of his obviously Egyptian name, one might look for his original role within the framework of the deliverance from Egypt, possibly as the messenger of God who announces the imminent action of God'.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from this, in Noth's conviction, Moses was everywhere a latecomer in transmission history, and the only remaining assured historical fact is that he lived, and that possibly on the occasion of Israelite pilgrimage to the 'Mountain of God', during a peaceful meeting with Midianite pilgrims, Moses took a Midianite woman as wife, and that he finally died.

Although some scholars have a more positive view about the possibility of establishing Moses's historical position, for others the problem still remains: no exact picture may ever be clear.

### *Moses – the Prophet*

Moses is called *nabî*' and in the Deuteronomic perspective he is the model, the ideal prophet (Deut. 18.18). In what sense is Moses called a prophet? Such a presentation is generally regarded by critics as a retrospection arising from the events of the very late periods. In identifying Moses as a prophet, 'E' and 'D' inform us not so much about Moses as about the best expectations for the prophets, in respectively the eighth, perhaps, and the mid-seventh centuries.<sup>8</sup>

According to Gressmann, the call of Moses as recorded in Exodus contains many layers of tradition. The one which he identifies as *'israelitisch'* represents a later form of saga. It is to be supposed, he points out, that it was for the first time related after the successful liberation event, since according to this view all vocation accounts used to be invented *a posteriori*.<sup>9</sup>

Noth does not regard any attribution of the title 'prophet' to Moses as authentic. He dismisses the two passages in Numbers 11.4-35 and 12.2-9 (where Mosaic relationship to prophecy is first attested) as not belonging to this context where elements of popular narrative within the Pentateuch are under discussion. In Noth's view, these passages have their proper place in the consideration of literary elaboration.<sup>10</sup> He gives this interpretation specifically to the passage in which Moses is presented as pre-eminently the bearer of 'prophetic spirit' (Num. 11.25-30). 'Since this passage contains reflection about the nature of the "prophet" and about the relation of Moses to prophecy', he says, 'it clearly presupposes the historical appearance, not of the ecstatic prophetic movement, but of individual prophetic figures.'<sup>11</sup>

There are, however, some critics who accept the authenticity of the traditions which portray Moses as a prophet. H. E. Ewald considers Moses in the first place to be a prophet, and understands the events in Egypt as religious struggle. He sees all the prophetic activities of the later period as going back to Moses.<sup>12</sup> Both Vatke and Volz also accept the prophetic role of Moses, especially in relationship to the well-known Israelite prophets.<sup>13</sup>

Referring to the figure of the ideal prophet and his functions in Israel, B. D. Napier<sup>14</sup> observes that it was on this note that the discussion began, namely,

that the historical Moses appropriately heads the list of Old Testament prophets. 'E' and 'D' were therefore not wrong in making the identification. But for our purpose, he says, the great question of the 'historical Moses' must be considered as of secondary importance. The real issue is to comprehend the true nature and function of prophetism in Israel. The figure of Moses which is ours from the biblical narrative is already prophetically interpreted even by the Yahwist. This is a Moses who lived in prophetic experience in Israel, not a figure of the past, but as the first of a line of prophets who in the present are continuing to bring Israel up from Egypt into existence under God.

### *Moses – the Liberator*

Biblical tradition, as we have already indicated, presents Moses also as a 'liberator' 'saviour' or 'deliverer', a champion of liberty from tyranny and oppression, a '*Volksbefreier*'. This is one of the most attested functions of his mission – deliverance of his people from Egypt, from the house of slavery, an affirmation which recurs frequently from the Pentateuch to the last books of the Old Testament, and in all forms of literature, historical books, prophets, and psalms; and which became a fundamental article of Israel's faith.

According to the accounts in Exodus 1.8-22 and 2.23, the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt was attributed to the rise of a new king who did not know Joseph (1.8), and also to the increase in the number of the Israelites which constituted a danger to the Egyptians (1.9-10), hence the suppression of the new-born males (1.15-22). The climax of the oppression was, however, the forced labour on construction work to which the Israelites were subjected. According to the narratives concerning the vocation of Moses, he had been chosen by Yahweh to 'free' these oppressed clansmen from the Egyptian bondage and to bring them into the 'Promised Land'.

In the face of modern criticism, there is almost no point of these narratives that has not been disputed. What was Moses's actual role as mediator between the oppressed people and Pharaoh? Did Moses as he set out with the group from Egypt merely want to free them from the Egyptian slavery; or had he also the intention of turning these nomads into sedentary folk? As for the 'Promised Land', had Moses from the beginning of his mission an eye on Canaan? Or was the memory of the 'Canaan of the Fathers' present to him as a hope, or an idea which occurred to him at a certain stage of the wandering? How many Israelite tribes actually participated in this event, or were all the twelve tribes involved? Before the conquest of this 'Promised Land', the Israelites were to sojourn in Kadesh for 'forty' years!

For many critics, it is almost impossible to detect any historical fact in the narratives. As De Vaux observes, judging from the contents of this deliverance-

tradition, there is no doubt that it is a fruit of literary composition incorporating diverse elements – legends, epics, myths, and liturgy. It is, moreover, difficult to determine the respective roles of Moses and Aaron.<sup>15</sup>

### **HOW DID THE LIBERATION EVENT COME ABOUT?**

For M. Noth, ‘That the Israelites, who had probably gone to Egypt in the first place only under the pressure of dire distress and had been forced to submit to compulsory labour amid conditions of slavery, finally longed to recover their old freedom is understandable.’<sup>16</sup> But, as he points out, historically it is impossible to say much for certain about the circumstances surrounding this migration from Egypt. He does, however, suggest that, contrary to the will of the Egyptians, whose interests were concentrated on building activities under Rameses II and who did not want to lose this labour force, the Israelites might have escaped from Egypt. It was this adventure that involved them in conflict with the Egyptian power, from which the mighty hand of their God delivered them. John Bright affirms: ‘If Israel saw in this (event) the hand of God, the historian certainly has no evidence to contradict it!’<sup>17</sup>

M. Buber defines the situation of the Israelites in Egypt as that of nomads who struggle to conserve their vitality and cohesion in a more evolved and state-controlled sedentary society.<sup>18</sup> In his view the liberation was effected when Moses wanted to manifest the unity of the people by a ‘consumed banquet’, an ancient Semitic feast which became for the Israelites a sacramental meal of the Passover. A clan feast of the shepherds was thus transformed into a national feast of the Passover, celebrating the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt.

### **HAD THE ISRAELITES AN EYE ON THE LAND OF CANAAN AFTER THEIR LIBERATION?**

Was Kadesh, where the Israelites evidently sojourned for a good length of time, not actually the goal of their wandering? How did the idea of the ‘Promised Land’ arise? These are some of the questions posed by critics in this connection. According to Gressmann, the Hebrews dwelt in Kadesh for about a generation. But whether the oasis earlier belonged to Amelek or to Kinsmen of the Hebrew tribes is not within anybody’s guess, he says. He points out that in Kadesh Moses gave Israel a political organization (cf. Exod. 18.13ff).<sup>19</sup>

In E. Auerbach’s view, the goal of the Exodus was not Canaan but Kadesh. He explains the departure from Kadesh as a result of the increase in the Israelite population, which set out to join the other tribes. These were presumably the tribes of Reuben and Gad, which had already settled in the Transjordan. Thanks to the accounts in Chapter 1 of the Book of Judges and

other traditions it is possible to reconstruct the list of the tribes that sojourned in Egypt.<sup>20</sup>

What is the ‘truth’ then concerning the ‘Promised Land of the Fathers’? M. Buber thinks that the whole idea came to Moses for the first time during the sojourn in Kadesh, at the beginning of the experiences of a sedentary life, and that it came as an urgent need for a settled life and the tilling of the earth.<sup>21</sup> For Wellhausen, the departure of the tribes from Kadesh was a result of pressure from the Amorites. It was therefore *provoked*, according to this view.<sup>22</sup>

In Moses’s confrontation with Pharaoh, one of the motives given for the request to leave Egypt was for a pilgrimage, ‘a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God’ (Exod. 3.18). As De Vaux points out: ‘Either ... Moses deceived Pharaoh as regards the motive and limit of the departure or ... this tradition was never orientated towards the taking of Canaan, but towards a return to the place where Yahweh had revealed himself.’<sup>23</sup> According to De Vaux, the latter is the more probable solution, and the consequence therefore is that this tradition originally belonged to that of Sinai. In fact, the same source, ‘J’, knew only three encampments (three ‘days’) between the departure from Egypt and the stay at Sinai. The importance of Kadesh in Israel’s early history is therefore recognized by authors, most of whom see it not as a mere ‘transit-camp’ but a year-long dwelling-place. In this view, Kadesh was seen as the scene of ‘*mosaischen Geschichte*’ or as ‘*Werdezeit Israels*’. Although the story of the wilderness-wandering is hard to reconstruct, J. Bright admits that it was during this period that Israel received her distinctive faith and became a people. This according to him can scarcely be doubted.<sup>24</sup>

### **WHAT ROLE DID ‘MOSES THE LIBERATOR’ REALLY PLAY?**

From some existing possible historical facts H. Gunkel reconstructs the following picture:

While the forefathers of the Israelite tribes were under the pressing Egyptian bondage, help came to them from outside, through Moses, a relation of theirs, who in the name of his God, Yahweh, called for the liberation of the people. After a lucky escape, Moses gathered the tribes at Sinai and united them in a covenant with Yahweh. There he introduced new legislation, which was perhaps of Midianite origin. After the departure from Sinai, Moses dwelt with the people for a long time in Kadesh and afterwards led them into East Jordan.<sup>25</sup>

The conquest of the ‘Promised Land’ was surely not an easy one. That was to be the task of the successors of Moses. Of utmost importance, however, was that Moses who initiated the liberation struggle in Egypt also succeeded to a certain extent in leading those wandering nomads into a ‘land’ which gave them a sense of belonging to a free and independent nation.

### *Moses – Founder of Israelite Religion*

It has been held by some critics that Hebrew monotheism originated within the prophetic movement of the later period; in short, that it was Amos and his successors who created monotheism. This is in contrast to the tradition which says that the name of Yahweh was first revealed at the call of Moses, and that the worship of Yahweh, the only one powerful God, goes back to Moses. That ‘Yahweh’ is not a newly-invented title for God is nowadays admitted by all, affirms Albrecht Alt.<sup>26</sup> As De Vaux points out, even ‘J’ which adopts the name Jahweh throughout the Pentateuchal narrative from the vocation of Abraham onward (Gen. 12.1), shows the Yahweh cult as going right back to the origin of humanity, to the time of Enosh, son of Seth (Gen. 4.26). In view of these divergent opinions we shall briefly examine the theories regarding the origin of Israelite religion.

### **THE RELIGION OF THE PATRIARCHS**

The notion of ‘God of the Fathers’ is disputed among scholars. There is the so-called ‘Midianite’ or ‘Kenite’ theory, which holds that Yahweh was originally not only the God of some pre-Israelite clans, but was in the first place the ‘*numen*’ (dwelling near Sinai), and that a considerable number of nomadic clans made pilgrimages to him.<sup>27</sup> Although Alt saw faith in the ‘God of the Fathers’ as an essential root of Israel’s religion, he points out that the oldest tradition contains several indications that the worship of Yahweh was located at a mountain sanctuary in the desert, visited and used – perhaps exclusively at first – by other tribes besides the Israelites. The so-called inscriptions of the Nabatean pilgrims at the foot of the holy mountains in the Sinai Peninsula confirms this theory, he says.<sup>28</sup>

From this angle, then, there is no difficulty in supposing that the Israelite tribes took part at the same time in the worship of the gods whose titles appear here and there in the sagas of their Patriarchs in Genesis.<sup>29</sup>

The religion of Canaan, with its numerous deities, undoubtedly exercised a strong and persistent influence upon the Israelite tribes. It was a polytheistic

religion, and the head of the pantheon was known as 'El'. 'El' was said to be the 'father of all gods' (a kind of Canaanite Zeus), 'father of mankind', 'created of all things', 'father of ages'. He was pictured as an old man with a white beard, 'wise', 'benevolent', 'merciful'; and was thought to dwell in a mysterious place at the extremity of the world, at the sources of springs or rivers, or in the abyss. He was regarded as the supreme arbiter and guardian of cosmic order who adjudicates between gods and men.

Tradition identifies the religion of the Patriarchs as that of the people of Israel, and Abraham is said to have adored the same God as Moses. According to 'P', Yahweh is the same God who manifested himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as *El Shaddai* (Exod. 6.3). The same term appears several times in some of the Old Testament books.<sup>30</sup>

### **WAS MOSAIC RELIGION MONOTHEISTIC?**

Considering the above facts, one may be justified in asking whether Israelite religion was originally monotheistic, or whether the idea of 'only one God' really began with Moses.

Some scholars have doubted that the Pentateuchal documents can afford reliable information concerning the actual beliefs of the Mosaic age. The lofty idea of God and the strong ethical elements in the biblical accounts, as well as the notion of Covenant itself, were accordingly widely held to be projections of later beliefs. As a result, the religion of early Israel has been conventionally described as *henotheism* (that is, the exclusive worship of a tribal god in which the existence of the patron deities of other peoples was not denied). It was therefore believed that *ethical monotheism* emerged in Israel only during and after the Exile, and that it was a result of the work of the prophets. In this connection it is explained that when the Israelite nomads entered into contact with the settlers of Canaan, they also rendered worship to the gods of the place without abandoning their own patron God. The progress of sedentary life led to further religious syncretism and eventually the 'God of the Fathers received a proper name'.<sup>31</sup>

Although J. Bright admits that it would be difficult to ascertain whether the God called Yahweh had been worshipped before Moses, he maintains that 'we may be certain that through Moses, Yahwism was completely transformed and given a new content. It is with Moses that Israel's distinctive faith begins.'<sup>32</sup> Bright has no doubt that Israel brought the worship of Yahweh with her from the desert, or that the faith was communicated to her in the desert by some great religious personality, namely, Moses. Bright sees Israel's notion of God as unique in the ancient world as a phenomenon which defies any rational explanation.

Israel's religion rested in no abstract theological propositions, but in the memory of historical experience as interpreted by and responded to in faith. She believed that Yahweh, her God, had by his mighty acts rescued her from Egypt and, in Covenant, had made her his people.<sup>33</sup>

E. Auerbach is convinced that it was Moses who created monotheism, which substituted the ancient representation and conceptions of the divinity, still discernible from the sagas. According to Auerbach:

For the first time in the history of the human spirit, divinity is conceived as a moral being and it is in this orientation that Israelite monotheism has its root. This is neither a philosophical nor a theoretical monotheism. It was Moses who made the Israelite religion surpass the magic state.<sup>34</sup>

As Gressmann points out, the Hebrews of the pre-Mosaic religion was polytheists. While Genesis manifests 'El-religion', he observes, Exodus manifest 'Yahweh-religion'. This, according to him, is a sure sign that faith in Yahweh must have been introduced in Israel through Moses. Yahweh, the God of Sinai, originally the God of the Midianites, became God of Israel through Moses.<sup>35</sup> H. H. Rowley expresses a similar view. According to him, Moses would have been born to an Israelite group related by marriage to the Kenites, worshippers of Yahweh. After the Exodus and the conclusion of the Covenant with Yahweh, the God of the Kenites became the God of Israel on the basis of the Decalogue in Exodus 20.<sup>36</sup>

If things stand like this, the Yahwist's presentation of Yahweh as the God invoked by Abraham must be anachronistic (cf. Gen. 4.26), and 'J' thus at variance with the evidence which we have elsewhere, that the name of Yahweh was introduced to the Israelites by Moses (Exod. 3.13ff). 'What the Israelite authors said about the God of Abraham, etc., is usually dismissed as a purely literary artifice without a solid basis in the tradition that lay behind them,' points out Albrecht Alt.<sup>37</sup>

In spite of the objections of certain scholars, the evidence that Moses must have played a very significant role in shaping the faith of Israel is, as we have seen, strong. As W. H. Albright points out:

Today the critical views associated with the name of Julius Wellhausen no longer hold the field undisputed. There is certain

agreement among scholars that we cannot understand Israel's religion or its political history – even its literature – unless we begin by recognizing the monotheism of Moses.<sup>38</sup>

Martin Noth's sceptical views have also been rejected. According to him: 'To describe Moses as the "founder of a religion", or even to speak of a "Mosaic religion", is quite misleading and incompatible with the Moses-tradition as it was developed later on.'<sup>39</sup>

The 'evolutionist theory' concerning Israelite religion has equally been abandoned, as well as that which holds the prophets to be the harbingers of 'ethical monotheism'. It is to a large extent accepted by authors today that *true* monotheism began with Moses. Y. Kaufmann talks of the '*revolution monothéiste*' and the '*mort des dieux*'.<sup>40</sup>

De Vaux admits that Moses did not 'found' a religion in the sense that he fixed the teachings and established the institution. That it became a world religion was surely the work of other 'men of God' and of God Himself. But the originator of this movement was Moses. It was he who planted that extraordinarily fruitful seed as the first servant of God (Exod. 14.31). It is in this sense, says De Vaux, that one could speak of 'a Mosaic religion', and should try to determine the traits of this primitive Yahwism.<sup>41</sup>

### *Moses – the Law-giver*

Moses, the prophet, the liberator, the originator of monotheism, is also known as 'a law-giver'. The Decalogue is traditionally called the 'Law of Moses'. As his other roles in the Israelite religion have been disputed, so also has his figure as a law-giver. The question thus arises, whether the Pentateuchal laws, or at least the Decalogue, can be traced back to Mosaic origin, and in what sense Moses can rightly be called a law-giver.

Some critics deny any Mosaic origin of the Decalogue. For M. Noth, 'Of the various laws which were later added to the story of Sinai, as precise indications of the obligations of the covenant, none can be traced back with any certainty to the original content of the tradition and most of them do not even go back to its earliest literary version.'<sup>42</sup>

As far as Moses is concerned, Noth denies that he had any historical connection with the event which took place on Sinai. 'Historically, it is therefore hardly justifiable to describe him as the organizer and law-giver of Israel.'<sup>43</sup>

Other critics who deny the Mosaic origin of the Decalogue point out that some of the laws it contains could not have been promulgated earlier than the Exilic or post-Exilic period. For Wellhausen, the law should be seen as a

product of the spiritual development of Israel, and not a point of departure. The whole legislation as found from the Exodus to Numbers is to be seen as post-Exilic documentation. Wellhausen unfolds his great thesis under the catchword: '*das Gesetz gehört hinter die Propheten*'.<sup>44</sup> For S. Mowinckel, although old tradition lay behind the accounts of Yahweh's revelation at Sinai, the Decalogue represents a collection which grew up over a considerable period of years. For its '*Sitz im Leben*', Mowinckel draws attention to several elements which betrayed a connection with features of Israelite worship, especially in the pre-Exilic celebration of the festival of Yahweh's enthronement and the Covenant renewal.<sup>45</sup> He also sees the influence of the prophets in the formulation of the Decalogue. Referring to the Psalmists' emphasis on the offering up of praise, prayer, thanksgiving, and penitential prayer, Mowinckel concludes: 'It is an outcome of ideas which might possibly grow out of the soil of cultic religion – out of the spirit prevailing in the *tôrâ* – liturgy – but which are likely to have been stimulated also by the prophetic movement.'<sup>46</sup>

In his *Origins of Israelite Law*, Albrecht Alt discusses the so-called 'casuistic' and 'apodeictic' laws. Judging from their contents, especially of the first type, Alt concludes that these laws presuppose the cultural conditions of a village or city civilization such as was indigenous to Canaan, and are therefore not a specifically Israelite phenomenon. Their stylistic characteristics, he points out, can be found in non-Israelite legal codes, e.g. in the Code of Hammurabi.<sup>47</sup> The discovery of the code of Hammurabi in 1902 has thus been very fortunate for biblical scholars. The family customs of the Patriarchs – marriage, concubinage, inheritance, etc. – appeared to conform to the legislation of that Code, and certain authors estimate that Patriarchal society was served by the laws of the sovereigns of Babylon.

W. G. Lambert points out specifically that the oldest Hebrew civil code, the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 21-3), has some close parallels with the laws of Hammurabi and the earlier Mesopotamian laws.

The so-called '*lex talionis*', with its 'eye for an eye' and 'tooth for a tooth' for example, says Lambert, first appeared in Mesopotamia, in the laws of Hammurabi, where it is enunciated explicitly for bodily injury and the principle appears in a number of other laws: e.g. that if a house collapses and kills the owner's son, the builder's son shall be put to death.<sup>48</sup> Lambert explains the similarity between the Sumero-Babylonian codes and the Israelite Book of the Covenant as that of parallel development rather than one of borrowing, unlike the traditions in Genesis 1-11. He doubts that this seemingly retrogressive '*lex talionis*' could have originated with Hammurabi. He explains:

On the contrary, Hammurabi was an excellent and just administrator of his empire. He was, however, an Amorite in origin, and the most plausible explanation of the facts in that the 'eye for an eye' and 'tooth for a tooth' was an old Amorite legal precept that reached Babylon and the Hebrews from a common origin.<sup>49</sup>

In distinguishing between casuistic and apodeictic laws, Alt's theory maintains that the Israelites adopted the Canaanite casuistic law shortly after their entry into Palestine. But in the apodeictic laws, Alt detects a number of small passages which provide clear evidence of the forcible imposition upon casuistic law of a law different both in form and content. These he identifies as presumably Israelite in origin.

As a law-giver, it seems then that the principal role of Moses has been the introduction of those imperative laws which contrast strongly with the rest of Near Eastern law-codes, and there is strong reason to attribute to Moses the paternity of that complex legislation which is the Code of the Covenant. This is also the view expressed by Alt when he writes:

But since the worship of Yahweh, with which the Apodeictic law is inseparably linked, clearly originates from the desert, we can presume the same source for the basis of the Apodeictic law, if not for the extant examples in their present form. This would partly explain its severity, and the sharp contrast between it and the Canaanite law. So the assertion of the canonical text, with which our investigation began, that all law in force in Israel came down from the occasion when the Covenant was made in the time of Moses, is to some degree confirmed for at least one category of law.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Summary and Conclusion***

Moses, the long acknowledged ideal leader and prophet of Israel, has certainly lost a lot of influence as a result of critical views associated with Wellhausen and other subsequent schools. But it is surprising with what force scholars of more moderate views have attacked these sceptical theories concerning the figure of Moses. In the face of the misty figure (*Nebelgestalt*) of Moses, there have been attempts to rediscover what this personality must have looked like.

As we have seen in the different roles attributed to Moses by tradition, there have been clashes of opinion among scholars. We have presented both the extreme and the moderate views. While the traditional view is that Moses was

truly all that had been attributed to him in the biblical narratives, scholars with more negative views are sceptical about the authenticity of those assertions, and therefore dispute or deny completely that there is any historical value in the narratives. We are now left with the summary of the views we consider as 'moderate'. Generally they recognize to a certain extent the Mosaic origin of some of the biblical narratives concerning the figure of Moses.

For Sönderbloom, it is arbitrary to doubt the existence of Moses, since without him, Yahweh and the '*Religiongeschichte Israels*' would have been a puzzle to historians. He finds it impossible to see the creative epoch as occurring in the period of the Writing Prophets, since, in his view, these only continued the work of Moses.<sup>51</sup>

In H. Gunkel's view, Moses is more than a founder of Israel's confederation. He is founder of religion, leader, Judge, in one man; and never again did Israel produce such a figure of both religious and political stature.<sup>52</sup> Although he has been super-elevated through saga, as a figure full of life and blood, in searching for an adequate term to describe his many-sided activities both Osswald and Eichrodt designate him as an ideal charismatic leader.<sup>53</sup>

Martin Noth's sceptical views about Moses have been criticized by some authors, including J. Bright and B. W. Anderson. Bright has criticized as inadequate Noth's method of reconstructing the early history of Israel. He admits, however, the existence of difficulties confronting such a work, but has no doubt that Moses was

as the Bible portrays him, the great founder of Israel's faith. Attempts to reduce him are extremely unconvincing. The events of Exodus and Sinai require a great personality behind them. And a faith as unique as Israel's demands a founder, as surely as does Christianity – or Islam, for that matter. To deny that role to Moses would force us to posit another person of the same name!<sup>54</sup>

Bernard Anderson for his own part points out that the scepticism about Moses has not been accepted as an inescapable conclusion by German scholars who stand under the influence of Alt, Noth, and Von Rad. On the German scene, he observes, a number of younger scholars, using a traditio-historical method, have concluded that Moses was firmly rooted in the oldest Pentateuchal tradition.<sup>55</sup> Anderson is optimistic that on the basis of the present post-Nothian trends and the re-evaluation of the traditio-historical method, a more serious approach will be taken toward the 'actual historical memory' which constitutes the bedrock of the tradition concerning Israel's faith. He observes:

Already, the new quest for the historical Moses is leading to a greater appreciation of the decisive importance of the figure of Moses. We cannot turn the clock backward and maintain that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch in the traditional sense; yet in the present stage of historical research it is likewise unnecessary to go to the opposite extreme and say that Moses was only peripherally related to the origins of the Pentateuch. It is still true that, as the first prophet of Israel, Moses was in some sense the founder of Israel's religion and the fountain-head of Israelite tradition.<sup>56</sup>

Certainly doubts about the exact picture of Moses will still remain, but with E. Reuss we conclude that 'what is decisive in the figure of Moses is not "*what*", but "*that*" Moses did something, anyway'.<sup>57</sup>

## 13

### **Ecstatic Prophecy and Supernormal Experience of the Israelite Prophets**

The rise of the rationalistic spirit of the eighteenth century in relation to the new biblical research also marked a great turning point in the re-evaluation of the traditional figure of the Israelite prophet, and of some of the phenomena connected with prophecy. The contention that Israel borrowed most of her

religious ideas, including prophecy, from her Near Eastern neighbours was strong. In this connection, it has been suggested that the rise of Israelite prophecy coincided with the appearance of the groups of ecstatics as recorded in 1 Samuel 10 and 19, a phenomenon identified as Canaanite in origin. Proof of this proposition has also been sought in the reports concerning the ecstatic manifestations in Byblos around 1100 BC, as recorded in the travel document of the Egyptian Wen-Amon.<sup>1</sup> The conclusion thus reached was that the initial Israelite prophetic experiences had Canaanite roots; and on the presupposition of a basic similarity between all religious phenomena, prophetic states were equated with the raptures of such ecstatic pagan prophets of the ancient Near East as the Indian fakirs, the Greek orgiasts, and the Arabian dervishes.

By accumulating such diversified material, scholars believed that they had penetrated into the historical roots and the structure of the prophetic consciousness; some maintaining the view that every prophetic message as recorded in the Scriptures arose out of ecstatic experience, that is, in a state of frenzy and abnormality. The result was that the discussion of those strange and mysterious actions of the Israelite prophets to which the term '*ecstasy*' was applied, has for a long time attracted the attention of scholars. As O. Eissfeld points out: 'The main reason for this is that this question touches or appears to touch the religious and theological value of the prophets, since according to the thinking of many scholars, the admission of an abnormal or even supernatural state of experience and action would endanger the worth of the divine revelation in the pronouncements of the "Great Prophets", and much more so if one admits that there was great similarity between them and the "false" prophets whom they denounced.'<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, we shall examine these 'supernormal' phenomena under the following headings. (1) The basic features of ecstatic phenomena; (2) The figure of the Israelite prophet in modern critical research; (3) 'spirit-possession'; (4) stimulation to ecstasy: music and dance; (5) modes of divine communication of revelation; (6) symbolic actions and magic; (7) prophecy and 'divination' (inquiry of the Lord).

### ***The Basic Features of Ecstatic Phenomena***

Some critics claim that the psychological explanation of what had hitherto proved to be an enigma has helped to solve the riddle of how religious movements have come into being. Prophetic inspiration is assumed to have been a form of ecstasy. Different theories have been propounded, as we shall see, some scholars endeavouring to interpret prophecy by using the findings of modern psychology and history of religion.

The Greeks who coined the word ecstasy (*ekstasis*), understood it quite literally to be a state of trance in which the soul was no longer in its place, but

had departed from the body; or a state in which the soul, escaping from the body, had entered into a relationship with invisible beings or become united with a deity.<sup>3</sup>

The ecstatic state was thus regarded as a way of ascending to a higher form of living, or at least a way which rendered possible the receiving of supernatural endowments. From a psychological point of view, ecstasy is described as:

A withdrawal of consciousness from circumference to centre; a state in which the absorption of the mind in one idea, in one desire, is so profound that everything else is blotted out, a state in which consciousness of self disappears. Such a condition, it is said, could be brought about by preparation and could as well be induced by the use of narcotics, alcohol, music and dancing. It could also come by contemplation and complete spiritual concentration as well as by prayer.<sup>4</sup>

Ecstasy is classified as being of two kinds: (1) The wild or fervid type, described as a state of frenzy arising from the over-stimulation and emotional tension, in which case one is said to be possessed by the spirit. It is often accompanied by abnormal manifestations – gasping, groaning, babbling, and uttering of strange and meaningless sounds, and the performance of frivolous antics. (2) The second, more sober or contemplative type, is described as a rapture of the soul in a state of complete calmness, enabling a person to rise beyond the confines of consciousness.

In the early Church, it seemed that some of the Fathers of the Church understood ecstasy in the same psychological terms. Athenagoras would say that the Spirit used the prophets just as a flute player blows a flute, thus reflecting a state of unconsciousness or rapture. For Justin Martyr the Spirit, ‘as a divine plectrum, descending from heaven’, used the prophets ‘like a cither or lute’. For Tertullian, ecstasy was a hallmark of the supreme prophetic state.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously the character of the Montanist ecstatic movement must have caused a lot of concern and disgust among the Church Fathers, who declared ecstasy incompatible with true prophecy. ‘How can the spirit of wisdom and knowledge deprive anyone of his senses?’<sup>6</sup>

Historians have pointed out that the strange phenomenon often referred to as ‘speaking in tongues’, or glossolalia, has always appeared in Christian revival movements, up till today. It is said that in the tenth century this phenomenon was condemned by the Pope as demon-possession.<sup>7</sup>

With the rise of modern biblical criticism and the application of the findings of psychology, more light has been thrown upon this ecstatic phenomenon, especially as far as it is related to prophecy. In this connection, we shall now examine the opinions of some scholars, exponents of ‘ecstatic theories’.

### ***The Figure of the Israelite Prophet and the Problem of Ecstasy***

Judging from the type of picture presented by some of the biblical prophets, both earlier and later, some critics seem to depict the Israelite prophets as crude and abnormal personalities, little different from similar ecstatic figures in Oriental heathenism. They are portrayed as dervish-like fanatics. Their ecstatic excitement is described as infectious, and the terms used to refer to these fellows: ‘slavering’, ‘dribbling’ in the sense of prophesying, or ‘mad fellow’ as used to designate a prophet, speak for themselves.<sup>8</sup> ‘The proverbial expression, “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (1 Sam. 10.11ff) implies that behaviour like that of the prophets was beneath a man of good family. The question uttered by one of those who witnessed Saul’s behaviour in the midst of the raving prophets (“and who is their father?”) suggests that the prophets were despised as being of lowly and obscure origin.’<sup>9</sup>

It is therefore maintained by some critics that the distinctive feature of Israelite prophecy was ecstasy, and that there was nothing unique about prophecy in Israel.

The passages which critics usually cite to prove their theories include those found in 1 Samuel 10.5ff; 19.22-24, where the effective and contagious power of ecstasy is described. Saul’s meeting with the bands of prophets resulted in contagious ecstasy, and his behaviour was strange enough: ‘And he stripped off his clothes and prophesied, and lay naked all that day and all that night’ (19.24). In the story about the messengers sent by Saul to take David, the contagious nature of this phenomenon is evident: three times messengers were sent, but all three groups fell into ecstasy at the mere sight of a company of ecstatic prophets (1 Sam. 19.18f). In the narrative in 1 Kings 22 it is said that the four hundred prophets who assembled before the kings of Israel and Judah on the eve of the attack against Ramoth-gilead ‘raged in ecstasy before the kings’. There are other examples too which are cited as strange prophetic behaviour, described as the effect of divine action, and of possession by the Spirit.

#### **A. KUENEN**

Kuenen,<sup>10</sup> together with Duhm, was preoccupied with the problem of whether the numerous descriptions of visions and states of violent exaltation and strange

behaviour found in the prophetic books correspond to real live experience. He considers the visions and the reported ecstatic manifestations simply as literary makeshifts, devised to introduce peculiar imagery into the accounts. Kuenen also sought to derive the term '*nabi*' from a Canaanite verb, meaning 'to bubble', 'groan', or 'seethe', and thought that it arose from the incoherent or at least disjointed utterances of the ecstatic, conforming to the prophetic exaltation of the prophets of Baal. Kuenen's ideas were taken over also by other scholars, such as Wellhausen, Kautzsch, Guthe, and Harpa. And today the list extends to yet other names such as Hölscher, Smend, and Haldar.

### **W. WUNDT**

In the second volume of his work,<sup>11</sup> Wundt<sup>12</sup> considers the problem of ecstatic experiences in relation to religious factors, and in particular, in relation to prophecy and visions. From his findings, he concludes that visions experienced in both dreams and waking states are only the results of strange states of psychic agitation. Strong sensations, prolonged states of tension, could in fact provoke phenomena like visions, daydreaming, hallucinations; and it is not possible to draw any line of demarcation between them, Wundt claims. He affirms that these abnormal psychological states, which characterize religious manifestations, should in all probability be considered typical of the activities of the Hebrew prophets, for whom visions and states of ecstatic exaltation or depression must have appeared to correspond to experiences they were actually living through.

### **G. HÖLSCHER**

Hölscher's<sup>13</sup> view about the problem is summarized in his thesis that: 'All the canonical prophets, from the first to the last, are ecstatics.' He considers the whole prophetic movement as characterized by ecstatic manifestations, which he sees as a phenomenon extraneous to original Hebrew religion, and in fact communicated to Israel through contact with her neighbours. Hölscher lumps all Israelite prophets together and declares that they were men to whom ecstatic experience was not foreign. The historical problem thus became that of determining the relationship between these experiences and the content of the prophetic message. Hölscher's theories have been further propagated by A. Jepsen, T. J. Meek, and R. Knight.

### **T. H. ROBINSON**

Robinson<sup>14</sup> seems to be an ardent supporter of the 'ecstatic interpretation' of classical prophecy. He sees the *nebiim* as a class consecrated to the cult and to the service of particular divinities, with whom they were supposed to be in

communication. The external characteristics of ecstasy may not be clearly distinguishable from those of madness, he says (cf. 2 Kings 9.11; Jer. 29.26). He observes the importance of external stimuli in the inducement of ecstasy – toxic vapors at Delphi and music in Palestine, emphasizing at the same time the contagious nature of prophetic ecstasy.

## **H. GUNKEL**

According to Hermann Gunkel,<sup>15</sup> the problem of ecstasy is no longer an impenetrable mystery. He defines it as a peculiar state of body and spirit, which takes possession of a man when he feels particularly intense sensations, and by which he is taken up and feels that he is being swept away as by a current of water, or that his heart is internally burning. Losing dominion of his faculties, and staggering, babbling, and stammering like a drunkard, his sensitivity to physical pain may diminish or even disappear. He may run about, jump up and down, or execute tasks impossible for any human being in a normal condition. Every type of agitation of the human soul, says Gunkel, can reach a degree of such intensity as to become ecstasy. He further points out that a poet, a scientist, a lover, or a warrior can work himself into a state of ecstasy; a poet in a moment of very high enthusiasm; a scientist in an hour of happy intuition; a lover in the mood to seduce a girl against her will; a warrior who overpowers an enemy forcing him to surrender.

In such a state and in the face of religious conceptions and dispositions, a man can be so taken up by ecstasy that all other spiritual forces in him appear to have diminished. Gunkel declares: ‘The prophets of Israel are certainly religious ecstasies of this type.’ His description of the ancient Israelite prophets runs like this:

They were bands of vagabonds parading the whole countryside, prey to overwhelming enthusiasm, preceded by harp, flute, and tambourine, and anyone who happened to draw near to them had to take care not to be infected by such intoxication (cf. 1 Sam. 19.18-24; also Isa. 20.2-3; Mic. 1.8).<sup>16</sup>

At a first superficial observation, Gunkel says, it may not be easy to distinguish these prophets from crowds of drunkards, and anyone referring to them without particular reverence might well describe them simply as madmen or something similar. But the hand that seizes or grasps the prophet was often identified as Yahweh’s. It was in such an atmosphere of mystery that he felt the strange sensations, saw visions, and heard strange voices. With the awe born of veneration, it was thought that once the ecstasy was over, the prophet would be

in a position to relate messages communicated to him or to describe the visions which he had seen. No doubt, in the eyes of the pious Israelites ecstatic phenomena must have been valued as being a consequence of direct divine action on man.

## **J. LINDBLOM**

The supernormal experiences of the prophets and the problem of ecstasy are discussed by Lindblom in three chapters of his *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*. In answer to Hölscher's strong emphasis on the foreign origin of the Israelite prophecy, Lindblom has this to say:

After more recent investigations of a religio-historical and psychological nature, the ideas presented by Hölscher are hardly tenable. Ecstatic phenomena and movements are not confined to particular races, peoples, or countries; they flourish all over the world.<sup>17</sup>

He points out that 'ecstatic predisposition' and ecstasy itself cannot be 'borrowed' from other quarters like clothing and customs, words and technical inventions. Ecstasy can arise by suggestion and psychic contagion, but not through cultural influence of an external sort. On the question of ecstatic features in the classical prophets, Lindblom does not confine this phenomenon to the so-called primitive prophets:

If there is any difference (and there is), it is not an absolute difference, but consists only in the frequency and character of the ecstasy. It is true that the 'classical' prophets from Amos to Malachi are prophets of a different type from those of the time of Saul, and different too from Elijah or Elisha, but this difference must be defined in other terms.<sup>18</sup>

## **ORGIASTIC AND LETHARGIC ECSTASY**

Lindblom distinguishes between the so-called 'orgiastic' and the 'lethargic', or passive, types of ecstasy: 'orgiastic' relating to an unrestrained type of emotion characterized by frenzied movements; 'lethargic', referring to a state of abnormal drowsiness. He identifies the first in the stories concerning Saul's meeting with the bands of prophets and in that related about Elijah in 1 King 18.46. It is said that the 'hand of Yahweh' came upon Elijah, which according to Lindblom is an expression used in the prophetic narratives for ecstatic fits.

The second type of ecstasy ('lethargic' or passive), he detects in the story in 2 King 8.77ff concerning the behaviour of Elisha. It is said that Elisha fixed his gaze and stared at Hazael until the man was ashamed and the man of God burst into tears. Lindblom comments:

... What the narrator means us to understand is that the prophet, falling into a trance, had a vision in which he saw with his inward eyes, as clairvoyants do, the harm, which Hazael would later do to Israel. Throughout the world prophetic persons are respected as being endowed with the gifts of clairvoyance, thought-reading, and telepathy. It is something like this that is attributed to Elisha in this story.<sup>19</sup>

### **'ABSORPTION' AND 'CONCENTRATION' ECSTASY**

Lindblom further distinguishes between 'absorption' and 'concentration' ecstasy, in answer to the criticism that any admission of ecstatic phenomenon and psychic disorders could minimize the genuine religious and moral elements in the religion of the Israelite prophets. (In 'absorption' ecstasy, it is said, the personality loses itself in a fusion with the universal, whereas 'concentration' ecstasy entails a deep concentration of the soul on a single feeling or notion, and has the result of extinguishing normal consciousness and putting the outward senses out of action.) He therefore draws a sharp distinction between these two 'degrees' or 'grades' of ecstasy. 'If ecstasy is understood as the well-known mental state in which the "ego" fully loses consciousness of itself and becomes completely absorbed in the divine, in the so-called *unio mystica*, there can be no talk of ecstasy in connection with the prophets,' he says.

'Lindblom's finding will receive general assent', says Eissfeld 'at least in as far as he distinguishes two kinds of ecstasy and declares that only one of these may legitimately be applied to the prophet.'<sup>20</sup>

### ***'Spirit-Possession'***

'Spirit-possession', also called 'divine seizure' or simply 'prophetic frenzy', or even 'sacred madness', is an essential feature of the ecstatic experience. The 'possessing spirit' is identified as Yahweh's, and it is the 'hand of Yahweh' which seizes or grasps the prophet. The 'divine seizure' of the prophet may be overwhelming enough to cause anguish:

You have over-powered me! You were the stronger. Each time I speak the word, I have to howl and proclaim: Violence and ruin!

There seemed to be a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones. The effort to restrain it wearied me, I could not bear it (Jer. 20.7ff).

The unmistakable effect of possession by the Spirit or the grasping hand of Yahweh includes a full-scale ecstatic hysteria such that the possessed may be ‘turned into another man’ (1 Sam. 10.5-6). In such a case the frivolous antics of the possessed may become grotesque, he may perform abnormal or superhuman acts, or lose physical sensation (see the behaviour of the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18.26-9, and that of Saul before the battle with the Ammonites in 1 Sam. 11.7ff). The saying attributed to Samuel confirms the effects of this ‘divine seizure’: ‘Now when these signs meet you, do whatever your hands find to do, for God is with you’ (1 Sam. 10.7).

This spirit may be transmitted or conveyed from one prophet to another. In the story in Numbers 11.23ff, ‘the Lord took some of the spirit that was upon Moses and put it upon the seventy elders and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied.’ The behaviour of these ‘possessed’ elders must have horrified the young man who went to report to Moses. We are once again given an intimation of how the ancients considered divine inspiration, a phenomenon which received no approval in the eyes of Joshua either. But it seems that in the eyes of the Elohistic theologian, the phenomenon was a legitimate one, as he makes Moses say on that occasion: ‘Would that all the people of Yahweh were prophets, and that Yahweh would put his spirit upon them’ (v. 29).<sup>21</sup>

The spirit is not only shared by transmission, it can also be inherited from a master. In the narrative in 2 Kings 2, Elisha had to request Elijah for his spirit, ‘I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit’ (v.9). It is pointed out in v. 15 that Elisha’s possession of the spirit was attested by his associates. The spirit could also suddenly take a prophet from where he was and transplant him to another place (1 King 18.12; 2 Kings 2.16).

### *Stimulation to Ecstasy*

The ecstatic experience which serves as a suitable climate for prophecy can be induced by mutual contagion through music and wild dancing. This is the opinion of many critics, and is also well attested in the biblical narratives. One can equally work oneself to a state of frenzy by taking alcoholic stimulants, or by wild shouting. ‘This is the premise to ecstasy, and what is inaccessible to man in the state of normal consciousness is given him in the state of intoxication.’<sup>22</sup>

Referring to the confraternity of the *nebiim* in the time of Samuel, Desnoyers infers that the state of high frenzy in which they performed their

patriotic and national activities was worked up by music and wild dancing. 'They lived in bands or groups filled with contagious enthusiasm, induced by songs, dancing, and beating of instruments, and their feverish exercises performed at the city gates must have been strange enough to the silent crowd.'<sup>23</sup>

In 2 King 3.15 there is mention of some type of technical preparation for the reception of divine revelation by the use of a minstrel. It is stated that when the minstrel whom Elisha asked for played, the power of the spirit came upon the prophet and he delivered his oracles. Inspiration might come to the prophet as he was at table (1 Kings 13.20); on the other hand he might have to wait as long as ten days for an answer from Yahweh (Jer. 42.7).

In the past, observes L. Ramlot, some scholars did not hesitate to compare the *nebiim* with the shamans of the Mongolian tribes (Reuss, Sabatier); to the Moslem fakirs (Cornill); to sorcerers and frantics of orgiastic cults (J. Keville); and above all to the frenzied dervishes and dancers known to have used instruments to induce ecstasy (Noeldeke, Wellhausen, Renan, Kittel).<sup>24</sup>

### *Music and the Sacred Dance*

Music gives rise to 'joyous leaping' possibly accompanied by violent movement of the body, and often leading to a kind of trance-like state reminiscent of those of the dancing dervishes. The role of music is well attested in the Israelite cult and ceremonies, forming an indispensable part of divine worship. This is often referred to as the 'sacred dance'.

According to some critics (e.g. Hölscher, Duhm, Mowinckel), the *cultus* calls for consideration as the most likely sphere of this phenomenon in which groups of human beings are seized by frenzy, and even innocent bystanders are drawn into a circle. For Mowinckel, 'the *nebiim* were originally representatives of the cultic congregation, seized by the ecstasy or the orgiastic tumult of the cult festival; they were filled by divine power to raving point as, ideally and theoretically, should happen to the whole congregation ... they stand forth out of the congregation by the side of the priest-seers as the actual "*religiosi*" of the congregation'.<sup>25</sup>

As Walther Eichrodt points out, the force and energy with which the sacred dance was performed were proportional to the seriousness with which the celebrants regarded it as part of their religious duties, and to the degree to which it provided an outlet for their enthusiasm for the God so worshipped. It is moreover clear, he says, that this cultic dance was practiced by the *nebiim* with particular abandon, and that music and song played a great part in heightening and enlivening its intensity (1 Sam. 10.5ff; 2 Sam. 6.5f).<sup>26</sup>

In the account in 2 Samuel 6.5, we read that after David captured Zion the Ark of the Lord was brought to Jerusalem, and David and all the house of Israel made merry before the Lord with all their might, with songs, lyres, and harps and tambourines. David participated, ‘dancing before the Lord with his might’ (v. 14). But Michal’s displeasure and remarks over David’s behaviour must have shown how the ordinary Israelite rated this ecstatic dancing: ‘How the king honoured himself today, uncovering himself before the eyes of his servant maids, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself’ (6.20). But David’s defense of his action demonstrates the legitimacy of the dance. It is merry-making before the Lord, a part of divine worship. There is therefore no reason to show contempt or abasement before the Lord!

### *Modes of Divine Communication of Revelation*

We are familiar with the biblical narratives in which the prophet’s reception of revelation came through *visions*, *auditions*, and *dreams*. Occasionally it is recorded that an *angel*, ‘*mal’ak*’ appeared as an intermediary between Yahweh and the prophet. The anonymous prophet at Bethel says in 1 Kings 13.18, ‘I too am a prophet as you are: and an angel spoke to me by the word of Yahweh.’ When Elijah was in the desert an angel visited him. ‘Here,’ observes Lindblom, ‘the appearance of the angel seems to have occurred in a dream ... In other cases it appears that the angel was seen in a trance’ (cf. 2 Kings 1.3, 13ff).<sup>27</sup>

Whatever may be the experiences of the supernatural by the prophets, the problem confronting these phenomena is that they have been described by some authors (e.g. Hölscher and those who followed his ideas) as *hallucinations*.

The question which arises is whether the prophets, when they describe their visions, do deliberately set out to form a mental picture of God or the things which they claimed to have seen, just out of their stock of intellectual ideas about these things, or whether they had the immediate conviction that they actually saw something before their eyes or actually heard sounds which conveyed an intelligible meaning to them.

For C. H. Dodd the affirmation, ‘thus says Yahweh’, implies at least in form that the oracle which follows was ‘heard’ by the prophet as an utterance of a divine voice<sup>28</sup> (cf. Amos 3.8; Isa. 8.11; 28.22).

The ‘correctness’ of ‘vision-seeing’ was considered as an important element of true prophecy, for Isaiah would accuse the ‘false’ prophets of, among other things, ‘erring in vision’ (Isa. 28.7). What do the prophets see? Do these experiences cause them any discomfort or abnormality, or what has been described as hallucinations? Does the prophet retain his self-consciousness during the hour of his excitement?

Lindblom distinguishes between ecstatic *visions* and *auditions* on the one side and *hallucinations* on the other. (Hallucination is defined as a visual, auditory, or other sensory perception which does not correspond to any objective reality in the external world, but – and here it differs from vision and audition – is thought to be apprehended by the bodily senses and has all the characteristic features of a real perception, although it does not correspond to any external reality.) He denies that the prophetic visions were hallucinations by distinguishing further between ‘hallucinations’ and ‘ecstatic visions’ (also called pseudo-hallucinations). The distinction, according to him, lies in the use of such expressions as the ‘*outward eye*’ and the ‘*inward eye*’, the ‘*outward ear*’ and the ‘*inward ear*’, as in the case of medieval visionaries. It is appropriate, he says, to regard the supernatural visual experiences of the prophets as ‘ecstatic visions’ rather than ‘hallucination’.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of these distinctions, it seems that some of the prophets did actually experience some sort of abnormal disorder during their reception of revelation. Very frequently such reception of revelation was something which caused the prophet bodily shock, observes von Rad. When it is said of a prophet that the hand of Yahweh came upon him, fell upon him, or seized him, there is every reason for believing that behind these brief notes lie experiences which not only shock his soul, but caused him bodily disturbances as well.<sup>30</sup>

### **STATE OF PSYCHIC ABNORMALITY**

The prophet Ezekiel displays traits which reveal a state of psychic abnormality during his experiences. In him the spirit played a dominant part. He appears subject to trance and catalepsy (Ezek. 3.23-7). He feels himself like a psychical ‘medium’, lifted into the air and transplanted to distant places (8.3). He records at least one clear case of telepathy (24.1-5), and a case of clairvoyance (11.1-13). Ezekiel relates too how he sat on the ground awestruck and unable to speak a word for seven days after his call (3.15). In the Book of Daniel also the writer says that all the blood drained from the prophet’s face and that he fell down (Dan. 10.8f); after one such experience he lay sick for some days. Such was the result of Yahweh’s hand on his prophet! Isaiah’s description of his own state, too, reveals his bodily suffering as something very real and painful:

A stern vision is told to me ....  
Therefore my loins are filled with anguish; pangs have  
seized me,  
like the pangs of a woman in travail;  
I am bowed down so that I cannot hear,  
I am dismayed so that I cannot see.

My mind reels, horror had appalled me;  
the twilight I longed for has been  
turned for me into trembling. (Isa. 21.1-10)

### *Symbolic Actions and Magic*

The presence of certain peculiar symbolic actions has drawn the further attention of scholars, some of whom, however, have seen in these actions nothing but the last echoes of magic practices.<sup>31</sup> In heathenism, the use of symbolic magic is common, whereby the priests or oracular diviners seek to control events by symbolically enacting what they desire to be accomplished in reality. Such phenomena seem to be present in some of the biblical scenes connected with our prophets.

According to 1 Kings 22, the prophet *Zedekiah* made for himself *horns of iron* in the presence of the kings of Israel and Judah, and said, ‘With these you shall gore the Syrians until they are destroyed.’ Symbolic action of the same nature with *bows and arrows* is described in 2 Kings 13.15ff, *Elisha* told the King of Israel to shoot with bow and arrows in the direction of Syria in order to secure victory over Israel. *Isaiah* walked naked and barefoot as a sign and symbol indicating that one day the Assyrian king would lead away the Egyptians and Ethiopians barefoot and with buttocks uncovered as captives to Assyria and as a warning to Israel. *Jeremiah* wore thongs and yoke bars around his neck through the streets to depict the impending Babylonian bondage (Jer. 27.2ff). *Ezekiel* was commanded to lay mock siege of Jerusalem by portraying it upon a tile (4.1-3); to lie for a stated period of time upon his side to depict the period appointed to Israel as punishment for her iniquity (4.4-8); to eat unclean food by measure as a sign of Israel’s physical privations in exile (4.9-17); to burn a portion of his hair, thus foretelling the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its inhabitants (5.1-4). On other occasions he was commanded to prophesy to the mountains, to dig through the wall and carry out his personal belongings, to prophesy to dry bones, to set a cauldron on the fire, and in many other ways he depicted by symbolism the future course of God’s dealings with Israel.

While some critics, in view of these strange acts, brand these prophets as primitive magicians, pagan diviners, or visionaries, others do not see in these symbolic acts any cause for alarm. Considered in its substance Fohrer denies any place to magic in these symbolic actions.<sup>32</sup> For H. Freeman, ‘The symbolic acts of the prophets were a significant form of the prophetic method for expressing the word of God. They are not expressions of “symbolic magic”, but rather a symbolic method of proclaiming the divine revelation.’<sup>33</sup> According to H. W. Robinson: ‘Genetically, they spring from the widespread practice of symbolic magic, but the prophets have transformed them into religion by

assimilating them to the will of God.’<sup>34</sup> In Lindblom’s view, ‘The effective power of the prophetic word was increased by these peculiar actions by which they were frequently accompanied. They illustrated dramatically what the prophets had to proclaim. But they were more than that. Just as the words had a creative effect, so had the actions.’ He describes them as ‘parabolic actions’. They are, so to speak, parables in action. For Vawter, ‘the symbolic act, whether accompanied by words or not, is a dramatized prophecy’. It comes quite naturally to an imaginative people in love with the concrete.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Prophecy and Divination in Israel ‘Inquiry of the Lord’***

If, in the eyes of critics, the presence of ecstatic and abnormal psychic manifestations lowers the traditional standard of the Israelite prophets, equally damaging is the assertion that they performed divinatory practices similar to those found among the heathens. ‘The prophets were traditionally oracle-givers; and this function was never abandoned during the whole history of prophecy.’<sup>36</sup> Although the sacred Scriptures condemn all acts of divination (Deut. 18.9ff), it seems that such phenomena existed among the Old Testament prophets and priests, and are described in the New Testament as well (cf. Acts 1.26).

Tracing the origin of prophetism in Israel, H. Orlinsky says that it ‘was divination, and not prophecy, that finds its parallel in the Mari and other social structure and documents in the Fertile Crescent of old’.<sup>37</sup> More specifically, according to Orlinsky, it is the Israelite seer and his role that correspond to the Mari ecstatic.

Referring to the names *rô’êh*, *hôzêh*, and especially *nabî*, as applied to the prophets, W. F. Albright points out the first two mean ‘seer’, that is, a diviner who sees what is invisible to the ordinary eye by some kind of clairvoyance or organized divination. ‘In practice’, he suggests, ‘it would seem that the early seers were mostly diviners who had learned indirectly from the elaborated techniques of Mesopotamian and other pagan origin, but who were uneducated quacks from the standpoint of a graduate, a *qôsem*’.<sup>38</sup>

Tracing the evolution of ecstatic nabism in Israel, Jepsen presents the following picture:

In early times Yahweh spoke to men for instance through dreams, but above all through the ephod oracle. Ecstatic prophecy came into existence under Canaanite influence because the ephod oracle, which was attached to the central sanctuary, was not accessible to ordinary men. Alongside the priestly class there now arose a new class of oracle-givers, namely the nabis. After the destruction of the sanctuary of Shilo the nabis obtained a new authority and an

unprecedented influence. In fact Samuel was the man who by virtue of his authority imparted to Israel the knowledge that the oracles of the nabim were revelations from Yahweh in the same measure as the priestly oracles at the sanctuary.<sup>39</sup>

M. Buber sees in nabism '*ein Ersatz*' (substitute) for the Ark. 'Divine leadership' (*Gottesführung*) without the Ark, such was the idea of Samuel and the idea of 'true' prophecy.<sup>40</sup>

Similarities are seen between the Israelite seers and the pre-Islamic Arab *kahins*. Expressly called 'seers', these are said to have acted as interpreters of dreams and finders of camels and other lost objects, and were regularly consulted about various enterprises, particularly before the beginning of raids and wars; they also were believed to be able to detect criminals. The Arabian *kahin* was said to be seer, prophet, priest, and even judge in the same person.<sup>41</sup>

## **INQUIRY OF THE LORD**

Whatever similarities might exist between the activities of pagan diviners and those of the Israelite seers, it seems that in Israelite tradition there was also divination that was not opposed to the Yahweh religion. The angel of the Lord even sent Elijah to put the question to the messenger of the sick Ahaziah, king of Samaria. 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron?' (2 Kings 1ff). In the narrative concerning Saul and the witch of Endor, the rejected king resorted to mediums because the Lord had refused to answer him either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets (1 Sam. 28.3).

The legitimate type of divination is popularly known as the 'inquiry of the Lord', and is a recognized activity of the prophet, for 'formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God he said, "come let us go to the seer; for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer".' (1 Sam. 9.9)

In various circumstances, and especially during misfortunes in life, the 'man of God' was consulted, and he regularly received a modest fee for his service: *In sickness* (1 Kings 14.1ff; 2 Kings 1.2ff; 8.7ff), and over general *difficulties* or domestic *misfortunes*; e.g. loss of animals, etc. (1 Sam. 9.3ff, 2 Kings 22.13). *Before embarking on battle*, a consultation with Yahweh became a clear-cut responsibility of the prophet (1 Sam. 14.37ff; 23.2ff; 30.8; 2 Sam. 2.1; 1 Kings 22.5ff; Jer. 37.6ff).

## **TECHNICAL MEANS OF INQUIRY**

*The Sacred Lots of Urim and Thummin:* The will of God was not discovered only by consulting the ‘man of God’. It could be ascertained also by technical means, using the *ephod*.

(It has been surmised from the narratives in 1 Samuel 14.36-42 and 23.6ff that this *ephod* was an oracle-box containing two differently marked counters or dice, the Urim and Thummin. Another possible interpretation of *ephod* is in relation to the priestly garment on which was sewn a pocket for holding the lots (Exod. 28.6, 15).) Whatever may in fact have been the significance of these curious objects, it is certain that they were used in time of emergency to determine the will of God. (cf. also Acts 1.26). Depending on the way the counters fell out, or were drawn, when the container was shaken, the answer of the deity, ‘yes’ or ‘no’, could be ascertained.<sup>42</sup>

Among other objects held in special reverence to guarantee the effective presence of Yahweh in ancient Israel, were the Ark, the sacred tent, and the sacred Rod.

*The sacred rod or staff* was regarded as a special gift from God, a symbol of authority, a sort of wand, charged with magic power (Exod. 4.17). Judging from the role it played in the ‘serpent miracles’ (Exod.4.2ff) and in the battle of Rephidim against Amelek, it was evident that the miraculous power of the rod demonstrated the effective presence of Yahweh in it.

What was the real significance of this rod? W. Eichrodt denies that it could have been an instance of fetishism: ‘We are here dealing with an appendage of the invisible deity who fights alongside his people; with a physical means of representing the presence of the god which is comparable to the Ark and which symbolizes both the victory of Yahweh over the hostile powers and his authority over the serpent demons, who are the instruments of his judgment.’<sup>43</sup>

### ***Summary and Conclusion***

The presence of ecstatic manifestations in Israelite prophetism probably points to the foreign origin of the prophetic phenomena. They are certainly strange enough to have merited such a contention among scholars. As Albright points out, ‘After what we have learned from neurophysiologists during the past decade, there can no longer be any doubt that these traditions reflect a substantially correct idea of what actually happened.’<sup>44</sup> He maintains, however, that some excesses, like the self-mutilation characteristic of the Phoenician and Syrian *nebiim* (1 Kings 18. 19-40), must have disappeared quite early on in Israel, where castration and other forms of mutilation were an abomination.

Although Albright identifies Samuel as the leader and patron of the ecstatic prophets, who carried on their ancient function as oracular-diviners and *rô'êh*, 'seers', he suggests that the same Samuel and his band of prophets must have abolished the more obviously pagan symbols and practices, much as the Christian missionaries of the Middle Ages did in the case of the Germanic and Slavic shrines.<sup>45</sup>

On the phenomenon of 'spirit-possession', Lindblom points out that the idea of *rûah*' as the cause of ecstasy is a heritage from still more primitive times, when ecstatic men and women were thought of as possessed by and filled with spirits. In the Old Testament narratives, however, '*rûah*' is never regarded as a being independent of Yahweh. The Spirit is always Yahweh's Spirit, a more or less substantial dynamism, a force emanating from Yahweh, not analogous to the spirit of shamans or the djinn of the pre-Islamic Arabs.<sup>46</sup>

Were the 'Great' Israelite prophets also 'ecstatics'? As we have seen, some ecstatic manifestations were present also among the classical prophets, although it seems that, with the exception of Ezekiel, they appeared to have outgrown such experiences. This 'isolated' extreme case of Ezekiel has been attributed to illness, and as a result it is inadmissible to draw conclusions from his case about the character of classical prophecy as a whole.<sup>47</sup>

Does any admission of abnormal phenomena endanger the worth of divine revelation or prophetic pronouncements? As R. E. Clements points out, apparently not. 'At no point is any detailed appeal made to the prophet's experience as a yardstick by which the truth of prophecy is to be tested .... The affirmation is simply made, 'I have not sent them,' says Yahweh.<sup>48</sup> In another instance, surprisingly, it is tradition which is used to uphold the truth of prophecy and a special experience of God: 'The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms' (Jer. 28.8).<sup>49</sup>

Although elements of psychological intensity and even abnormality may be present in the prophet's experiences, all interest is directed away from this to the fact of the coming of the message from Yahweh. Thus the visions, the ecstatic transportations, the prophet's shaking, dumbness, and even temporary paralysis are made into vehicles of the divine message.<sup>50</sup> On the problem of 'divination' or 'inquiry of the Lord', it is evident that some of the prophets, including the classical prophets, did indulge in the practice, but from texts such as Ezekiel 14.7ff it seems that a clear-cut distinction was made between 'pagan-divination' and the 'inquiry of the Lord'. There is a condemnation of the former:

For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart, and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to inquire for himself of me, I, the Lord, will answer him myself; and I will set my face against that man, I will make him a sign and a by-word and cut him off from the midst of my people; and you shall know that I am the Lord. (Ezek. 14.7ff).

Inquiry of the Lord was therefore a legitimate form of ‘divination’. The word ‘divination’ or ‘inquiry’ can stand for this phenomenon – but there was also the warning – ‘do not inquire of their gods’ (Deut. 12.30). Whatever the implications may be for the prophets and the Yahwistic religion, what is involved here is a phenomenon not very different from what obtains in many world religions, past and present. In all ups and downs of life, man always feels insecure in this world, insecure amid spiritual forces working in darkness, illness and disease. Man wants to safeguard his life and fortunes. He may also want to know what the future holds in stock for him. In all his endeavour, therefore, man is always craving for security!

On the whole problem of supernormal experiences among the prophets, von Rad’s warning against too much curiosity about these phenomena may be adequate here:

It is impossible exactly to separate our visionary experiences which were genuinely ecstatic from other forms of the reception of revelation. Yahweh has assuredly more ways than one of communicating with the prophets, but it is hopeless to try to gain clear ideas about the psychical side of the process.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Concept of the Messiah in Biblical Tradition**

As we have already seen in the first part of this study, it has been a commonplace to think of the Independent Churches as ‘messianic’ or political movements. The typology, ‘messianic Churches’ has been adopted by many authors to describe a group of these religious movements, and messianic titles have been attributed to some of the prophets.

Although it seems that some of the prophets have earned their messianic titles by popular acclamation, nevertheless, there are not a few who themselves conceived their mission as ‘messianic’ in nature. What is the idea behind messianic movements in the Independent Churches? What has inspired them?

It is on account of certain problems which have arisen that we wish to examine the figure and mission of the Messiah in biblical tradition, so as to see the similarities and differences between the concept of the Messiah in that tradition and in the Independent Churches.

We shall consider the following: the nature and origin of messianic expectations; messianic prophecies of early date; the prophecy of Nathan; prophetic messianism; messianic expectations in the inter-testamental period, and the concept of the ‘Day of Yahweh’.

#### ***The Nature and Origin of Messianism in the Old Testament***

‘Messiah’ – from the Greek ‘*Messias*’ or ‘*Christos*’, Aramaic ‘*Mešîha*’, and Hebrew ‘*Mashiah*’ meaning ‘the Anointed’ – is said to designate primarily and in most cases the king of Israel or Judah who ruled at a particular period. In the post-Exilic period, it was sometimes applied to the high priest (who had inherited certain functions of the king).

While certain authors tend to limit the concept of the Messiah to the pre-Exilic kingship, others (mainly the ‘liberal school’ represented by B. Duhm and K. Marti, and S. Mowinckel) seem to reserve the term exclusively to a future vision of an eschatological Saviour. According to Mowinckel:

In later Judaism, the term, 'Messiah', denotes an eschatological figure, belonging to the 'last time', and whose advent lies in the future. To use the word 'Messiah' is to imply eschatology, the last things. It is therefore a misuse of the words "Messiah" and 'Messianic' to apply them, for instance, to those ideas which were associated in Israel or in the ancient East with kings who were actually reigning ... The word 'Messiah', by itself, as a title and a name, originated in later Judaism as the designation of an eschatological figure; and it is therefore only to such a figure that it may be applied.<sup>1</sup>

In the above conception, it follows that the Messiah is to be identified with eschatological events which, in their complex application, include that turning point in history which opens a new era, to be brought about by the transcendental intervention of God. H. W. Robinson describes the pivot of this history as 'the Day of Yahweh', which should be its definitive outcome.

The above view of the 'messianic' meets with difficulty when we consider that in its very complex picture, eschatology presents to the scene different figures and representations – e.g. 'the Servant of the Lord', 'the Son of Man', which are not strictly speaking 'messianic', or at least whose attributed messianic identities have been disputed. Should 'messianism without a Messiah' be the appropriate ideology? These are some of the observations made by A. Gelin.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of these ideas about the nature of the 'messianic', we shall examine some of the theories proposed about the figure of the 'Messiah' in Old Testament tradition.

### **THE ORIGINAL CHARACTER OF BIBLICAL MESSIANISM**

Some scholars have pointed out that many of the concepts which are a part of the picture of the Messiah in biblical tradition are also to be found in the intellectual world of the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and other cultures of the Near East. The mythological idea of a 'first man' as king of paradise also seems to have played a part in it.<sup>3</sup> The original belief in the return of the Golden Age, re-enacted each time at the New Year festivals, where the king is principal actor in the liturgy and representative of the God Marduk, is cited as a possible origin of Hebrew messianism, as well as the eschatological ideas of the paradisaical era: Gressmann brands the 'Messiah' as a political figure, and as an idea borrowed from outside in the form of world-ruler and paradisaical king.<sup>4</sup>

The above glimpse from the outside seems to throw more light on the original character of biblical messianism. There are, however, objections. For Eichrodt, 'To postulate a Canaanite-Amorite Messiah-figure, who in turn would have been borrowed from Babylonia or Egypt, is simply a flight into the void.'<sup>5</sup> The messianic ideas of the ancient East are said to lack the specifically Israelite projection toward the final goal of history. The development of this messianic expectation is not left to free fancy, but is always directly related to the expected full revelation of Yahweh. According to Mowinckel, 'The Messiah was not only an eschatological figure, but always had a measure of political significance. The Messiah is he who shall restore Israel as a people, free her from her enemies, rule over her as king, and bring other nations under her political and religious sway.'<sup>6</sup> For L. Dürr, messianic hope is related to God's revelation in history and is implied as leading to its religious goal.<sup>7</sup> 'It is from this original revelation, as yet obscure, that messianic hope derived its character of definitive aspiration and the possibility of the purification of that hope. Messianism, therefore appeared always as a sort of corollary to Yahwism.'<sup>8</sup>

There is thus a measure of agreement among those who hold to the originality of Israelite messianic ideas. According to them (Mowinckel, followed by the Anglo-Scandinavian school), the biblical concept of messianism was not born in the 'land of myth', nor on the basis of royal ideology, which is seen as a later idea, historically considered, the king in the psalms is not a future figure, but a contemporary one.

As the earthly king was one of the most important gifts of Yahweh at his 'coming', so in post-Exilic and later Judaism, the future king, the Messiah, became the most eagerly expected blessing of Yahweh at his last eschatological coming. To this extent, it may be said that the messianic hope has its roots in the cultic festival of Yahweh's epiphany and thronement.<sup>9</sup>

### *Early Messianic Prophecies*

Certain passages in the Old Testament have been considered as containing the oldest messianic prophecies; that is, as a point of departure for messianic expectations. These include the so-called *Proto-Evangelium* (Gen. 3:15), the 'Oracle of Jacob' (cf. in particular the 'Blessing of Judah', Gen. 49.10ff), and the oracles of Balaam (Num. 24.15-19).

In Genesis 3.15 salvation is assured in spite of the 'fall of man'. In the messianic context, the reference to 'descendants' or the 'seed' (*Zera*) recurs. Salvation will be conferred upon the seed and descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12.7), passing then to David (2 Sam. 7.12-15); in the period of the Exile the

'Zera' becomes qualitative and almost corresponds to the 'remnant' (Isa. 43.5; 44.3), and with Paul the offspring is individualized in Christ (Gal. 3.19). The promises to the Patriarchs are seen, therefore, as the pivot of the election tradition by which Israel became the People of God, occupying a privileged position in God's design for mankind. The repetition of the promises (Gen. 15.1; 5ff; 22.17), also referred to in the Covenant narratives (Exod. 3.15; Deut. 6.10), is seen as part of the structure of the earlier promises. The Covenant thus implies a choice made by God, a promise of salvation, whose tension would later take an eschatological turn.

While some sort of 'messianic speculation' may be accepted in the promises made to Abraham, it has been denied that any messianic prophecy was intended in the oracles attributed to Balaam. The oracles are said to be poems, put into the mouth of the ancient legendary Aramean seer and saga, in honour of Israel's greatness, good fortune, and supremacy over the other Canaanite peoples.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Prophecy of Nathan*

Whatever may have been the traditions behind the kingship and anti-kingship controversies in the days of Samuel, there seems to be some agreement among scholars that with David a new type of kingship, both dynastic and juridical, was established in Israel. It was after his victories in war and his installation in the 'City of David', that Yahweh was to confirm this royal institution through his prophet Nathan. The successive rulers of the kingdom were to be the offspring of the house of David, a shoot from the stock of Jesse. Each was to be a deliverer, an upholder and restorer of David's lineage.

For long, therefore, tradition has recognized the prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam. 7.8-17) as the pivot of true dynastic messianism. Thus, 'since Nathan's oracle, each Prince of the Davidic dynasty was a candidate to Messiahship'.<sup>11</sup> Contrary to the opinion associated with Wellhausen and followed by Buddle, Gressman, Kittel, and Nowack – namely, that the reference to 'house' or 'temple' was Yahweh's condemnation of the Temple, or more precisely, a protest of the old nomadism against the forms of Canaanite worship – A. Gelin points out that the point of the prophecy does not lie here. According to him, the prophecy was concerned with the establishment of the Davidic line, a messianic hope: 'David was not to build a "house" for Yahweh, but it is Yahweh who was to build a "house" for David.'<sup>12</sup>

From another point of view A. Moret, R. Labat, H. Frankfort, and J. de Fraine maintain that the role of kingship as expressed in the prophecy of Nathan was a borrowing from the kingship ideologies of the ancient Near East. 'Il reste qu'une parenté indéniable existe entre le roi biblique et le roi Mésopotamien.'<sup>13</sup>

But this theory has been denied by A. Alt, who points out that in the Israelite kingship, while different official names are used to refer to the king of Israel, the title of ‘King’ is often reserved for Yahweh (cf. Isa. 9.5ff; 6.5; 1 Chron. 17.14; 27.5; 29.23; 2 Chron. 9.8; 13.8) The contention is that the office of King derives from the plenary authority of Yahweh.

This makes it all the more difficult to suppose that the divine kingship of the ancient Near East, so frequently discussed nowadays, and which was allegedly universal, could have found acceptance within this circle of ideas, unless it were so thoroughly adapted as to be compatible with the strict subordination even of the kings of the house of David to Yahweh.<sup>14</sup>

Another difficulty confronting the idea of Davidic kingship as it is expressed in the prophecy of Nathan, is the view which interprets the remark in 2 Samuel 7.8 as meaning that Yahweh had called David to be only a ‘*nagîd*’ (military leader), and not king as such. But according to Martin Noth:

We do not hear anything about such a call having played any part in David’s rise to power. Possibly, it was only established retrospectively that David must have been called by Yahweh to be ‘*nagîd*’, 1 Samuel 6.12 will therefore be judged in the same way.<sup>15</sup>

On the prophecy of Nathan itself, says Noth: ‘Though it was later revised, it must be regarded as historically authentic.’<sup>16</sup>

The hopes based on the ideal messianic king, as expressed in the royal psalms, show the common characteristic, that the king is in the foreground (Pss. 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 61; 63; 72; 89; 101; 132; etc). He is the one who prays or the one who is spoken of, or who is prayed for. These psalms show that the Davidic monarchy was to play a fundamental part in God’s plan of salvation. Each dynastic king was like a Messiah, and the people prayed that through him God would realize all His designs for Israel (cf. Pss. 45; 72.1). These hopes are based on two fundamental promises made by Yahweh through His prophet: first a covenant enacted with David, guaranteeing undisturbed continuance of the throne (2 Sam. 7.14); and secondly the promise that David’s descendants would be acceptable as successors to the throne for all time. ‘The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which He will not turn back: “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies which I shall teach them, their sons also for ever shall sit upon your throne”’ (Ps.132.11).

If the first belief had legitimized the dynastic principle, so the second legitimized each king of the dynasty himself; the two together were quite sufficient to replace the old Israelite ideal of a choice carried out afresh on each occasion by Yahweh and the charismatic designation of a saviour for his people. This is the first appearance of the simple but highly creative historical origin of the expectation of the Messiah, which was later to show such an extensive development, for the Messiah, was from the start none other than the descendant of David who in the relative or absolute end of future history would be the last king of his dynasty.<sup>17</sup>

### *Prophetic Messianism*

#### **THE IMMANUEL PROPHECY**

Said to be one of the most difficult passages of the Old Testament, a wide range of views has emerged to challenge the traditional interpretation of the Immanuel prophecy in Isaiah 7.14; 9.1-6 and 11.1-9. It has been denied that these passages ever contained any messianic idea, and even more strongly denied that they contain Christological titles. For Mowinckel, any direct Christological interpretation of the prophecy is out of the question. He contends that Isaiah cannot here be referring to the birth of Jesus more than seven hundred years later,<sup>18</sup> pointing out that '*Immanuel*' – 'With-us-is-God' – was a familiar ejaculation in the liturgies of the sanctuary. With this cry a woman would greet the birth of her child, expressing her certainty of the truth which it conveyed: in that age, the first exclamation after the birth of a child was regarded as an omen of its destiny and its character<sup>19</sup> (cf. Gen. 29.31ff; 35.16; 1 Sam. 4.19ff).

E. Hammerschaimb recalls that the problem of royal heritage was already a fundamental problem in the ancient Near East, as shown in the Phoenician texts of Ras Shamra, where the formula 'See, a woman will conceive a son' has been found.<sup>20</sup>

Mowinckel sees the background of the prophet's metaphor in Isaiah 9.1-6 as the pre-Exilic concept of the king as the representative of the sun god and the fertility god. According to him, it is derived from the myth of the god of life and his victorious invasion of the nether world, Sheol, to rouse the dead.<sup>21</sup> Concerning the messianic character of Isaiah 7.14 and 9.1-6, J. Lindblom, admitting the presence of messianic ideas in the texts, adds, however, that they derive from the royal ideology of the ancient Near East.<sup>22</sup>

What messianic colour do we detect then in the Immanuel prophecy? A. Gelin sees the background of the prophecy as that of Nathan in 2 Samuel 7, and

in the problem posed by the dynasty as a result of the failures of the Davidic successors.<sup>23</sup>

According to Perderson and Bentzen, there is no reason to challenge the authenticity of Isaiah 9.1-6. For them, the text reflects the royal ideology of the pre-Exilic period, and is understood as according with Isaiah's experiences concerning the monarchs.<sup>24</sup> For J. Coppens, the progress realized in the portrait of the future king is clear from the classic texts of Isaiah. He is Yahweh's ally, aided by the Spirit in his mission of peace, in the practice of law and justice.<sup>25</sup>

Taking together the views expressed by various authors on the Immanuel prophecy, there is no doubt that the traditional Christian interpretation of the prophecy has been more or less abandoned. As C. R. North puts it:

This implies that the Immanuel sign was no longer to be taken as having messianic significance, such as might be assumed from Isaiah 9.1-7, 11.1-9. And it must be conceded that the New Testament is not regulative for the interpretation of the Old Testament.<sup>26</sup>

For North, in the last analysis, the possibility must be considered that a prophecy may have a proximate fulfillment which nevertheless does not exhaust its meaning. If we say that the original Immanuel was Hezekiah, we are not saying that the further application of the sign to Jesus in the New Testament was unwarranted fantasy.<sup>27</sup>

## **MICAH**

The expectation of a Messiah in Micah (5.1-6) is said to bear a strong resemblance to that of Isaiah (cf. Isa. 11.1). But in spite of its concise style many authors do not see a perfect unity in Micah 5.1-3, and some scholars interpret verse 2 as a gloss. Others, in view of the many ancient myths which tell of the virgin birth of a wonder child, have postulated from Isaiah 7.14 and Micah 5.3, that there must have been a similar popular expectation in Israel. Eissfeldt, Oesterley-Robinson, and Pfeiffer consider the messianic oracles in Micah as post-Exilic.<sup>28</sup>

For Oesterley and Robinson, 'The messianic passage, 5.2-4, can hardly be earlier than the Exile, and may be very much later, while the reference to the Diaspora in 4.6-8, and the eschatological tone of 4.11-5, suggest a comparatively late date.'<sup>29</sup> But as E. Jenni points out, the reference in Isaiah 5.3 need not refer to the return of the exiles to their home, but may just as well refer to the restoration of the kingdom of David, which had been split up since the death of Solomon, and especially since the Assyrian annexations.<sup>30</sup>

## **JEREMIAH**

Jeremiah presents three oracles dealing with royal messianism (Jer. 23.1-6). The authenticity of the verses is affirmed, as well as the oracle on the 'Shoot of David', which some authors have thought was Jeremiah's sole utterance concerning a personal Messiah.<sup>31</sup> According to Siegfried Hermann, Jeremiah's programme of hope and salvation was based on the prophet's own experience; but he does not believe that the alleged messianic texts derive from the prophet himself. Hermann attributes these passages to the Deuteronomic school, which he says must have elaborated on Jeremiah's memories.<sup>32</sup>

## **EZEKIEL**

The passages in Ezekiel 34.23-4 and 37.24-36 are considered to be strictly 'messianic', whereas for some authors nothing is particularly noteworthy in the other oracles concerning 'messianic prophecy' (Ezek. 17.22-4; 21.25-7). In fact J. Coppens considers the oracles of Jeremiah and Ezekiel about the future king less striking than those of Isaiah and Micah. In the passages with messianic colour, the promises of Yahweh are reiterated, as well as the restoration of the People in Palestine and the appointment of his Servant David over them, with the shepherd, in 34.23-4, considered as the beginning of a renewed dynasty. The name David, which the shepherd bears, indicated his stock and quality. The title 'Servant of Yahweh' is often given to David to designate his fidelity to his office (cf. 2 Kings 8.19; Pss. 18.1; 89.4, 21). It is maintained that the 'David *redivivus*' will be unique king of all Israel like his ancestor. In fact he is not called '*melekh*' but '*nāsi*' (prince).

## **HAGGAI AND ZACHARIAH**

*The Prophecies about Zerubbabel* ,The prophecies which we have so far discussed are said not to be 'messianic' in the strict sense, since they supposed that the house of David would still be in power as the ruling dynasty in Jerusalem. With the collapse of the Davidic kingdom, it was thought that the messianic lineage had been broken. But after the return from the Exile, about 520BC, the hope of a coming king was once more revived by Haggai (2.20-3) and Zechariah (6.9-14; 9:9-10). The new figure was identified with Zerubbabel, the governor of the community of Jerusalem, who was appointed by the Persians. Through him Yahweh was to intervene, in the immediate future, to overthrow the kingdoms of the nations and destroy their strength (Hag. 2.21ff).

This is said to represent the transition to the true messianic prophecies, as Zerubbabel was now addressed by a series of messianic titles: ‘my servant’, ‘signet ring’. Therefore in the concrete historical context, once again a descendant of David through Jehoiachin was in line, as Zechariah announces the ‘Day of Yahweh’ (9.9-10).

*Was Zerubbabel the expected Messiah?* Doubts are raised concerning the nature of Haggai’s messianic aspirations. It is questionable whether or not Haggai expected the full realization of the prophecy in the lifetime of Zerubbabel. How far are these claims for Zerubbabel consonant with the political subservience to Persia, and how likely is it that the Persians would admit of such activities as might follow?<sup>33</sup>

For Mowinckel the promises given through Haggai and Zechariah cannot be taken as an expression of messianic hope, since according to him the facts do not justify the common interpretation that Zerubbabel was a David *redivivus*. The specific expectation of a coming eschatological Messiah did not yet exist. What these prophets did was to promise: ‘In this man the house of David will be restored in its ancient glory. Once again we shall have a king who will fulfill the ancient ideal of kingship.’<sup>34</sup>

But contrary to these views, and according to J. Bright:

It is clear that Haggai and Zechariah affirmed the fulfillment of hopes inherent in the official theology of the pre-exilic state, based upon Yahweh’s choice of Zion and the Davidic dynasty. They regard the little community as the true remnant of Israel spoken of by Isaiah, and Zerubbabel as the awaited David who would rule over it. Theirs were bold words, inflammatory and highly dangerous. But they served their immediate purpose.<sup>35</sup>

The rupture of that dynastic succession after Zerubbabel, however, supported the idea of looking for the final scene of the ‘Day of Yahweh’ and the coming of the Messiah in the remote future. It was no easier to specify the exact epoch for the event, which was perhaps believed to coincide with the end of the world.

### ***The ‘Servant of Yahweh’***

Like the Immanuel prophecy, the interpretation of the ‘Servant Songs’ and the identification of the Servant have called forth a wide range of discordant views among scholars. In the four Songs (Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50.4-9; 52.13-53.12) are seen aspirations for eschatological salvation, and the Messiah depicted in a new light – as a meek and suffering Servant.

In Mowinckel's opinion, 'From the historical point of view – the problem is not whether the prophecies refer to Jesus of Nazareth, but rather whether they are intended to be messianic in the sense which the word has been used in the Old Testament and in Judaism.' According to him, 'It may be said at once that these prophecies were not intended to be messianic, but that Jesus gave them decisive importance for the concept of the Messiah.'<sup>36</sup> Although not many share the above view, the main point of the controversy, in any case, is the question: 'Who is the Servant of the songs?', a question very widely discussed and which has received a great variety of answers.

*The Identity of the Servant* On the problem of the identity of the Servant, H. H. Rowley, S. Mowinckel, C. R. North and A. Gelin follow almost the same line in presenting the history of the interpretation, so we may summarize their theories here.

The traditional Christian view, which saw these prophecies as being fulfilled in a unique way in Jesus Christ, dominated the field and remained unchallenged down to the end of the eighteenth century. But with the advent of the critical era in Old Testament studies, new interpretations and theories have been propounded.

The views so far expressed are divided principally into two groups: (1) the individual theories – which identify the Servant with different historical figures, and (2) the collective theory – which identifies the Servant with the whole nation of Israel. A compromise between these two groups of theories is found in the 'collective-fluid theory', as expressed by the term 'corporate personality'. The theory of 'corporate personality', associated primarily with Wheeler Robinson, is explained as a combination of the individual and collective interpretations, in which a whole group, including its past, present, and future members, might function as a single individual through any one of these members conceived as representative of it. In the ancient mode of thought, it is said, there is no antithesis between the individual and the group. The Hebrew conception of 'corporate personality' can therefore reconcile the two, and pass without explanation or explicit indication from one to the other in a fluidity of transition.

*Individual Theories:* These are the theories which identify the Servant with a historical individual who had lived in the near or distant past. Different figures have been proposed and these include: Jehoiachim, Zerubbabel, Meshullam the son of Zerubbabel, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Deutero-Isaiah himself, an unknown contemporary of the prophet, Jeremiah, a mythological figure associated with the cult of the Babylonian god Tammuz, a messianic Angel, an eschatological

reformer. The Servant has also been identified as a ‘new Moses’.<sup>37</sup> In the Christian era, the Servant was certainly identified as Jesus, and as a result there arose the reaction against the Christian claim. This was the origin of the so-called ‘Jewish interpretation’, which saw the Servant as ‘the Jewish nation’. J. Coppens mentions P. A. H. de Boer and N. H. Snaith, in particular, as more recent representatives of this opinion. They discern in the Servant the people of Israel – empirical and historical.<sup>38</sup>

*Collective and Fluid Theories:* In the ‘collective theory’, the Servant is identified as the personified nation of Israel or Israel’s representative, a future Messiah. A variety of this is presented by J. Lindblom. He finds the Servant in all the Songs to be an allegorical figure, ‘whose interpretation is not to be pressed in all details’.<sup>39</sup> Lindblom poses the question, whether the Servant was to be thought of as a historical figure or as an ‘ideal’ figure. For S. A. Cook. ‘It is indeed as foolish to ask, “Who is the Servant?”’, as to ask, “Who is the prodigal son?”’<sup>40</sup> In P. Volz’s view, still in line with Lindblom’s suggestion, the Servant embodies an idea, and that idea is the mission of Israel to the world.<sup>41</sup> According to T. H. Robinson, ‘What is brought before our eyes is the character of the ideal Slave of Yahweh, of the man who is utterly and wholly devoted to his Master.’<sup>42</sup>

At the other extreme, and opposed to all collective interpretation, are the exegetes who discover in the Servant an individual, recognizable by his ‘gait’ and vocation. He is identified as a ‘prophetic figure’. Among the exponents of the ‘collective interpretation’ are O. Kaiser, R. J. Tournay, P. Grelot, and J. Coppens; as opposed to the ‘individual interpreters’ – S. Mowinckel, C. R. North, G. von Rad, W. Zimmerli, and N. Füglistler: Coppens thinks that the ‘collective interpretation’ offers a more satisfactory solution to the problem of the identity of the Servant.<sup>43</sup>

*‘Corporate Personality’:* With this theory, the problem seems to be resolved to a certain extent, as many authors seem to have adhered to this explanation, extending it further to the figure of the ‘Son of Man’. According to the theory of ‘corporate personality’, there is a fluidity of conception, a possibility of swift transition from the ‘one’ to the ‘many’ and vice versa, to which our thought and language have no parallel. In the light of this conception, therefore, the Servant in Deutero-Isaiah can be both a prophet himself as a representative of the nation, *and* the nation whose proper mission is actually being fulfilled only by the prophet and that group of followers who may share his views.

Are there then messianic values in the Servant Songs?

In the final analysis, some authors, including C. R. North, H. H. Rowley, and G. Gelin, do see messianic values in the Servant. It involves an eschatological projection with prophetic structure. The Servant is seen as a 'Prophet-Messiah', and no longer a 'Messiah-King' (cf. Isa. 42.1; 53.12). During the Exile, prophecy is said to have experienced a revelation – a new type of mediation. 'Where the former mediator-kings and priests have been practically eliminated, it was realized at that moment, that there still remained men who, like Moses, had become responsible for their brothers through their vocation.'<sup>44</sup>

The whole theology of Suffering expressed in Jeremiah 26 finds its formula only in the Maccabean epoch, but already inside the qualitative community of the exile the prophets formed the new structure of the people of God. It is on this ground that there arose the messianic hope which was expressed in the 'Song of the Servant'. Deutero-Isaiah, therefore, exposes his individualist messianic message, which, however, is not presented as strictly Christological, for the prophet does not take photographs of events of distant centuries, but is concerned with the present pressing realities. The personage is an eschatological projection of an ideal figure, who was already incarnated in the prophet of this epoch.<sup>45</sup>

### *Messianic Expectations in the Inter-Testamental Period.*

#### **UNFULFILLED PROPHECY, FALSE HOPE, AND DISILLUSIONMENT**

The unfulfilled promises inherent in the official theology of the pre-exilic period, based upon Yahweh's choice of Zion and the Davidic dynasty, seemed a delusion to many of the Jews. The glowing picture of the triumphant establishment of Yahweh's universal rule, the Golden Age which would usher in the 'Day of Yahweh' – all this was difficult to recognize as good tidings of redemption and restoration, in the face of the hard realities of Israel's experience. Were the pagan gods, as in the days of the conquering Assyrians, proving to be stronger? 'There will have been many people in Israel who thought thus, who expected that their God must still "save" them by a miracle, and were then disillusioned again and again by the actual course of events.'<sup>46</sup> There were, indeed, no signs that the 'promises' of the past were soon to be realized, and so hope had to be reinterpreted if it was to retain any real meaning: 'Hope could neither return to the old forms, nor be satisfied with the present or

with some expected development out of the present. It had to find new forms or be surrendered altogether.<sup>47</sup>

The result, therefore, was the projection into the future of the hopes of a New Age. This was not simply the result of dissatisfaction with the present, of disillusion following on the deferment of hope. It was rather a recognition of the fullness of what was already tasted as reality.<sup>48</sup>

While some Jews abandoned hope in the messianic prophecies altogether, many others began to look for their fulfillment in a new Age to come. This has been seen as the opening of the vision of the Apocalyptic. The years 200 BC-AD 100, within which the bulk of the Apocalyptic literature appeared, witness a revival of Jewish nationalism and began with an account of the travails accompanying the birth of the Jewish nation under the Maccabean leaders and the Hasmonean royal house which their descendants formed, and concludes with the accounts of its demise at the hands of the Roman legions.<sup>49</sup>

### *The 'Son of Man'*

The Book of Daniel, the greatest of the Jewish apocalyptic writings, as well as the bulk of other extra-biblical apocalyptic literature, appeared as a reaction of the Jews to religious and political persecution under their new Masters. As a particular instance, Daniel was occasioned by the oppressive rule of the Seleucid Antiochus IV Epihanes (175-163 BC), with his policy of Hellenization which culminated in what the prophet called 'the abomination that makes desolate' (Dan. 11.31; 12.11).

The description of Yahweh's victory and triumph over the evil Seleucid ruler personified in the ferocious beast is followed by the appearance of 'the son of man', to whom dominion and kingdom is given (Dan. 7.13f). Why is this divine figure described as 'son of man'?

According to G. von Rad, 'We still do not know the origin of this concept; but we can say this much. The vision speaks of an individual who comes from the heavenly world, and whom God authorized to take "dominion and glory and kingdom" over all the nations of the world. Oddly enough, this figure of the "man", quite certainly understood initially as an individual, is given a collective interpretation in the passage which explains it (Dan. 7.17-27): the "man" is the incorporation of "the saints of the Most High".'<sup>50</sup>

Of the countless attempts to determine the origin of the concept of the 'son of man', von Rad indicates that the idea of Procksch seems to merit special attention. According to Procksch's interpretation, the concept of a man who

comes with the clouds of heaven is connected with that of the coming of the 'glory of Yahweh', especially as this is worked out in Ezekiel 1.26. Ezekiel, too, sees something like a man come down from heaven. Moreover, the coming of the divine '*kabod*' with the cloud is already characteristic of the account given in the Priestly Document.<sup>51</sup> The representatives of the school of comparative religions see in the 'son of man' ideology in Daniel traces of a divine 'original man', the ideal prototype of mankind, as present in the Iranian, Chaldean, and Egyptian religions; in the cult of Attis; among the Mandaeans and Manichaeans; and in Gnosticism in general. This concept, it is claimed, appears to be as universal as that of the *Logos*.<sup>52</sup>

### **IS THE SON OF MAN A MESSIANIC FIGURE?**

It has been pointed out that before New Testament times, the term 'son of man' was used in certain Jewish religious circles to denote a person who in many ways would correspond to a Messiah. By the time of Jesus, it had therefore acquired a certain content, and when he used it, it suggested to his hearers a number of definite conceptions of the mission and message of the man who applied it himself. Following the present form of Daniel's vision, it has been further argued that the 'son of man' is a pictorial symbol for 'the people of the saints of the most high', namely the people of Israel, and not an individual figure or a personal Messiah of any kind.<sup>53</sup> But this view is also represented in another form, according to which the 'son of man' is an individual 'identical with' the people of Israel. This represents again the collective-fluid theory of 'corporate personality', which we have already seen in the case of the 'Servant of the Lord'. According to A. Gelin, recent studies on the idea of 'corporate personality' may help us to understand the ambivalent notion of the title 'son of man'. We can hardly, according to Gelin, conceive of the people of God without a head.<sup>54</sup>

This eschatological figure is thus conceived as transcendental, and the hope of supernatural deliverance based on him was also to sustain the reaction of the Jewish fanatical sects during the Seleucid persecutions.

Although, in Daniel 7, the 'son of man' is not directly identified as the Messiah who was to deliver Israel, without doubt we are here again dealing with a messianic figure. He is a pre-existence being and comes from above. This is a prophecy of the final triumph of God's people in God's kingdom, coming in God's appointed time. As such, it is in line with the popular hope expressed throughout the apocalyptic writings, in which a Davidic Messiah may or may not play a part.

### ***The Place of Apocalyptic in the Development of Messianism***

Whether biblical or extra-biblical, a common hope underlines the apocalyptic writings, namely an expectation of the catastrophic intervention of God in history, ushering in the Golden Age in which the oppressed people are restored in order to enjoy eternal bliss.

Apocalyptic is described as:

Essentially a literature of the oppressed who saw no hope for the nation simply in terms of politics or on the plane of human history. The battle they were fighting was on a spiritual level; it was to be understood not in terms of politics and economics, but rather in terms of 'Spiritual Powers in high places'. And so they were compelled to look beyond history to the dramatic and miraculous intervention of God who would set to right injustices done to his people Israel. The very urgency of the situation emphasized the nearness of the hour.<sup>55</sup>

R. H. Rowley describes apocalyptic as 'the child of prophecy'. Although, 'for most of the prophets, the judgment might be thought to stretch down to the near future, the glory lay afar off, whereas for the apocalyptists, that too lay in the near future'.<sup>56</sup>

In their expectation of the catastrophic intervention of God in history, the apocalyptists did not fail to portray God's agent as a warrior. Political restoration and independence from Rome was to be achieved through military action led by the Messiah. Hence the messianic conceptions of certain circles produced the picture of a Messiah who was predominantly this-worldly, national, and political; whereas the views of other circles produced the picture of a predominantly transcendental, eternal, and universal Messiah.<sup>57</sup> Hope, under the pressure of evil times, was thus pinned to a rising nationalist leader who would bring about victory over Israel's present enemies. 'Messianism was a tendency, a thrust, before becoming a precise hope. First a Messiah was expected, then the Messiah.'<sup>58</sup>

### ***Nationalistic Movements and the Hope of Political Restoration***

*The Hasidic Movement:* The Books of Maccabees no doubt represent the reaction of the Jewish nationalists, and especially the Hasidim (the so-called 'pious ones', with their devotion to the law and the religion of their fathers), who gave their strong support to the Maccabean movement in the struggle against the Romans, resisting pacifically, and looking for supernatural

deliverance. They are described as fanatically brave and reckless men, perpetuators of the Maccabean spirit, ready to strike for independence against whatever odds. In their fanatical clinging to faith and self-endurance in the cause of the national struggle, the Qumran Community or the Essenes are also associated with the Hasidic movement and with opposition to any programme of Hellenization. Josephus describes their incredible resistance to suffering and torture during the Jewish-Roman wars.<sup>59</sup>

*The Zealots:* But a more powerful movement, Zealotism, was to emerge to continue the tradition of the Hasidim of Maccabean days. The deteriorating situation under Roman rule provided inflammatory material of those who wished to appeal to religious fanaticism, which became a feature of the struggle against the common enemy. Josephus describes the reaction of the Zealots to this situation: 'And now the people could no longer bear the insolence of this procedure, but did altogether run zealously in order to overthrow that tyranny.'<sup>60</sup> The result was thus a continuous struggle, and the expectation of a warlike Messiah who would victoriously defeat the Romans and re-establish an independent Israel. 'Men such as these participated in the revolts of AD 66-70 and 132-5 which brought the Jewish commonwealth to an end.'<sup>61</sup>

### ***The 'Day of Yahweh'***

To gain a more complete picture of the range of messianic expectations in biblical tradition, we here give special consideration to the 'Jewish hope of restoration', as popularly expressed in the 'Day of Yahweh' ideology, often regarded as the very heart of prophetic eschatology.<sup>62</sup> Based on the age-long promise of a 'glorious future' for Israel, there is no doubt that it derives its content from a messianic faith. Hope, as it was envisaged during the course of Israel's history, always embraced the idea that Yahweh would establish Israel, and give her victory over her foes and endless felicity under his beneficent rule. Such were the popular hopes attached both to the 'Day of Yahweh' and to the official theology of the Davidic state, where the notion of the Messiah has its roots.<sup>63</sup>

But the sad events of the Exile had put an end to these popular hopes. Moreover the Davidic successors had failed to live up to expectation, and thus had failed to win the confidence of Yahweh or of his prophets. No doubt, then, that for some of the prophets, the 'Day of Yahweh' would equally bring sad realities (Amos 5.18; Isa. 13.6; Zeph. 1.15). It would be a Day of Judgment, in the first place for the nations, and then for Israel. Whatever might be the case, there was the conviction that Israel's hope did not originate with the monarchy, nor would it end with it. The dawn of the New Age must not be hindered by any

human failure. Thus in the light of this conviction, the ‘Day of Yahweh’ came in practice to have a two-dimensional aspect – namely, redemptional and vindictive.

*Redemption:* The concept of hope here includes political and national deliverance of Israel (Isa. 10.27; Ezek. 34.27), the restoration of the dynasty and the kingdom of David, the reunion of the two kingdoms (Isa. 11.13ff; Jer. 3.18), the return of the Diaspora (Isa. 35.10, 43f; 48.20), and the restoration and glorification of Jerusalem as the religious and political centre of the world (Ezek. 36.33f; Isa. 51.3). Jerusalem becomes the ‘City of Paradise’ set on the highest point of the earth, to which pilgrims come from all the nations of the world to pay homage to the God of Israel, the King of Zion (Jer. 3.17).

*Judgment:* The Day of Yahweh meant also the ‘Day of vengeance of our God’ (Isa. 61.2). It was believed that on this Day, Yahweh’s final uprising against Israel’s enemies would take the same form as it had in the days of old, as in the events of the Exodus and the conquest of the ‘Promised Land’, and as in the wars leading to the founding of the Davidic kingdom. The nations’ disaster, therefore, meant Israel’s salvation. It denotes hope of God’s intervention on the side of his people, manifested in redemption and judgment. It was thought of as the time of divine breaking into history in spectacular fashion, when it would be God’s pleasure to consume all that is evil and bring in the age of bliss.<sup>64</sup>

*The Golden Age:* Israel’s redemption and the punishment of her enemies would usher in a ‘Golden Age’. On the economic level, it was conceived as leading to the paradisaical prosperity of land, people, and cattle (Isa. 49.20; Jer. 3.16). With the destruction of the world outside Jerusalem, eternal peace would prevail (Isa. 9.6-8; 32.17ff); suffering and disease would cease; men would live to be more than a hundred years old (Isa. 65.20); peace and joy, light and life, would prevail when the old things had passed away and heaven and earth had been created anew (Isa. 65.17). This Golden Age has also a universal character. With the establishment of the ‘mountain of the house of the Lord’, all the nations will flow to it, many people will come and say: ‘Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord ... and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’ (Isa. 2.2ff; Mic. 4.2ff). Therefore the Golden Age is always the Kingdom of God.

### ***The ‘Remnant’ and Messianic Promises***

Although the concept of the 'Remnant' had a clearly defined content from the beginning, it was still capable of acquiring finer shades of meaning and of being applied in new circumstances. R. de Vaux<sup>65</sup> outlines three stages of development:

1. Before the Exile, Amos, Micah, and Isaiah, in speaking of the Remnant had in mind the Israelites left behind in Palestine by their conquerors, and they stress the tiny number of these survivors.
2. During the Babylonian Exile, Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Ezekiel think of the Exiles who would return from Babylonia to form the new Israel.
3. After the return, the prophets identified the Remnant with the community under Ezra, which became the repository of all messianic hopes.

The hope expressed in the 'ideology of the Remnant' was that, in spite of Yahweh's castigation of Israel, a certain group of survivors would be spared who would in the end be heir to the messianic promises.<sup>66</sup> For this Remnant is prepared a glorious future, reminiscent of the Golden Age:

For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruits and the ground shall give its increase and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the Remnant of this people to possess of these things. (Zech. 8.12)

The Remnant would thus become heir to the promises originally made to the whole nation, as the new nation of Israel increases in power to dominate its enemies (Mic. 4.7; Isa. 28.2). 'A remnant shall go out from Jerusalem, and survivors from mount Zion' (Isa. 37.31-2). As the Remnant would now retake possession of the Land and form itself into a new community, everything was to be new. There was to be a new allocation of territory of the Promised Land (Ezek. 48), and a new name for the new city which would be called 'the Lord is there' (Ezek. 48.35). The days of fasting would be replaced by days of rejoicing (Zech. 8.11-15).

### *Summary and Conclusion*

In spite of some possible influence from the ancient Near Eastern world, it is not to be doubted that the promises made to Israel's forefathers by Yahweh, and especially the prophecy of Nathan, had a unique role in Israel's messianic expectations down to New Testament times. In the promises made to the house of David, the future theology of Israel's eternal redemption and restoration

found its point of departure, although the crisis which led to the disappearance of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah seemed to have shattered those hopes.

But in the face of all odds, hope had to find new forms of expression. The community was a desperate one in search of divine succour in a real time of need. The problem was to find an instrument – we may call him a '*Messiah*' – through whom the old promises would find their fulfillment. It envisaged a complete reversal of fortune as far as Israel and her foreign oppressors were concerned: a restoration based on '*land and people*'. The overthrow of the hostile powers meant Israel's salvation, as well as a reminder to the nations of what it was that had been done to Israel (Ezek. 39.21-3).

As the establishment of right ownership of land was effected, the land would reflect the ancient splendour of paradise (Ezek. 36.33-6). Involved in the restoration programme was the re-establishment of the nation on the old pattern, an outline which represents the expression of a desire to reactivate the old tribal order. In 'prophetic messianism', the figure which was to bring about this new phase in the destiny of Israel appeared in different forms. He was the 'Immanuel', the 'Servant of the Lord' and the 'Son of man'.

The hope for the revival of Israel was so urgent that even the heathen Persian ruler, Cyrus, was incorporated into the messianic expectation. 'It may be taken for granted anyway, that his words were gladly listened to by the exiles in Babylonia and powerfully kindled their hopes for a change in their affairs.'<sup>67</sup> For the apocalyptic writers, whatever might happen, salvation would eventually come, perhaps at the end of time. It would be accomplished by God's chosen agent – the 'Son of man', a transcendent divine being. And in the New Testament period, Christians were to identify this 'Son of man' with Jesus of Nazareth. It is believed that in him, all the prophecies of the Old Testament have found their fulfillment. He is the true Messiah, of the family of David, the Servant of Yahweh, and the Son of man spoken of by the prophets.

In the whole history of messianic expectation, especially in the rise of nationalistic movements in the later period, we notice one fundamental factor underlying the entire programme. It is the concomitant role of religion, nationalism, and politics in the struggle for independence and self-determination, and the rejection of foreign tyranny and interference in Israel's affairs. Messianic hope did not fade away, as one leader after another arose to take command of the continued struggle.

### **False Prophets in Israel**

Taken in a wide sense, the problem of ‘false prophetism’ has become a world-wide phenomenon, common to many world religions as well as to secular institutions, both in the past and in modern times. Conflict has always existed within prophetic circles. The argument is not whether tares can be found among wheat, but how these tares are to be separated from the wheat (Matt. 13.28ff). It boils down to the question: Who is a ‘true’ prophet and who is an ‘impostor’? What are the criteria for distinguishing one from the other?

In the Independent African Churches, the problem being created by the continuous rise in numbers of the thousands of self-proclaimed prophets is immense. Some of these we have already seen in the first part of our work. But the problem of false prophetism is a phenomenon found also in biblical tradition. It is a problem which goes back to ancient nabism in Israel, and which became more pronounced in the classical prophetic period. In the Sanhedrin (the Jewish supreme council and tribunal), the problem also attracted the attention of the court. With its discretionary powers over prophets, one accusation brought by two witnesses against a prophet was sufficient to bring about the death of the prophet by strangulation.

In the New Testament, the term ‘pseudo-prophet’ is used to cover the various kinds of false prophet, and Jesus Himself warned His disciples to beware of false prophets (Matt. 7.15,20). The appearance of such impostors is also cited as one of the signs of the end of time (Matt. 24.11).

The problem of false prophetism is therefore an important aspect of biblical prophetism, and in this chapter we shall examine the main issues involved in the polemics between ‘true’ prophets and ‘false’ prophets, limiting our investigation to the Old Testament situation. Our aim is also to fine out what the implications may be for the African prophetic Churches and for the world at large.

#### ***The Origin and Causes of False Prophetism***

As Edmund Jacob points out, false prophetism is nothing but a temptation to which every prophet is constantly exposed. In the attempt to fulfill his mission, the prophet meets occurrences in life which are not necessarily obstacles but which could become such, thus transforming the ‘true’ prophet into a ‘false’ one. These instances, for Jacob, include for example the sociological forces exerted in Israel by the kingship on the professional prophets belonging to the royal institution, a temptation which easily led to the withdrawing of attention from the word of God, as the prophet now concentrates his efforts only upon trying to please the crowd – in other words, a problem of the ambiguity of ‘*vox populi, vox Dei*’.<sup>1</sup>

Tracing the causes of the degeneration of nabism in Israel, W. Eichrodt emphasizes the sad results of its contact with the political institution through which the original purely charismatic endowment was abandoned in favour of close association with the monarchy and adaptation to its methods and requirements. In the face of strong pressure from nationalistic circles, successful maintenance of the integrity of the prophetic guild became difficult as its members were influenced by their material dependence on the favour of the king. ‘What men wanted from the prophet was words of power which would bring about *shalom* of people and state without imposing hard and fast limits on political action in the name of Yahweh’s moral demands’<sup>2</sup> (cf. Jer. 23.17). The disappearance of the sense of a divine message, embraced in the word of God, was to be the greatest failure of nabism – the prophet was no longer aware of the difference between the word of God and human wishful thinking.

There is therefore reason to believe that the prophets of *shalom* were always on the side of the Temple and the king, and derived their authority from these circles. In the opinion of H. J. Kraus, it is probable that the false prophets’ predictions of salvation coincided with the interests of the national cult.<sup>3</sup>

### **THE IDEAL ROLE OF THE PROPHET IN ISRAEL**

The unique role of the Israelite prophet is singularly emphasized and interpreted:

Yet Yahweh warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, ‘turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the laws which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets’ (2 Kings 17.13).

As John Gray points out, the full explanation of how Israel had sinned and was accordingly punished is seen in the passage 2 Kings 17.7-8. The notion of

delusion or unreality underlines the use of '*hebel*' (to go after vain things, false gods) to describe the life of the Gentiles (2 Kings 17.15) or of the man who is indifferent to law (Ps. 94.11), or has deliberately rejected discipline and whose life is haphazard and futile, the prey of chance rather than governed and stabilized by the moral law. It describes the state in which there is no discrimination between righteous and wicked, wise and foolish (Eccl. 2.2, 17; 8.4).<sup>4</sup>

In this situation in which the people of Israel had placed themselves, the prophets were looked upon as saviours, preachers of repentance and a return to law and sensible living. The messengers of Yahweh had therefore the principal function of proclaiming the word of God and insisting on the interior spirit of religion. They had the duty of 'watchmen' to the house of Israel (Ezek. 3.16). In this important office, the priests were also the instruments of Yahweh for the conversion of Israel.

### **THE MESSENGER, ALSO A CULPRIT?**

According to the duties of the 'watchman', as outlined in Ezekiel 3.1ff, the implication was that if the watchman failed to warn the wicked man in order to save him, and on account of this laxity the wicked man died without repenting, the watchman was to be held responsible. It was therefore an irony of faith that the messenger of God, the watchman, the accredited champion of Yahwism, had fallen along the way with the sinners!

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its zest, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men (Matt. 5.13).

The danger was that the supreme and exclusive character of Yahwist religion was more and more sacrificed, by those who should have been its champions, to the independent value of the professional religious organization, which now allied itself with the established guardians of popular faith.

It is precisely this discrepancy which existed between the ideal role of the prophet and how their duties were actually carried out by some of the prophets that brought about the conflict within prophetic circles in Israel. The false prophets stood condemned, together with the priests, for having lost the sense of their mission. Working as paid functionaries of a state bureaucracy, they had betrayed their calling and had thus fallen with the masses. The conflict which ensued is well illustrated in the scenes in 1 Kings 22. 1-40 and Jeremiah 23 and 28.

According to A. Gray, the respective attitudes to Micaiah of the king of Israel and of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, introduce us to the main conceptions of prophecy in ancient Israel.

This passage significantly anticipates the difference and, indeed, antipathy between the great figures of prophecy such as Amos and the other canonical prophets and those termed by them ‘false prophets’, particularly Hananiah (Jer. 27-29) who is seen as an official prophet circumscribed by his office of intercession and reassurance and limited by a merely national outlook, as against Jeremiah, whose experience of divine revelation made him independent of institutionalism and turned his vision outward to the action of God in world history.<sup>5</sup>

### *Criteria for Distinguishing Between the Prophets*

The formula, ‘by their fruits you shall know them’, which has since constituted the true test of the prophets or disciples, has run into difficulty as it becomes difficult to determine what the fruits are. It has therefore been doubted whether this formula could stand as a universal criterion for distinguishing false prophets from true. The validity of the arguments advanced by the true prophets in their polemics with their colleagues has been questioned by many scholars. ‘All rational attempts to unmask the false prophets break down, for there are no generally trustworthy criteria by which to tell whether a man is a false prophet or not.’<sup>6</sup>

Following Ma Weber, many exegetes in the past continued to regard Jeremiah’s opponent, Hananiah (Jer. 28), as representative of the false prophets – the prophets of salvation, the so-called ‘*shalôm*-prophets’: a criterion that seemed to be established by the ‘true’ prophets themselves (Jer. 28.8ff). Hananiah has been treated as, among other things, a cultic prophet, a nationalist, a pseudo-prophet, a fanatic, a demagogue, and a sinner against the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Contrary to these views, however, G. Quell recognizes in Hananiah all the external characteristics of a true prophet – he (Hananiah) believes like Isaiah in the election of Israel, quotes Yahweh as his authority, makes use of symbolic actions as Jeremiah does. Jeremiah’s statement, ‘Amen! May the Lord do so’ (Jer. 28.6), is interpreted as an agreement to Hananiah’s prophecy, but the already-prejudiced Jeremiah was to look for a new revelation to condemn his opponent.<sup>8</sup>

As von Rad also points out, Jeremiah seems to have been overwhelmed by the problems raised in the clashes with his colleagues (Jer. 23.9ff; 28).

We can see him searching deliberately for practical criteria to identify the false prophets. At one moment he compares the content of their message with the prophetic tradition, at another he is suspicious of the forms in which they received their revelations, because they appealed to dreams, and not to a word from Yahweh, and were therefore in danger of self-deception. Further, their offensive conduct spoke against them.<sup>9</sup>

He continues:

The fact that Jeremiah could not point to any criterion that might in principle answer the question – who was the false prophet and who the true? – showed him the full difficulty of the problem: for there could be no such criterion in respect of form or conduct. Just because Jahweh was not ‘a God at hand’ but a God ‘far off’ (Jer. 23.23), there could be no standard method of any sort by which he granted revelations.<sup>10</sup>

But two centuries earlier Micaiah ben Imlah had given a completely different solution to the problem of prophets who contradicted one another:

He did not look for criteria to deal with his opponents. He saw the whole matter as lying in the transcendental sphere, in the council of Yahweh, who himself inspired the false prophets in order to entice Ahab (1 Kings 22.21ff). With such a point of view he could accept his opponents’ ‘*bona fides*’, and their subjective certainty of having been commissioned, much more calmly than did Jeremiah.<sup>11</sup>

## **THE TRUE PROPHET AND THE FALSE PROPHET IN DEUTERONOMY**

Deuteronomy strives to draw up objective criteria by means of which the false prophets may be recognized.

*Deuteronomy 13.2-6* refers to the case of the ‘*nabî*’ who leads people to the worship of other gods. This prophet, like the true prophet, gives signs and wonders, and his predictions equally come true. But the difference is: if on top of these, he says, ‘let us go after other gods and let us serve them’, he is clearly a false prophet, and the death penalty should be his lot.

*In Deuteronomy 18.20ff*, the death penalty is also prescribed for a prophet who presumes to speak in the name of Yahweh without any commission from

him. The criterion here is whether what he prophesies comes to pass or not (Deut. 18.22).

Deuteronomy is thus comparable with Jeremiah 28.8ff – subsequent validation by fulfillment of prophecy is demanded from the prophet who prophesies salvation. ‘When the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet’ (Jer. 28.9).

As we can see also from other relevant texts, it seems that it is their ‘false’ colleagues’ proclamation of salvation which was particularly suspect in the eyes of the true prophets. (See 1 Kings 22.11ff; Mic. 3.5ff; Jer. 6.14; 14.13; 23.9ff; 28.5-9; Ezek. 6.16.)

## **OTHER ACCUSATIONS**

Other accusations brought against the false prophets, and which serve as criteria, may be summarized under nine headings, following R. Chave’s classification.<sup>12</sup>

1. *Immorality*: (adultery) – Jer. 23.14; 28.23-31; (drunkenness) – Isa. 28.7-8; Mic. 2.11; (theft) – Ezek. 22.25ff; (venality) – Mic. 3.5; Jer. 6.13-14; 8.10-12; Ezek. 13.10; (lies) – 12 texts.
2. *Impiety* – Jer. 23.15; 5.14-15; Deut. 10.20.
3. *Lying dreams* - Jer. 23.32; 23.25; 29.8-9.
4. *Magic* – Deut. 18.10; Ezek. 13.17.
5. *Optimism* – Jer. 6.14; Mic. 3.5; Ezek. 13.10.
6. *Professionalism* of the prophets – 1 Kings 22.6, 12; Mic. 3.11.
7. *Ecstasy*.
8. *Enthusiasm* to prophesy.
9. *Non-fulfillment* of prophecy.

Eva Osswald has another approach to the criteria problem – based on the mode of revelation. This would disqualify from the ‘true’ prophetic group those who were also diviners, dreamers, soothsayers, or sorcerers (cf. Jer. 27.9).<sup>13</sup>

### ***Prophets of Doom versus ‘Shalôm-Prophets’***

One of the most outstanding charges brought against the pseudo-prophets by the canonical prophets was that these false prophets were prophesying salvation and peace for Israel, in direct contradiction to the actual state of events. The heart of the people’s confidence, as well as that of the pseudo-prophets, lay on the election-tradition and on the belief contained in the Zion-theology according to

which the city of Jerusalem was conceived as inviolable because it was the place where Yahweh dwelt in his Temple on Zion.<sup>14</sup>

Our interest here is to find out how the canonical prophets (Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah in particular) looked at the inviolability-of-Zion ideology, which was an expression of salvation for Israel. Their attitude surely contradicts their opponents' views on the issue. In Micah 2.6-11, the source of contention between the nationalists on the one hand, represented by the pseudo-prophets, and Micah and his supporters on the other, is clearly stated. The pseudo-prophets are identified as those who tried to prevent Micah and his group from prophesying, as they did, a prophecy of doom. ' "Do not preach" – Thus they preach – "one should not preach of such things, disgrace will not overtake us". Should this be said, O house of Jacob? Is the Spirit of the Lord impatient? Are these his doings?' Micah's adversaries cannot subscribe to his conception of prophecy; in stubborn opposition they confidently maintain that 'disgrace will not overtake us'. In their opinion, giving credence to Micah's prophecy of doom amounts to having no confidence in Yahweh and in what he does. Pseudo-prophetism thus holds the Covenant to be an objective guarantee for national existence. But Micah was to ridicule his adversaries, for their very activities manifest the falsity of their hopes" 'Its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for hire; its prophets divine for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, "Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us"' (Mic. 3.11).

For Micah the consequences of their activities are clear: 'Therefore because of you Zion shall be ploughed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height' (Mic. 3.12). His version of redemption from the hands of the enemies that dare to lay siege to God's city could not be acceptable to the pseudo-prophets (cf. Mic. 4.13ff). 'The Zion myth is the divinely guaranteed keystone on which their whole existence depends, and on this they rely with dogmatic confidence.'<sup>15</sup> The conviction was that the King who dwells on Zion could not suffer his city to be taken by enemies – in direct contradiction to Micah's prediction of the total destruction of Jerusalem (Mic. 3.9-12).

For his part, Isaiah was to use the common Zion tradition of the city's invulnerability to support the people and to proclaim the message of Yahweh; 'but he radically alters this tradition in two ways. The prophet calls for faith in Yahweh as a condition for salvation and protection.'<sup>16</sup> Secondly, Isaiah changes the old Zion tradition by placing the onslaught and attacks of the enemies within the arena of God's activity and work.<sup>17</sup> In Isaiah 29.1-8 the destruction of Zion is directly assigned to Yahweh: 'I will distress', 'I will encamp', 'I will lay siege', all describe the work of Yahweh. 'Such thoughts', points out Hayes,

‘must have horrified the hearers of Isaiah, and those who believed in the City’s security.’<sup>18</sup>

This is in strong contradiction to Isaiah’s connection with the early tradition, which is abundantly clear, particularly in the way in which the prophet depicts divine intervention on the side of Zion.<sup>19</sup>

The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm. At evening time, behold, terror! Before morning, they are no more! This is the portion of those who despoil us and the lot of those who plunder us (Isa. 17.13-14).

But in spite of his good prediction for the City of God, at no time did Isaiah ever completely lose sight of the dark reverse side of the work of Yahweh, as von Rad points out.<sup>20</sup> There is to be moaning and lamentation, and Jerusalem is to be like a ‘ghost’ whose thin voice is to sound ‘from low in the dust’: such is the depth of humiliation which will precede the deliverance (Isa. 29.2, 4). Yahweh’s work for Zion is here given a remarkable theological ambivalence: it judges and saves at one and the same time.<sup>21</sup> But whatever his attitude to the Zion-tradition may have been, Isaiah’s work appears overwhelmingly negative; not one of all his sayings about Zion came true. The nation showed no faith, and Yahweh did not protect his City!

For his own part, Jeremiah was no prophet of weal. Proverbially, he has been known as the prophet of doom. During the months in which the danger from Babylon was most imminent, all that Jeremiah could prophesy was that the capture of the city was certain (Jer. 37.8, 17; 38.3ff), and his advice was to capitulate as quickly as possible (38.17). This conviction, which Jeremiah also expressed in public, was to be the reason for the prophet’s sufferings, for the nationalists in Jerusalem found a man with such conviction quite intolerable.<sup>22</sup>

Our attempt so far has been to establish the attitude of the canonical prophets with regard to the ‘*Shalôm*-versus-doom’ controversy within the prophetic circle. The canonical prophets prophesied doom because in the activities of the people themselves, and above all in those of their priests and the pseudo-prophets, Jerusalem and its people had fallen short of deserving the fulfillment of Yahweh’s promises. The reverse was the case, and the result – punishment – doom.

To summarize, it is to be noted with van der Woude:

As for the old traditions concerning Yahweh, the canonical prophets stood on one and the same ground, but as far as the interpretation of these traditions is concerned they differ widely from the pseudo-prophets – Woe instead of Weal.<sup>23</sup>

Micah, a younger contemporary of Isaiah, and the later prophet Jeremiah, both harshly denounced the people's confidence in the security and inviolability of Zion. In this regard their break with older traditions is much more radical.

### *Objections to Certain Criteria*

Judging from the internal evidence, many authors do not seem to accept the validity of the accusations advanced against the so-called false prophets. These criteria are either rejected as insufficient or they are seen as common to both the true prophets and the false prophets. We pick up some examples to illustrate the argument. In the first place, the attempt in Deuteronomy to draw a distinction between the true prophets and the false prophets is said to be unsuccessful.

### **PROPHECY OF WOE VERSUS PROPHECY OF WEAL**

Many authors do not see this as the main criterion, since the 'true' prophets of judgment, wars, and pestilence (Jer. 28.8; Mic. 3.12 and cf. 4.13ff; Isa.29.1-8; 17.13-14) were evidently prophets of salvation also. Nahum is cited as a typical example, but he is not classified with the false prophets. According to van der Woude, 'The book of Nahum is no exception, for it is very likely that this book is to be regarded as the words of a nationalistic, professional prophet resembling a figure such as Hananiah, whom Jeremiah opposed.'<sup>24</sup> Some of the classical prophets are also known to have prophesied the restoration of Israel and the 'Day of Yahweh'. At the same time, it has been suggested that in Isaiah and Hosea, Yahweh's calamitous acts could turn again to good; and idea was then carried forward beyond judgment into an era in which God's order of salvation could once more prevail (Isa. 1.21-6; 7.1-17; Hos.2.2-15; 14.2-9).

### *The Authority of the Prophets*

One of the regular accusations brought forward against the false prophets was that Yahweh had not sent them and yet they prophesied. They are not commissioned by Yahweh and have not been admitted into his counsel. Neither are they in possession of his word. This distinguishes them clearly from the true prophets, whose principal privilege it was to have divine commission to receive true revelations and to be bearers of the divine word. The formula '*kôh 'amar Yahweh*' (thus says the Lord) with which the prophets begin or end their oracles has been recognized as an appeal to the divine authority with which they

spoke.<sup>25</sup> Lindblom points out that this ‘oracle formula’ was commonly used by the early prophets as an introduction to their oracles, and was inherited from them by the classical prophets. The formula was not invented by the Hebrew prophets, but belonged to the oracle terminology of the ancient world generally.

Not that the claim to divine commission was a monopoly of the true prophets, nor that these deny that their opponents too accomplished wonders and signs, or were equally inspired. The accusation, however, was that their claim was dishonest and baseless (Jer. 6.13; 8.10; 14.14; 23.25; 27.15; etc.). They are simply liars and what they prophesy is falsehood. For Jeremiah, the source of their inspiration is in fact the syncretistic cult, which he held to be the worship of Baal. They prophesied by Baal (Jer. 2.8; 5.31; 23.13). Do we meet here again a ‘Beelzubb’ controversy? (Matt.9.32). For Ezekiel, the revelations of the false prophets were not inspired by Yahweh, in spite of their claim to speak in the name of Yahweh by using the common Yahwistic oracle formula (8.1ff; 22.28).

In spite of these explanations, we maintain that the arguments based on divine authority of the prophets do not seem to resolve our problem. They cannot therefore serve as decisive or practically demonstrable criteria.

‘*Dabar*’ and ‘*Ruah*’: It has been suggested that the vocational prophets (at least before the Exile), were reticent about the appeal to ‘*ruah*’ as source of their inspiration. In regard to prophetic intuition A. Neher<sup>26</sup> distinguishes between the role of ‘*ruah*’ and ‘*dabar*’ as two forms of inspiration in two different epochs of religious experience. In the ‘primitive’ prophets, the presence of the possessing spirit alone constituted proof of the prophet’s inspiration (2 Kings 2.15f; Exod.11.25,29), and legitimized a prophet in the eyes of his colleagues (2 Kings 2.15). From the eighth century, however, according to Neher’s observation, there was no strict appeal to the *spirit*, and far from being possessed, it was the prophets themselves who ‘possessed’ the *word* of God. The result therefore was that the true prophets of the later epoch were very mistrustful of the ‘possessed’ prophets, and considered their inspiration by ‘*ruah*’ a sham criterion for authenticating their ‘divine’ mission.

Mowinckel also insists strongly on this distinction between ‘*dabar*’ and ‘*ruah*’ and draws attention to the absence of the concept of ‘*ruah*’ in classical prophecy.<sup>27</sup> For him the true prophet has no ‘*ruah*’, but power, force, and judgment.

For von Rad, ‘The prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries received their call through God’s direct and very personal address to them, and this created a totally new situation for the man concerned.’<sup>28</sup>

It does not seem, however, that Mowinckel's view received approval from all scholars. E. Jacob as well as Ramlot rejected them, while J. Guillet was in favour.<sup>29</sup> It is pointed out that (quite apart from the difficult case of Mic. 3.8) Ezekiel made constant claim to the Spirit (cf. 3.12-14; 8.3; 9.1, 4; 43.5, etc.).

*Dream:* Another argument in which dream is rejected as an authentic means of divine revelation, is that illustrated by the saying in Jeremiah 23.28: 'What has straw in common with wheat?' Here a line of demarcation is being drawn between the dreamer-prophets (regarded as false), and the prophets who had the word of God. It is said that in the ancient Near East dreams or 'visions of the night' were considered as messages emanating from supernatural powers, and great importance was attached to their content and interpretation. On a lower level, frightening and nightmarish dreams experienced by ordinary people were ascribed to the machinations of sorcerers and evil spirits. On a high level, dreams experienced by kings or priests were conceived to be a vehicle by which the gods made known their intentions, as a means of communication between gods and men. Sometimes dreams could be induced by passing the night in a temple in the hope of receiving a revelation in a night vision.<sup>30</sup>

The false prophets were therefore accused of basing the veracity of their pronouncements on the claim that they were the recipients of dreams (Jer. 23.32; 27.9); to the true prophets these were 'lying dreams', giving 'empty consolation' (Zech. 10.2), and Deuteronomy prescribes the death penalty for any spurious 'dreamer of dreams' (13.1ff).

This criterion is rejected by some authors as unconvincing, since the true prophets also 'dreamed dreams' and the priests legitimately use Urim and Thummin. It is further observed that in the Hananiah-Jeremiah scene the accused prophet made appeal to another mode of communication of revelation, as did Jeremiah, i.e. symbolic action. 'God is therefore supremely free in the choice of the mode of revelation'.<sup>31</sup> 'Already with dreams', observes Ramlot, 'we enter into no-man's-land, for Jeremiah (23.25-8) sees in it an inferior form of inspiration. In the case where Moses was compared with the other prophets (of dream), its legitimacy was not challenged (Num. 12.6-8).'<sup>32</sup>

## **FULFILLMENT AND NON-FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECIES**

This is seen as a simple criterion by which people could in general conclude whether a prophet was really called and sent by Yahweh or not. If the prophecies of the *shalom*-prophet come true, only then can it be proved that Yahweh has truly sent him (Jer. 28.8). For Ezekiel, too, the fulfillment of that which he predicts is a sure proof that he was a prophet sent by Yahweh (2.5; 33.33; cf. Zech. 2.13, 15; Deut. 18.21f). E. Jacob points out that in spite of the

affirmation in Deuteronomy 18.22, non-fulfillment of certain prophecies had never been a determining factor in Israel for treating them as illusory.<sup>33</sup>

For his part, J. Hempel emphasizes how the plurality of meaning of history hardly favours the minute verification of these prophecies. Moreover he insists that the 'word' does not always provide for the benefit of history, an unequivocal concept which will be clear and convincing in all cases, since the word itself is not unequivocal, but has a plurality of meaning.<sup>34</sup> E. Jenny and Kuenen have taken pains to illustrate from different prophetic predictions and texts some of the discrepancies which have existed between such predictions and the events as they actually happened in history.<sup>35</sup>

But whatever the implications may be, it has been pointed out that beyond the details of these predictions it is necessary to take into account the totality of the events of history. Consider the small people of Israel being crushed between the two big blocks – Egypt and Mesopotamia. The announcement of the downfall of the empires, and the final survival of Israel in spite of the rapacious civilization of the big powers, this was Israel's expectation. It is therefore necessary to see such events with the eyes of those who consider history as a 'place of revelation' (with the condition that the latter clarifies the former), and also to recognize the place of God in history. In these situations, 'one can without doubt see here a sign of the recognition of that true prophecy'.<sup>36</sup>

## **SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION**

So far there does not seem to be any unanimous agreement on the decisive criteria by which the false prophets can be distinguished from the true. The difficulty originated even with the true prophets as they struggle to establish some criteria for identifying the false prophets. J. Fichtner points out the difficulties facing the establishment, of making any clear and systematic distinction between the true prophets and the false ones, since both claimed to have been sent by Yahweh (1 Kings 22.24), and both used the same authoritative formula: 'thus says Yahweh'.<sup>37</sup>

None of the criteria drawn from the mode of revelation or inspiration appears to be decisive. The criteria relating to the salvation-judgment controversy, to *dabar* as against *ruah*, and to the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of prophecy, are said to be relative. On the moral issue, too, the criterion appears equally unsatisfactory. Hosea's taking of a prostitute in marriage or the dissimulation of Jeremiah before the princes (Jer. 31.24-7) are seen as events not commendable as morally good. The seemingly more efficacious criterion – 'consciousness of divine mission' – is dismissed as being too subjective. For von Rad and G. Quell, the '*exousia*' (cf. Mic. 3.8) of the prophets cannot be

established with clarity and objectivity, nor is it an object of scientific analysis.<sup>38</sup>

In the view of A. Gelin, the group of prophets whom the classical prophets opposed were not necessarily 'false prophets'. The fact, he points out, was that Israel never considered these people systematically as 'false prophets'. There was rather an attempt to fix rules for a just discernment of spirits (Jer. 28.9; Deut. 13.1-6; 18.15-22).<sup>39</sup>

Side by side with the vocational prophets, as Gelin points out, these prophets were open to both religious and political influences, and were very much inclined by their position to identify Yahweh's interests with those of the king, and as a result the vocational prophets opposed them. Finally Zechariah 13.1-6 announced their disappearance.

But whatever might have been their relationship with the kingship in Israel, or their identification with the national cause, their spiritual level, according to Gelin, was not necessarily low; and 'to regard them as false prophets without distinction would be an exaggerated view'.<sup>40</sup>

The origin of the institution, in the eyes of Gelin, is a more complicated problem, just as is the identification of the groups of prophets under consideration as 'false prophets'. The questions he poses are of striking importance:

Are these prophets Israel's counterpart of the divining prophets who are regular court officials in Semitic civilizations (Jer. 27.9)? Are they a continuation of the ecstatic *nabis* whose cultic character Mowinckel emphasizes? Do they belong to the cult guilds from which many of the prophets came, as the Scandinavian school would have it? The lack of a clear answer to all these questions underlines the ambiguity of the problem.<sup>41</sup>

In view of these objections it is necessary to look for more profound arguments or more convincing criteria or solutions for resolving the problem of false prophetism

### ***Ultimate and Decisive Criteria***

Among the criteria suggested by some authors, the moral life of a prophet, and sound doctrine, seem to bear more weight; and many would consider these as valid enough for judging the authenticity of a prophetic vocation. Deuteronomy is clear on the fate of a prophet who claims to be a messenger of Yahweh, and at the same time leads people astray with false doctrines (13.2-6). The immoral life of the 'false' prophets was a mark for which they could not be distinguished

from the people whom they were supposed to correct; and the true prophets would point out the incongruity between such a life and the prophetic office. Lindblom would consider such a criterion valid enough:

The marks by which one could recognize a true or a false prophet cannot be expressed in a formula. They were not dogmatically fixed. Different features had to be taken into consideration. The preaching of *shalom* was not always false preaching; some predictions made by the incontestably true prophets did not come true.<sup>42</sup>

He affirms:

In such cases the moral discernment of a prophet played a decisive part. The general agreement of a prophet's preaching with Yahweh's will, thoughts, and purpose guaranteed the fact that this prophet had been sent by Yahweh and had a true divine message to convey. A prophet who in this way served the living God of Israel would not have been judged as a false prophet either by Isaiah or by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.<sup>43</sup>

A. Neher in his own judgment, insists on that radical aspect of the prophetic vocation expressed by the word '*massa*' (burden, bondage). As he points out, Jeremiah discovers the authenticity of his call from the fact that it was for him '*massa*', a charge not deliberately sought for, but rather imposed from the outside. Only on this condition can a prophet maintain that his prophecy is true, because it is for him a 'burden'.<sup>44</sup> In the same vein, S. H. Blank emphasizes the role and values of those trials of Jeremiah – lamentations (Jer. 15.10); torture and imprisonment (37.15; 20.2); outrage and sarcasm (15.15; 17.15; 20.7-8); accusation (26.17; 37.13; 38.4); the sad plight of a fugitive (36.5); the social condition of an outcast (parish) (16.5; 15.17); solitude (16.2). Blank sees in these the true signs of a divine mission.<sup>45</sup> For von Rad, Jeremiah's tribulations cannot easily be explained away: 'Thus, the reason why Baruch so conscientiously traces all the details of this "*via dolorosa*" is that the catastrophic events into which the prophet was drawn do not after all come by chance, instead, they bring the divine demolition to pass; here a human being has in a unique fashion borne a part of the divine suffering.'<sup>46</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

The criticisms advanced against false prophets by the true prophets in Israel resemble those which we meet in the Independent African prophetic circles. Nor is the problem of false prophetism limited to the Old Testament and African situations. In the New Testament the problem was not confined to the establishment of criteria for knowing the false prophets. A direct identification of those figures condemned by Jesus, or by the New Testament Church, was equally of utmost importance. Who is being referred to as ‘false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravening wolves’ – those who ‘on that day ... will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?”’ The attempt to establish criteria for unmasking the false prophets was also a New Testament preoccupation.<sup>47</sup>

False prophetism was also a source of anxiety for the early Church. The rule laid down by the *Didache* for detecting false prophets corresponds to the New Testament criterion – ‘by their fruits you shall know them’. He who does not practice what he preaches is a false prophet.<sup>48</sup> Very prominent in the early Church was the problem created by the Montanist prophets. The condemnations of the Montanists are well brought out in Eusebius’s discourse concerning the evils of false prophetism. Among his outstanding accusations against the Montanists are those found in his *History of the Church*, Book V, 18.2,4,17 and 7. In 18.2 he writes:

Who is this new ‘Master’. He is unmasked by his works and teaching. It is he who has taught divorce and made laws on fasting. He is the one who with the intention of making people flock together, has named Jerusalem, simple villages of Phrygis, Pepuza, and Timio. He is the one who has employed money-gatherers, organized exactions of tributes in the name of donation. It is he who has consigned salaries to the bandits of his doctrines, thus promoting greediness and diffusion of his false doctrines.<sup>49</sup>

In very strong terms Eusebius condemns the Montanist prophets whom he identifies as ‘false’ prophets leading people astray. His attacks against them and their leaders are no different from those which Jeremiah directed against false prophets.

From these few examples, we see how extensive the problem of false prophetism was, both in biblical tradition and in the early Church. The problem is a worldwide phenomenon, not limited even to the religious field.

The search for criteria by which false prophets can be unmasked may continue to present difficulties, but it may be worth considering the weight of

the argument embraced in the formula ‘By their fruits you shall know them’. In this all the arguments advanced by the true prophets against the false can be summarized. Whether this problem is found in the Old Testament, in the New Testament period, in the early Church, or in modern times, the prophets can be better known by the fruits which their preaching or movements produce, and we consider this ‘formula’ adequate enough to stand as a true test for all individuals who claim supernatural authority for their mission.

## 16

### **The Importance of ‘Zion-Jerusalem’ in Biblical Tradition**

Of the three main divisions of the Independent Church movements in Africa, the most influential group is the ‘Zionist’, clearly distinguished from the others by its attachment to the name ‘Zion’ or Jerusalem. Thousands of Independent Churches in this group go by the name ‘Zion’.

In adopting this typology, most authors, following Bengt Sundkler, have come to identify these Churches with the Zionist movement, although it has been carefully pointed out that in describing these groups as ‘Zionist’, the word has nothing to do with any modern Jewish movement. ‘The reason for the use of this term is simply that the leaders and followers of these Churches refer to themselves as “*ama-Ziyoni*”, that is “Zionists”.’<sup>1</sup> As Sundkler points out, there are at least two thousand Churches in South Africa using this formula ‘Zion’ or ‘In Zion’. They are said to be part of a mighty movement of the Spirit. ‘At this

time – at the confluence of Black Theology and a worldwide charismatic wave – they are of special interest.<sup>2</sup>

In the modern Jewish context, S. Mowinckel describes ‘Zionism’ as a kind of politico-religious ‘messianism’ without a Messiah, thought out in terms of immanent political forces, but coloured by a romantic, religious nationalism.<sup>3</sup> But the use of this term is by no means limited to the Bantu Churches in South Africa. ‘Zion-Jerusalem’ is a well-known theme in Kimbanguism, and in the Aladura Churches as well.

What is the ideology behind this African attachment to Zion? It may not be sufficient to describe these Churches as ‘Zionist’ simply because they bear the name ‘Zion’. In this chapter, therefore, we shall study the ‘Zion-Jerusalem’ theme in biblical tradition, so as to see what the implications are for the Independent Churches in Africa.

Following the same pattern as we developed in the first part of this work, we shall examine here the following themes: Zion – as the dwelling place of God; Zion – its political and religious significance; Zion – scene of great festivals; the River that gladdens the City of God; the restoration of Jerusalem in the messianic age; and the eschatological pilgrimage to Zion.

### ***The Origin of the Term ‘Zion’***

There are many hypotheses concerning the origin of the term ‘Zion’, which appears for the first time in the Old Testament in the narrative of the conquest of Jerusalem by David (2 Sam. 5.6-10; 1 Chron. 11.4-9). The etymology of the term is said to be uncertain.

As for the location of Zion, it has been suggested that it was originally a topographical term for the south-eastern hill of the pre-Israelite Jerusalem, site of a Canaanite settlement.<sup>4</sup> The settlement on the hill of Zion itself is said to have borne from early times the name Jerusalem; but under David it assumed a permanent glory of both religious and political importance; and under its religious aspect, it is most frequently given the name Zion. ‘Such was the name of the Jebusite acropolis of the city conquered by David, and Zion had become the city of David’ (2 Sam. 5.7). The prophets, like the psalmists, have resumed this archaic name to designate the city of Yahweh – Jerusalem-Zion is the City of Yahweh.<sup>5</sup>

G. Fohrer points out, however, that ‘Zion’ hardly occurs at all as a topographical term, or even as a name, in the periods that followed.<sup>6</sup> According to F. Stolz, it is likely that the name Zion had its theological significance before it was overrun by David. In the connection, David must have taken over the Jebusite city by a trick, thus leaving it materially undamaged. ‘*Die Festung Zion blieb intakt und wurde Stadt Davids.*’<sup>7</sup> ‘David seems to have continued the

Jebusite city-state system and to have settled only his household, officials, and mercenaries in the city.’<sup>8</sup>

### *Yahweh dwells on the Mountain of Zion*

One of the first results of the Israelite occupation of Jerusalem was the enthronement of Yahweh in Zion, where he is guaranteed dominion over all Israel and foreign kingdoms. This is said to be in consonance with the Jebusite kingship ideology, to which we shall soon return.

The primary importance of Zion is that it became the abode, the dwelling place, of Yahweh; and the transfer of the ark to the City of David seemed to have confirmed the presence of Yahweh there. And with Solomon, the God of Sinai took possession of the Temple and the continuity of the tradition was assured.<sup>9</sup> This is crucial for the growing reputation of Jerusalem as the City of God and the steady extension and transferring of the holiness of the loci of revelation: from the ark to the Temple, then to the Temple hill, and then to the whole city. Hence Jerusalem is ultimately the City of God (Ps. 46.4), the City of the Great King (Ps. 48.2); the Holy City (Isa. 48.22). ‘To Zion’ means ‘to Yahweh’ (Jer. 31.6); and ‘from Zion’ means ‘from Yahweh’ (Ps. 14.7). It was therefore a common belief that Yahweh who dwells in Jerusalem is God in Zion (Pss. 65.1; 98.2; 135.21).

### **THE CANAANITE IDEA OF DIVINE PRESENCE**

It has been pointed out that with the Israelite occupation of Jerusalem, the Canaanite idea of kingship was also explicitly taken over.<sup>10</sup> But not only is this Canaanite influence said to be present in Israel’s belief that Yahweh dwells on Mount Zion. A further implication was that in making Zion Yahweh’s throne and dwelling place, the Israelite had equally taken over certain mythological ideas derived from the cultic terminologies of Canaanite Ugarit.<sup>11</sup>

As to the idea of divine presence, in the ancient Near East, it was thought that the abode of the gods could not be precisely defined or isolated but could be symbolized, and in this way the god could effectively be reached by men. This explains the great attachment in the ancient world to sacred mountains, regarded as dwelling-places of the divine.

The universe itself was thought of as gigantic world-mountains, stretching from the entrance of the subterranean abyss to the highest point of heaven, and embracing the entire inhabited world. A real mountain was therefore a fitting symbol for such a god, and expressed the belief that his power extended across all the territory where men dwelt.<sup>12</sup>

A further inference is drawn from the association of local mountains or hills with shrines and temples in the ancient Near East. Artificial mountains which could serve as divine dwelling places are said to have been constructed, the great temple of Marduk being an example of such terraced-tower constructions.<sup>13</sup> A clear parallel can therefore be seen between the idea of divine presence in the ancient Near East and Israel's idea of Mount Zion as the dwelling place of Yahweh. Zion is the place where Yahweh dwells, or at least, he is approachable there and then in the Temple.

The above parallel is further confirmed by the identification of Mount Zion with Mount Zaphon. Zion is likened to Zaphon, 'mountain of the North' the famous mountain at Ugarit, in northern Palestine, upon which Phoenician and Canaanite texts locate the residence of the gods.<sup>14</sup> The Canaanite deity El-'Elyon was thought to have Mount Zaphon for his abode, and it is suggested that it was through this cult that Mount Zion came to be identified with Mount Zaphon, and so came to be regarded as the dwelling place of a god. The hill, like Mount Zaphon itself, was thought to be symbolic of the cosmos where the god reigned.<sup>15</sup> It is therefore asserted that a distinctive Canaanite doctrine of the divine presence was well known in Jerusalem before the Israelite established the worship of Yahweh there.

### *The Political and Religious Significance of Zion*

Whatever may be the extent of foreign influence on the Zion ideology, it is evident that the capture of the Jebusite city-fortress by David served two important needs in Israel. It became the political as well as the religious centre of all Israel. Jerusalem, the city of David, is also the City of Yahweh, and the two aspects are bound together historically.

'It is not to nature', writes A. Alt, 'that Jerusalem owes its preeminent position in present-day Palestine; that Jerusalem has become what it is in our days is because history has made it so, in spite of nature.'<sup>16</sup>

That history began with David. The king's transference of his residence and the Ark to Jerusalem, and the building of the temple there later, had given Jerusalem a special status of enormous importance. The choice of Zion and the election of David are clearly differentiated as two separate acts of unifying importance.

With surprising speed, belief in the promise of God to the Davidides, and in the presence of God, was linked unbreakably with the city, so that Jerusalem as a royal city and a religious symbol survived not only the collapse of the united monarchy, but

all the catastrophes that were to follow, even the loss of the sacred Ark and the temple. The Holy city, or the holy mountain of Yahweh, as the visible symbol which in itself embraces God's presence among his people, became the bearer of all expectations for the future, and, as such, the sign of God's faithfulness to his chosen people.<sup>17</sup>

In Nathan's prophecy is to be found a particularly revealing instance of the manner in which tradition has been continually reinterpreted during ancient Israel's history, just as David's role in relation to Jerusalem also was viewed differently in different periods.<sup>18</sup> It was the same Yahweh who had chosen Jerusalem for his dwelling place, who had also chosen David to reign there, and these two choices were related in the thought of Israel (Pss. 78.66-70; 132.11 and 13; 1 Kings 11.32). One could conclude from this that the political and religious fates of Jerusalem were indissolubly united, and the conclusion was indeed drawn that Jerusalem – the political city – was inviolable because it was the city where Yahweh lived. It was therefore significant that Yahweh's dwelling in Jerusalem came to be expressed in terms of his 'election' of Mount Zion, so that history rather than myth was looked to as the justification of his abode there, even though it was essentially a mythological idea that was so expressed.<sup>19</sup>

### *Zion – the Spiritual Centre of Israel*

Apart from the central role of Zion in the political and cultural life of Israel, in the strictly religious sphere also it was pre-eminently conceived as the centre of the nation's life force. 'Admittedly, the Ark had stood in former times in one or another of the old local sanctuaries, and the Israelite tribes revered the sanctuary of Jerusalem as their own religious centre. "Mount Zion" – this was the name of the hill-top on which Jerusalem's place of worship stood – became a concept in Israel's religious vocabulary.'<sup>20</sup> With the presence of Yahweh decisively established, Zion could not but become the centre of pilgrimages and festivals. The psalmist would long for Zion's beauty:

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!  
My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord;  
My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God  
Blessed are those who dwell in thy house, ever singing thy  
praise!  
Blessed are the men whose strength is in thee,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion (Ps. 84.1-2, 4-5)

## **ZION – A CULTIC CENTRE**

Zion was also Israel's centre of worship, and a fitting place for Yahweh's praises (Pss. 65.2; 97.8; 147.12).

Though the great post-Exilic Diaspora, scattered but growing increasingly in importance, is unable to take part in the temple *cultus*, except by pilgrimages, it not only clings to the indissoluble relation between temple and community and the decisive significance of membership of the temple community, but also regards the temple as a house of prayer for all nations and the spiritual centre of the whole world.<sup>21</sup>

The whole city is regarded as the temple city (Ps. 48; Ezra 5.15ff). If God is 'seen in Zion' (Ps. 84.7), the reference is to the climax which the pilgrim experiences in the *cultus*. In this context, Zion is both the cultic centre and also the *cultus* itself which is practiced there.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Zion – Scene of Great Festivals***

Several psalms speak of festivals on Mount Zion and of numerous processions which are clear manifestations of the important events that take place there. There are many hypotheses regarding the origin and background of these festivals, but here we shall consider that presented by S. Mowinckel. According to him, the principal festival in Zion has to do with the feast of the Enthronement of Yahweh, which has been compared to some of the ancient Near Eastern New festivals and royal feasts.<sup>23</sup>

The festival of the Enthronement of Yahweh is described as sometimes having a strongly dramatic character, the main event being the beautiful procession, the victorious coronation entry of the Lord into his sanctuary:

Thy solemn processions are seen, O God, the processions of my God,

my King, into the Sanctuary –  
the singers in front, the minstrels last, between them maidens playing

timbrels:

'Bless God in the great congregation, the Lord, O you who are of Israel's fountain!' (Ps. 68.2ff)

The personal presence of Yahweh in the festive procession is probably symbolized by his holy shrine (the Ark). The high points of the festival include the exhortation to praise, and the mention of Yahweh's presence and of the excellent deeds he has just performed or is about to perform:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises!  
Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and  
the sound of melody!  
With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord!...  
before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth,  
He will judge the earth with righteousness and the  
peoples with equity. (Ps. 98. 4-6,9).

Characteristic of the enthronement psalms is the acclamation of Yahweh as King. Yahweh is king in Zion, not only of Israel, but of the whole earth (Pss. 47; 93; 96; 98; 99). The actuality and contemporaneous character of these psalms are shown in the feeling that the congregation is now actually standing in the presence of Yahweh, who has established his kingdom and inaugurated his beneficial reign over his people.<sup>24</sup> The realities embraced in these psalms are presented as something belonging to the living present, something which all who hear or sing them themselves have taken part in and are experiencing at the time, something on which the singing congregation's whole happiness and well-being – their salvation – depends, and which they are at the moment praising and celebrating: 'O sing to the Lord, for he is come, he is come! (98.9); As we have heard, so we have seen' (48.8). But it is true on the other hand, that there is something in these psalms that points beyond the immediate moment; they also express a hope and a certainty regarding the future, beyond human and political calculations.<sup>25</sup> At the enthronement festival therefore, the congregation has most vividly experienced the personal coming of the Lord to save his people – his epiphany. In the cultic festival past, present, and future are welded into one.<sup>26</sup>

### ***The River that Gladdens the City of Zion***

Another attractive phenomenon marking Zion as the spiritual centre and life force of Israel is the presence of a stream of water of life and blessing flowing from its mountains: 'There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the most High' (Ps. 46.4f). Once again the presence of Yahweh is manifested in the midst of his people, a source of blessing for the righteous (Ezek. 47.1-12; Joel. 3.18; Sech. 14.8; Isa. 33.21).

It has been suggested that the idea of this river might well be connected with the actual situation in Jerusalem, in which reference is made to the water of Gihon which King Hezekiah brought through a tunnel to the pool of Siloam (2 Kings 20.20).<sup>27</sup> The river is said to have played a great role in the Jerusalem festivals. But again mythical motifs are said to be decisive. On the Canaanite hill of god spring forth ‘(two) rivers’ and ‘(two) floods’ and out of the Garden of Paradise flows the river of blessing or the four cosmic rivers.<sup>28</sup> W. I. Wolverton suggests that ‘the river, in the city of God’ in Psalm 46.4ff preserves ancient mythological ideas about the city of *El’Elyon* (Ps. 48). In the Ras Shamra texts *’El’s* dwelling was located ‘at the springs of the [two] channels of the deeps’.<sup>29</sup> Mention of this river in Jerusalem with its life-giving powers is also found in Psalm 65.9ff, Isaiah 33.21, Ezekiel 47.1-12 and Zechariah 14.8, and H. J. Kraus points out that the ‘river’ in Jerusalem may be connected with the ‘spring’ which first fertilized the created world mentioned in Genesis 2.6.<sup>30</sup> Its real significance is thus said to be found in the mythological belief in the river which fructified the garden of paradise, where God’s dwelling was situated. The idea of this river is vitally related to the belief in the presence of God, for just as in paradise a life-giving river was thought to flow, so Jerusalem was looked upon as a paradise on earth, a place where God’s presence was to be found.

In much the same vein, H. Junker believes that the river in Zion is a symbol of the presence of God who from the Temple bestows security, prosperity, and peace. By contrast the real great river which was the pride of Babylon did not long provide that city with the same gifts (Isa. 8.6ff). In Deutero-Isaiah, also, the restored Zion is associated with the imagery of rivers and streams: ‘For thus says the Lord, “Behold, I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream”’ (Isa. 66.12, cf. 33.21). Like Sinai (Exod. 19.12, 23) and other sacred mountains (Isa. 2.2; Exod. 40.2), Zion is described as a holy sight, and Jerusalem, where God dwells, takes its place among the sacred enclosures inaccessible to profane intrusion.

### **Jerusalem – an Unforgettable City of Splendour**

Belief in the inviolability of Zion became an illusion when in 587 BC Nebuchadnezzar entered Jerusalem and left the city a shambles. It was because Jerusalem had become a city of sin, that it was also to be a city of judgment. And so the threats of the prophets came true. The exiles far away from Zion in which their souls were knit together would long to return to the Holy City, and in the psalm which breathes the spirit of sadness and homesickness of the Israelite in Babylon, the psalmist pledges:

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!  
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not  
remember you,  
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy! (Ps. 137.5-6)

Sojourners in a strange land, the exiled Israelites had the conviction that the loss of the Holy City was a temporary setback. A return to Zion must mark a new beginning, and sooner or later hopes would be raised for its restoration and Yahweh's judgment on those who had brought the City of God to ruins. So long as the Jew was in exile from 'erez' Israel', his joy could not be complete. Assembled in synagogues, they sat like mourners, without shoes, on low stools or on the floor, lamenting the loss of the land and praying for its restoration. There was a yearning for their national and political past, and a persistent questioning of the causes, meaning, and purpose of the Exile.<sup>31</sup> In the liturgy, yearning for Jerusalem finds powerful expression:

It was towards Jerusalem that the Jew turned when he prayed, and thrice daily he beseeched: 'Gather us from the four corners of the earth to Jerusalem, thy city, return in mercy ... rebuild it soon in our days': 'May our eyes behold they return in mercy to Zion.' The two most impressive occasions of the year – the Passover Seder and the Day of Atonement – reach their climax in the proclamation: 'Next year in Jerusalem.'<sup>32</sup>

### ***The Coming Restoration of Jerusalem in the Messianic Age***

The hope of the restoration of Jerusalem was almost an imminent eschatological hope, for during the Exile the prophetic message either of judgment of the sinful city or of its possible deliverance through radical conversion was changed to a 'before and after' in time: *first* judgment and *then* salvation.<sup>33</sup> With judgment over, there could only follow the eschatological age of salvation, in which Zion-Jerusalem was the centre.

Based on the fact of Yahweh's past choice of Zion, the city now occupies an important position in the prophetic prediction of a glorious future. For Isaiah, Yahweh is about to deliver Zion, he is about to raise up the anointed one, the new David. It is here, in the future event, and not in any historical event of the past, that Jerusalem's salvation lies (Isa. 42.27; Zech. 1.12; Isa. 46.13).

According to Ezekiel, the reconstructed Temple will be the centre of the future Jerusalem, and it is in the Temple that he sees the return of Yahweh (Ezek. 43.1-5). His Advent in his City is imminent, and the transformation of

Zion by his coming will be a genuine and world-shaking event (Isa. 56.1; 58.8, 10ff; 62.1-3).

### **THE SPLENDOUR OF THE RESTORED ZION**

The glory of the restored Zion as foreseen by the prophets includes motifs of a new paradise, so that the whole picture of the transformed and jubilant city is set within the framework of a new heaven and a new earth. Deuteron-Isaiah (Isa. 60-2) displays all the splendour of the future Jerusalem: All the peoples of the earth bring their presents. There is no longer need of the sun and the moon, for God will be her light. This dazzling description has no longer any connection with earthly realities. Jerusalem transcends history; in her is summed up the whole history of salvation.<sup>34</sup>

It is a period of universal peace and reconciliation, as the glories of those days reflect the primeval life. A hitherto childless City, to her astonishment, will suddenly become again the mother of many children, to the point that there will be a space problem as the citizens will say one to the other: 'The place is too narrow for me; make room for me to dwell in' (Isa. 49.20ff).<sup>35</sup>

The glories of those days will be marked by the restoration of treasures and the bringing back of the children of Zion from different lands. The latter splendour will thus be greater than the former, as the Lord of hosts says: 'In this place I will give prosperity' (Isa. 54.13; Ezra 5.14). The event will mark a total reversal of fortunes, ushering in the establishment of God's kingdom, which marks the end of injustice and oppression. There is a concrete reference to the Babylonians and the Edomites, who were especially hated because of the disaster they brought on Judah and Jerusalem, and who are threatened with divine vengeance in the day of eschatological reversal.<sup>36</sup>

'I will require Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea before your very eyes for all the evil that they have done in Zion, says the Lord' (Jer. 51.24). 'In Mount Zion there shall be those that escape, and it shall be holy; and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions; (Obad. 17ff). 'The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you' (Isa. 45.14).

As a part of the radical transformation of things, Yahweh will effect a tremendous change in human destiny: ‘He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken’ (Isa. 25.8). The messianic age has arrived, for ‘Saviours shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s’ (Obad. 21). It is the Day of Yahweh.

On the lips of the pre-Exilic prophets the ‘day of the Lord’ had an ominous ring; it was to be a day of doom for unfaithful Israel, and the nations round about were to be Yahweh’s agents. But to the chastened Exilic and post-Exilic Israel, the coming day meant Israelite triumph and the chastisement of Gentile oppressors. The post-Exilic community may have seemed but the debris of a once proud state, but to the prophets it was the seed of a new Israel. God’s fidelity to his ancient promises and choice insured Israel’s permanence and salvation.<sup>37</sup>

### ***The Eschatological Pilgrimage to Zion***

Significant in the new development of events is the special positive relationship between Yahweh and the nations. ‘Gifts will be brought to the Lord of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide’ (Isa. 18.7).

‘On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the less, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the less well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering, that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations’ (Isa. 25.6-7).

The nations will come to know the Lord, and an epoch-making event which also marks the new order of things is the *eschatological pilgrimage* of nations to Mount Zion. ‘The place to which Yahweh has bound his salvation will rise out of its lowly and unknown state and will be seen by the world in “*doxa*”.’<sup>38</sup> The transfiguration of the city, which until the days of David meant nothing to the faith of the Israelite tribes,<sup>39</sup> is a mighty act of Yahweh by which is set in train the pilgrimage of all the nations:

‘Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk

in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isa. 2.3-4).

It is a nation-wide movement to Zion, as some come from the east, others from the west, both by sea and land. ‘The new Jerusalem becomes the centre of the world; above it Yahweh’s shining glory will radiate, and all nations will rejoice in its light. Innumerable multitudes of kings and peoples will come as pilgrims to the holy place.’<sup>40</sup> Yahweh will accept the burnt offerings and sacrifices of the foreigners who join themselves to him, ‘for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples’ (Isa. 56.6ff).

Jerusalem is described in its festive mood, as seen during a feast of Pentecost, attended by pilgrims from many nations (Acts 2.5-13). Zion is called to become the religious capital of all nations. Egypt (Rahab), Ethiopia, Syro-Phoenicia (cf. Philistia, Tyre), Mesopotamia (Babylon), all the pagan neighbours of Israel are destined to know the true God and to provide proselytes (Zech. 2.15; 8.23; Ps. 45.14, cf. Ps. 87). In the eschatological and apocalyptic writings there arose also the idea that the glorification of the messianic community would take place on Zion’s holy mountain, where the Messiah will appear at the end of time or even beyond the consummation of time; in the last instance, Zion becomes equivalent of the heavenly Jerusalem (Isa. 60.14; Heb. 12.22; Rev. 21.2; cf. also Obad. 20, 21).

### **OUT OF ZION GOES FORTH INSTRUCTION**

The pilgrimage to Zion also depicts the conversion of nations which rally in Zion to learn the law, ‘For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem’ (Mic. 4.2; Isa. 2.2-4). Because Yahweh resides in Jerusalem, and because the temple shelters the Ark of the Covenant which contains the Ten Commandments, Jerusalem is the new Sinai.

The last step was to make Jerusalem the centre of the earth. It is already prepared by Ezekiel: ‘Thus says Yahweh God. This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the centre of the nations, with countries around her’ (Ezek. 5.5). The idea is developed in the apocryphal books of the Old Testament in late Judaism, and by the Fathers of the Church. It is expressed visually in certain maps

of the Middle Ages, which place Jerusalem in the centre of the inhabited world.<sup>41</sup>

### **Summary and Conclusion to Part II**

Zion-Jerusalem, ‘City of David’, ‘the dwelling-place of Yahweh’, ‘new heaven on earth’, has been the scene of many political and religious activities, as well as the scene of terrible wars and devastations through the centuries, not least in modern times, as one power captures and occupies it and is later displaced by another. ‘After the glorious but short period of the empires of David and of Solomon, Jerusalem was only the capital of the little kingdom of Judah, then vassal city of Assyria and Babylonia, and finally a provincial city of the Persian, Greek, and Roman empires.’<sup>42</sup> The political importance of Zion seemed thus to have faded away with the end of Jewish history.

But its religious importance has remained almost indestructible. ‘In spite of the separation of the two kingdoms and the attempt of Jeroboam to establish a concurrent sanctuary in Bethel, Jerusalem remained the religious centre of Yahwism.’<sup>43</sup>

It has remained up to modern times the scene of pilgrimages, and of remarkable importance is the fact that ‘three thousand years after the entry of the Ark of God into Jerusalem, Jerusalem remains the Holy City, a spiritual centre for the three monotheistic religions of the earth.’<sup>44</sup>

In modern times there is no doubt that for the Jew of the Diaspora, *return to Zion* is among his most urgent yearnings, a phenomenon which has always constituted a major theme in Judaism. In the nationalistic and political sphere it is evident today that the modern Jewish messianic faith, which flared up most violently among the mystical Hasidim of Poland,<sup>45</sup> has come to blur the old Zion tradition. For the Jewish Zionist Movement:

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the re-establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 is one of the most important events in Jewish history. That a nation cut off – in the main – from its land for nearly two thousand years should regain its sovereignty is amazing enough. That it should do so immediately after suffering the worst disaster any people in recorded history has ever suffered and, from a military point of view, against overwhelming odds, compounds the astonishment and indeed awe that any spectator must feel. With good reason many people, both Jews and gentiles, saw the hand of God in the miracle of 1948.<sup>46</sup>

And justifying his choice of the title ‘The Return to Zion’ in contributing to the series *Popular Judaica Library*, Rubinstein explains:

‘The Return to Zion’ was chosen as the title rather than ‘Zionism’, because the Return did not start with the First Zionist Congress nor even with the coining of the word ‘Zionism’. This Return to Zion started the day the Jews were driven from Zion.<sup>47</sup>

Whatever may be the implications of the ‘Zion tradition’ today, there is no doubt that it has strongly influenced many movements of our own time, political as well as religious. It is not surprising then, that the Independent religious movements in modern Africa should equally have undergone such influences.

## **Part III**

### ***Comparison between Prophetic Movements in Modern Africa and Ancient Israel***

## **Introduction: The Basis for Comparison**

In this third part of our work, we shall endeavour to bring out some of the important points of contact between the two prophetic movements we have studied, and the role of the prophet-leaders in each. Since we have already given detailed descriptions of the elements common to both situations, we shall here do no more than indicate as briefly as possible what these common elements are.

‘Prophecy and Revolution’ is the title we have given to our study. It may be necessary, however, to indicate that by ‘revolution’ we do not mean to indicate ‘conflict’ or ‘clashing’ of forces or ideas. ‘Revolution’ here implies ‘a face-to-face meeting’, a comparison. Through such a ‘meeting’, some of the features common to the situations in Israel and Africa are brought out, as well as the dissimilarities.

In Old Testament research dealing with the prophetic phenomenon in the ancient world and Israel, the problem raised by the presence of similarities concerns primarily matters of origin and development. The fundamental questions seem to have been concentrated on the implications of foreign influences on Israelite religious and political institutions. Was there a parallel development of such phenomena both in Israel and in her ancient Near Eastern neighbours? As far as our own project of comparison is concerned, these problems do not arise. The basis of our comparative work is not concerned with any possible parallel development of prophetism in Israel and Africa, *in time and space*. It is rather presumed that the Israelite prophetic movement has in fact influenced the prophetic movements in Africa. The African prophets clearly claim to be ‘followers’ of the Israelite prophetic figures and religious leaders. This is the point of departure of our study - namely to verify the ‘truth of such claims. The comparison therefore endeavours to stress those elements that the African prophets have *borrowed*, and which are common to both situations.

This type of comparison is in fact somewhat flattering to African Independency. But whatever may be the implications of the points of contact so

established, our respect for the prophets of Israel does not require us to deny the existence of similarities or to be indifferent to the truth. In any case there is no cause for alarm, since similarity does not connote sameness. The comparison shows also some areas of difference.

The fundamental basis of our comparison is also found in that radical breakthrough characteristic of some of the Independent African Churches, a breakthrough from traditional animism and polytheism, with their associated magic practices, in favour of faith on the one God they find in the Old Testament, but which may not, however, have reached a Christian position.

The two distinct religious forms found in the Old Testament period, the early classical religion of Israel, and the later Judaism, are both represented in these African movements. Accordingly we suggest 'Israelitish' to describe movements such as these growing round the advent of a new prophet with a gospel similar to that of the earlier prophets of Israel; in contrast we use the term 'Judaistic' for movements where there has been a shift of emphasis from direct revelation through prophets to laws and rituals, accompanied by an exclusive attitude and possibly by messianic expectations.<sup>1</sup>

Between the two prophetic movements we have described in the first two parts of our work many similarities exist. Here we briefly point out these points of contact, following the same outline we developed in the previous parts.

### *The Emergence of Prophetic Movements*

In both situations, we have seen that *two* basic sorts of factors have been responsible for the rise of resistance movements, namely socio-political and religious factors.

### **SOCIO-POLITICAL FACTORS**

In times of emergency, struggles against a common enemy, or against tyranny and oppression within and outside the existing communities, lead to a rise of national heroes and charismatic leaders in whom hopes for salvation are incarnated.

In Israel, the mortal enemies, forces of oppression, tyranny, subjugation, and enslavement were represented throughout its history of Egypt (Pharaoh), the Ammonites, Amorites, Edomites, Midianites, Philistines, Assyria, Babylon, Syria, and so on. Within its very borders, the enemies of justice and oppression were some of Israel's kings, who contributed their quota to the misfortunes of the nation.

On their part, the Africans do not fail to represent their enemies as Philistines, Egyptians, and Midianites. These enemies are no doubt the colonialists, represented by the *Boers* and *Britons* in *Southern Africa*, the *Belgians* in the *Congo*. The colonial administrator, or the *South African Prime Minister*, in particular, is referred to as *His Majesty* and represents the *Egyptian Pharaoh*, before whom the African Moses stands begging that the persecuted people of God be granted some sort of freedom – a lessening of their burden! (cf. p. 128).

'Comparison with the Jews as a chosen people is a common religious phenomenon', points out J. D. Y. Peel, and one reason for this is usually postulated: the Churches are Churches of the depressed, and they compare themselves with the Jews, oppressed but virtuous.<sup>2</sup> But, Peel further observes, the point of comparison is different in the case of the Aladuras.

It is not that they feel themselves to be like the Jews in being persecuted (for they do not think themselves like this), but that they, like the Jews, are the special recipients of divine favour, with positive spiritual benefits; this is expressed by Jewish, as by Seraphic, symbolism.<sup>3</sup>

## RELIGIOUS FACTORS

Ronald E. Clements does not agree with the psychological explanations which are assumed to provide a key to understanding the nature of divine revelation with all its theological implications. He insists:

We should also wish to criticize the assumption that racial and genetic lineage can explain the history and development of religious movements, especially when they contain highly distinctive ideas, such as Israelite prophecy undoubtedly did.<sup>4</sup>

In our opinion, it is necessary to accept that religious movements can rise also from genuine religious motives. It was therefore not purely social and political factors that brought the Israelite prophetic movement into being, although there was no clear-cut dichotomy between religious and political aspirations. The above argument holds too for the African situation.

### *The Functions of Prophetism*

The functions which leaders are expected to exercise, no doubt determine the emergence of such figures and the movements which they inspire. This is the case with both the Israelite and African prophets.

## CHAMPIONS OF LIBERTY

Here one must distinguish between the earliest charismatic leaders, the *nabî's*, and the classical prophets. All the prophets of Israel, from Moses to John the Baptist, stood out against all forms of tyranny perpetrated by the rulers of this world, within and outside Israel. While the classical prophets manifested their opposition to oppressive rule in their messages and condemnations, some of the charismatic leaders and *nabî's* showed a more violent attitude towards the defense of liberty. These include the two charismatic kings – Saul and David, the Judges, the Nazarites, some of the ancient *nebiim* (especially the ‘Sons’ or ‘Bands of Prophets’), warmongers, patriots, and various enthusiasts, and many other champions of liberty during the Holy War campaigns.

In the African situation, the Ethiopian prophet-leaders and other messianic figures who assume the different functions of Moses are no doubt champions of liberty for the oppressed Africans. Isaiah Shembe's *Nazarite Group* cannot be unconnected with the type of function which their counterparts exercised in ancient Israel. The strong and very influential *Ngunzists* of the early phase of the Kimbanguist movement were surely ‘Holy-War-mongers’. Their patriotic and religious campaigns, well documented in the literature, resemble

those of the ancient nabism in Israel. Among the members of the ‘School of Prophets’ that Jennings saw in Thysville were nationalists and enthusiasts who were at work preaching religious war intended to drive the whites in the Congo into the sea! Kimbangu was sitting before the company of the prophets (cf. pp. 48ff and 1 Sam. 19.20).

### **ETHICAL MONOTHEISM**

The religious functions of prophetism are among the most important factors which brought the emergence of charismatic figures in both Israel and Africa. Ethical monotheism was the phenomenon with which Israel’s religion was most intimately identified. War against *Baalism* was among the principal tasks with which all the champions of Yahwism were associated. The criticism of intransigent Yahweh-worshippers like Elijah against the co-existence of Yahweh and Baal was well illustrated in the contest at Mount Carmel. The hypocritical attitude of the kings and their Israelite subjects towards the moral demands of Israel’s religion was described as ‘limping between two loyalties’. Moses, the first champion of Yahwism, was given an important place in the religious and political history of Israel. The multiple functions attributed to him – prophet, saviour, founder of religion, and law-giver – points to his unique position in Israel. All these functions lean on the one most important prescription of ethical monotheism.

Moses’s activity and influence released impulses of fundamental significance for Israelite religion; and the development of transmission history makes it quite clear that these impulses contained the trend towards recognizing Yahweh as the only effective God for his worshippers, and the one who made the highest demands on them.<sup>5</sup>

The attack which nabism declared on Baalism was sweeping enough, and was to be continued in a most emphatic manner by all the later prophets. As W. Albright suggests: ‘We may suppose that Samuel and his band of prophets cleared away the most obvious pagan symbols and practices, much as the Christian missionaries of the Middle Ages did in the case of Germanic and Slavic shrines.’<sup>6</sup>

In the Independent African religious movements, it was not the missionaries who in fact took the lead in the violent campaigns against paganism in African communities, but the new prophets and their enthusiastic followers. The bands of prophets have always played a significant role in the open war against all symbols of *Baalism*, as represented by *fetishism* in the

African context. The iconoclastic programme of the Ngunzist movement had its most drastic effect on paganism in that part of Africa, where it exercised great influence. The immediate effects of their activities were vividly described by A. Walder in his *Ngunzismen in the Congo* (cf. pp. 47ff). The most immediate duty which the African Moses or 'Elijah' assumes after his call to prophecy is to put an end to fetishism and to destroy all the symbols associated with that cult, setting in their place the one true God of the Scriptures. Prophet Harris spelt it out, 'I am like the prophet Elijah to destroy fetishes!'

## **TWO-PRONGED CAUSATIVE FACTORS**

The idea of politico-religious factors may go to suggest two divergent aspirations. But, as has been emphasized, in neither the Israelite nor the African situation, does there seem to be a clear-cut separation of the two phenomena. In Israel's covenant with Yahweh, the terms of the alliance specify both political and religious directives. The rule of Yahweh over Israel was ratified in the covenant which guaranteed Israel's spiritual as well as her political well-being.

In the Independent Church of the Lord (Aladura), there seems to be a merging of both political and spiritual aspirations, also expressed in the idea of a 'covenant'. Letters are addressed to political heads of government in West Africa, emphasizing the necessity of a national Church or a spiritual organization to supply the much-needed inspiration and guidance, as political independence without a spiritual national Church is a farce! The emphasis is on a 'United States of West Africa' under a national spiritual Church, an awareness of spiritual affinity between religious and political independence.

Sermons may narrate the early persecutions the Church suffered and rehearse how God has been at work in its history. This amounts to a cultic recital proclaiming part of the basic *kerygma* of the Church – how God has been at work in the foundation of the events and in his subsequent saving acts to produce a covenant people in the service of his mission to mankind. The self-awareness of the Church therefore matches that of ancient Israel, and supports its claim to be more than a human society.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Supernatural Experience and Ecstatic Phenomena***

In both Israelite and African situations, great similarities exist between the various supernatural phenomena connected with prophetic experience. These include the call to prophecy, modes of divine communication of revelation, and ecstatic manifestations in general.

## **THE PROPHETIC VOCATION**

In Israelite prophetism the weight of conviction, embraced in the consciousness that one has been called and set apart by Yahweh for a special mission, receives further support in the repeated formula, 'thus says Yahweh'. This authoritative self-awareness of divine call was to become the distinguishing mark of the group of prophets who are known traditionally as the 'classical' or 'writing' prophets and specifically referred to as 'vocational' prophets. In their conviction lay their weakness as well as their strength. The divine call to 'go' and prophesy became the turning point in their life career. It involved great risks and suffering, and at the same time sacrifices. In the Old Testament, six elements are the most immediately recognizable characteristics of the prophetic call:

- Suddenness of the call;
- An introductory discourse;
- Visions, or messages to 'go' and 'preach';
- Objections or refusal on the part of the prophet';
- Reassurance and promise on the part of Yahweh;
- Request for a guarantee – a sign.

(See Judg. 6.11ff; Exod. 3.1-12; Jer.1.4-10; Isa. 6.1-13.)

In the African prophetic Churches the greatest dynamic for the emergence of any meaningful religious movement lies in the new leader's claim to supernatural revelation, by which he is turned into 'another man', a mark of change of career in life. Some of the prophets relate the circumstances which surround that mysterious encounter with the divine, its immediate and after effects. The order received to 'go' and 'preach' or 'heal' is never absent. There may be protests and objections (cf. Kimbangu, p. 47), but eventually that divine force which overpowers the weak man proves irresistible. The result is acceptance of the consequences of the call. For some, the new vocation may be trying enough. Isaiah Shembe was thus forced to abandon his four wives in order to dedicate himself fully to the service of God. Prophet Joshua Nweke had to abandon his prosperous trade in Northern Nigeria to obey the voice of the one who called him to 'go' and 'preach'. Prophet Mark of the Apostolic Church of Christ is still celibate; and he intends to remain so, since according to him 'prophetic mission does not admit any hindrance'. Others may suffer persecution, but the God who calls and sends is always there to encourage and strengthen.

Although not many African prophets could be associated with 'genuine' conviction in the claimed mission, the achievements of the few clearly manifest the truth of what they claim to have been called to be or to do. 'True' and 'imposing' prophets there are in the Independent Churches, and on the

continental scale we can be sure of at least four. Bryan R. Wilson and Marie-Louise Martin would regard Kimbangu as one of the greatest prophets of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

We can point at others. Surely Sundkler would recommend Isaiah Shembe, whom he says is better known than any other Zulu prophet.<sup>9</sup> Sundkler reports too that a prominent European who knew the prophet well once said about him: 'I have never met his parallel among Africans, and with all his tremendous influence over people, he was a man of great charm of manner, benevolence, and tolerance.'<sup>10</sup>

For G. M. Haliburton, Prophet William Harris will be an obvious choice. Pierre Benoit was expressing the Methodist judgment of him when he wrote, among other things: 'Harris is in part a figure from the Old Testament, but there is more than that in him... He well represents what a black Christian prophet could be.'<sup>11</sup>

Another ideal African prophetic figure might appear to be Josiah Oshintelu, on the recommendation of H. W. Turner.

## **ECSTATIC MANIFESTATIONS**

*Spirit possession:* This is one of the prominent features of the ecstatic manifestations which we have seen both in African prophetic movements and also among the Israelite prophets. The phenomenon is often described as 'divine seizure', 'prophetic frenzy', or even 'sacred madness'. More plainly it is described simply as 'promptings of the Spirit'. The unmistakable effect of possession by the Spirit or by the grasping hand of Yahweh is a full-scale ecstatic hysteria, to the extent that the possessed is 'turned into another man' (1 Sam. 10.5-6). Prophet Hill would describe the same state in the following words: 'When the Spirit gets hold of you, you are no longer an ordinary man.'

The effects of such 'divine gripping' can often be a source of anxiety for bystanders. In Numbers 11.28, Aaron wanted Moses to forbid the young men upon whom the Spirit had fallen from prophesying. In 1 Samuel 10.11 and 19.24, the proverbial expression 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' implies that behaviour like that of the prophets was unbecoming of a man of such status. Saul's meeting with the band of prophets resulted in contagious ecstatic activity, and his behaviour was strange enough: 'And he stripped off his clothes and prophesied, and lay naked all that day and all that night.'

In the New Testament that state of frenzy would be described as 'drunkenness' by the crowd: 'And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine".' That was the first Pentecost, when the spirit had fallen on the Apostles (cf. Acts 2.12). In the Corinthian Church and in the Montanist

movement of the second century, the extravagant use of a spiritual gift such as glossolalia, was a source of anxiety for the early Church, not unlike today. Man have expressed fears concerning the presence of similar phenomena in the so-called modern Pentecostalist movement in the Christian Churches today.

*Stimulation to a state of Ecstasy:* Music is known to be a good stimulant to ecstasy, and often leads to contagious mass excitement and activity. The bands or troops of prophets in the earliest Israelite prophetism were known to have dwelt and acted together in groups and in contagious enthusiasm, induced by the beating of instruments, dancing, and singing. In 1 Kings 3.15, Elisha requested a minstrel to play for him. This put him in the appropriate mood, so that he was able to deliver his oracles. Music is no doubt an indispensable element in worship in almost all the Independent Churches in Africa. Apart from its role as a stimulant to frenzy, the successes of the new movements cannot be separated from the importance that is attached to the African love of music and dancing.

*The Sacred Dance:* The common features found in the ‘Sacred Dance’ have been discussed (cf. pp. 84ff and 171ff). But it may be useful to point out further that there is in fact extravaganza in everything. That an ecstatic dance could lead King David to strip himself naked, points to the extreme forms of behaviour which one finds in most of the Independent Churches, as all, from the dignified prophet to the smallest toddler, are caught up in a crescendo of noise and movement!

On ecstatic manifestations in general, Marie-Louise Martin too has some interesting observations to make. The music, the singing of the hundreds of followers of Kimbangu, caused the district officer in the Belgian administration, Morel, a lot of disturbance. He easily came to the conclusion that Simon Kimbangu was not fully in possession of his senses – ‘just as the Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost said something of the kind about the Apostles, who were speaking in tongues’.<sup>12</sup> But the problem is that:

We twentieth-century Europeans may think the same of a Pentecostal service in Africa, or services in one of the many Zionist Churches in South Africa, in which, at a certain point, the whole congregation joins in prayer leading to ecstasy. The question is simply whether we can apply here our sober Western standards. If we do, what are we then going to do with the Old Testament prophets like Samuel, or Elisha who used music to put himself into a trance, or with Ezekiel and his apparently pathological

conditions? What are we going to do with Paul who was caught up into the third heaven and also spoke in tongues?<sup>13</sup>

### ***‘True’ Prophets and ‘False’ prophets***

As we pointed out in our discussion on ‘false prophetism’, this phenomenon is a worldwide problem, found in religious as well as in secular institutions and movements. In Old Testament prophetism and in the African religious movements the problem was to be a strong source of contention within prophetic circles. In both situations, the problems which arose were similar. Since all the prophets claimed divine authority for their mission, in spite of certain contradictions in their ways of life and teaching, it was necessary to establish a decisive criterion by which the ‘true’ prophets could be distinguished from the ‘false’ messengers. Among the many criteria proposed, one seemed to have merited much attention and was therefore regarded as most decisive. Lindblom pronounced the judgment (cf. p. 214), and the same is true of the Independent Churches. The ‘true’ African prophets lay down the simple decisive rule: ‘Prophets who preach *false doctrine* and *who do not live an exemplary life* are false prophets’ (cf. p. 105). Furthermore, in both African and Israelite situations there are general agreement with the formula – ‘By their fruits, you shall know them’.

### ***The Zion-Jerusalem Ideology***

Our parallel development of this theme reveals very similar and common features between the Jerusalem ideology of Palestine, and that of Africa. The similarities include:

1. The idea that Zion is the dwelling place of God, and that here he manifests his presence in the midst of the people in diverse ways.
2. Zion-Jerusalem has both a political and a religious significance, which are historically bound together. In the South African situation, where the Africans have been dispossessed of their land and property, it is necessary for a leader or prophet to find new ‘Zions’ in the ‘Reserves’, conceived as the ‘political’ as well as the religious centre of the suffering ‘Israelite Exiles’ in Africa.
3. Zion is the spiritual and cultic centre, the scene of great festivals and pilgrimages.
4. In Zion, ‘There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High’ (Ps. 46.4). As R. E. Clements points out, the idea of this river is vitally related to the belief in the presence of God, for just as in paradise a life-giving river was thought to flow, so

Jerusalem was looked upon as paradise on earth, a place where God's presence was to be found.<sup>14</sup>

The presence of a 'Holy Spring' in Nkamba-Jerusalem (Zaire), and in other Zions in Africa, points to the same ideology. The blessings which these rivers brought were not only, nor even mainly, of a mythical or spiritual nature, but encompassed the whole round of daily needs and requisites.<sup>15</sup> In the eyes of the Africans, the waters of the rivers of their Zions are not ordinary waters. They contain wonderful healing power, and when consecrated are antidotes against the multitude of spirits that menace human life. They can also neutralize the effects of 'bad medicine'.

5. Zion is an unforgettable city of splendour, where the dwellers' hearts are knit together, and to separate them from their city by force of arms is mere folly, for they will ever long to return there, mourning the loss of Zion. 'If I forget you, O Jerusalem ...'
6. The destroyed Zion will be restored in the messianic age, and will be transformed into paradise on earth!

In the Nazarite Church of Isaiah Shembe, its Zion already has a paradise section, next to the prophet's mausoleum.

To the Israelites, all the glory of the earth was summed up in the thought of 'Yahweh's garden', the 'garden of God' told of in the ancient creation myths. At that time earth itself was 'paradise'. No wonder, then, that the enthronement or birth of a new king is taken as an omen that the conditions of paradise are about to return: both the child and his people 'will eat curds and honey', the food of the gods, and wild and tame animals will live peacefully together.<sup>16</sup>

### *Messianic Expectations*

#### **MESSIANIC FIGURES**

On the concept of the Messiah and the functions associated with this figure, there exist similarities between the messianic movements in biblical tradition and in the independent African Churches. In different periods of Israelite history, various figures were recognized or spoken of as 'messianic'. These include 'Immanuel', the 'Servant of the Lord', the 'Son of Man'. Individual 'historical' figures like Zerubbabel, Cyrus, and Simeon bar Kokhba were one time or the other conceived as 'the Messiah'. In the New Testament, the figure of Jesus as the expected Messiah occupies a unique place in the Christian *Kerygma*. A vast number of personalities, present or past, have been identified by various authors as the 'Servant' in Isaiah.

In the messianic Churches in Africa, the Messiah may often assume the form of a 'Servant'. Isaiah Shembe, the strong Zulu messianic figure and founder of 'Ama Nazaretha', was known as the 'Servant'. His son and successor is 'the Servant, Johannes Galilee Shembe'. Although Simon Kimbangu might not have personally claimed to be a Messiah, he was nevertheless looked upon by his followers as the expected Messiah.

### **FUNCTIONS OF THE MESSIAH**

In whatever guise the Messiah appears, a 'suffering Servant', or a 'warrior King', his important task is directly connected with the programme of *restoration* of the *land, property*, and above all the *honour* of the menaced people of God, long humiliated and dispossessed of their belongings by strong enemies.

In Israel, the warrior Messiah was expected to engage in battle with the nation's mortal enemies and with the Romans in particular, thus leading Israel to military victory. No doubt that Hasidim and Zealots of Maccabean days expected the arrival of such a messiah. In their fanatical resistance movements, they also expected supernatural succour to help them win victory over the Romans.

In the earliest phase of the Kimbanguist movement – also referred to as the 'Messianic Popular Movement in the Congo' – both the imprisoned Kimbangu and Matswa were expected to return to lead the Africans to victory in their struggles against the Belgian colonialists. Their arrival was to mark the *restoration* of the ancient kingdom of the Kongo, as well as the prestige of the despised and oppressed Africans.

The Ngunzists, also called 'Zealots', demonstrated their militant resistance against the colonialists' persecutions, both through their Holy War songs and in open skirmishes with the administration's soldiers and security men in the Congo.

In South Africa and Zimbabwe, although open war may be too dangerous, the Messiah is nevertheless expected to demonstrate his capability in leadership, and above all his aversion to the white minority regime. He must show concern for the *restoration of land*. At least the prophet-Messiah must be able to secure land for the construction of a new Zion. Such a task may constitute a serious trial for him if the Spirit indicates that such a Zion should be located in an area of land belonging to the whites!

Sundkler relates a concrete case, in which the 'Israelites' under Enoch Mgiijima at Bulhoek lost 117 men as they fell to the machine guns of the white man's police. 'A sacred place, a Zion, as in the Old Testament – this was what they were longing for in the land of the white where they no longer had any

right to possess land.<sup>17</sup> Mgijima and his group had no legal rights to establish their Holy Place there, but refused to be moved away. But as the story went, it was interesting to note that at last the white settlers recognized the need for a Zion to be given over to Mgijima's religious group.

### **THE DAY OF YAHWEH**

Messianic expectation receives further expression in the 'Day of Yahweh' theme. Based on the promise of a glorious future, it envisages an era of transformation of the world, ushering in the Golden Age of paradisaal prosperity. In its practical dimension, the 'Day of Yahweh' is the Day of Redemption of Israel as well as the Day of *Judgment* of her enemies. It is the Day of *Vengeance*, with apocalyptic and catastrophic overtones, in which the 'nations' will meet with disaster, a sign of Israel's salvation.

In the Independent Churches the 'Day of Yahweh', as preached by the Watch Tower and messianic prophets, is the Day of Judgment and Vengeance. The catastrophic transformation of things will lead to the downfall of the enemies of black Africa and a change of fortunes. Such aspirations are even put into songs: 'Hypocrites, you gonna pay your price One Day!'

Whether it happens in Africa or Israel, the events of that Day are likened to those of the Exodus. It will be a historization of victory over chaos as in the time of creation. This time, God's victory will be manifested in the liberation of the oppressed, so that the returning exiles will sing the songs of Zion in their land!

But while biblical tradition sometimes presents a misty figure of an eschatological Messiah, who may come in the remote future, at the end of time, perhaps; the African Messiah is often already in the midst of his people, heavily engaged in his messianic task. African problems require urgent solution, and even if the Messiah is expected in the future, his appearance is thought to be imminent! Thus would such a state of affairs take on its urgency. In the words of Mowinckel:

What is said about many political messiahs shows that in time of gloom and unrest the thought of a messiah emerged again in the depths of the national consciousness, setting men's thoughts in a ferment, in virtue of its national and political character. This is understandable. The pressure of evil times gave life to the longing for one who would deliver and restore. An expectation which belonged to the presuppositions of the corpus of inherited, traditional, religious conceptions, was again given contemporary relevance, but in a form corresponding to what every nationally-

minded Jew might wish, irrespective almost of the measure of his religious enthusiasm. In the same way, during war and occupation, Christian conceptions and ideas have taken a new meaning, and have to some extent become vital in circles where their conscious influence had previously been small.<sup>18</sup>

### *Faith-Healing and 'Miracles'*

Although we have not discussed healing and miracles in the second part of our study, it is nevertheless presumed that the similarities will be clear, since the prophet-healers in the Independent Churches cite many biblical passages to prove the legitimacy of their healing mission. Here we indicate some points of contact.

It must be admitted in the first place that the abundant interest shown by the prophets in healing activities finds good support in Christ's attitude toward sick people, and in the numerous cures and exorcisms attributed to him in the New Testament. His sayings as recorded in many New Testament passages, and especially in Luke 13.32, confirm that his mission on earth was also directly connected with concern for human maladies: 'Go and tell that fox, "Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course".' On account of Jesus' miraculous cures and his power over malignant spirits, his fame was to increase the more. The result was that the crowd declared him the expected Messiah and desired to crown him king, for 'Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people"' (Luke 7.16). And in John 4.42 the crowd said to the woman: 'It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.'

Such has been the immediate reaction of the crowds, as new prophets imbued with healing powers emerge in Africa. The first successful cure effected, marks the prophet out as God's envoy, who shares in the anxieties of his people and is at the same time deeply involved in alleviating their suffering. He may just be a wise man, good at pastoral counseling; but the effect of his initial achievements, and the impact they make on the people, do not diminish as his new movement grows, and takes on a recognizable shape. Thus prophets are also born by *popular acclamation*, and he who now stands in the midst of his people could not be but a saviour (cf. pp. 48 and 142).

*Faith*: 'Faith-healing' – that is the watch-word. Most of the miracles and acts of healing accomplished by Jesus received their force from such stereotyped sayings as 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'. It is also expressed in forms

of reproach: ‘faithless’, ‘unbelieving’ – ‘O man of little faith!’, ‘O faithless and perverse generation’. Because of their unbelief, he could do no mighty work in his own country (Matt. 13.58; Mark 6.5). With faith no bigger than a grain of mustard seed, one can remove mountains (Matt. 11.20). The importance of faith in prayer is emphasized, ‘Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith’ (Mark 11.23ff).

With these and some other passages, the African prophet-healers justify their emphasis on faith-healing in their Churches. Whatever techniques the prophet may employ to effect a cure – symbolic act, recommendation of herbs, oil, water, potash, and so on – it is the patient’s faith which is above all the decisive factor. Where a particular malady proves incurable, it is never difficult to indicate the cause. The patient has no faith and so carries the blame.

### **PROPHETIC MIRACLES AND PRIMITIVE MAGIC**

In the Old Testament, no significant healing activities were reported of the prophets, except the few associated with Elijah and Elisha. What has attracted our attention, in these healing acts and miracles attributed to Elijah and Elisha, in particular, is the magical phenomenon associated with the cures effected. As far as the historicity of the miracles is concerned, scholars differ in their conclusions. But it seems that our African prophets have taken all the miraculous events literally.

Naaman the Syrian was cured of his leprosy after washing seven times in the Jordan, according to the order of Elisha: ‘Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean’ (2 Kings 5.10). But Naaman’s reaction to this recommendation expresses his disappointment at this magical and naive method of cure, and what he thought of Elisha:

Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean? (2 Kings 5.11ff).

For the disappointed Naaman, the ‘man of God’ Elisha, was a wonder-worker, a magician of a first-class order!

The symbolic act which Elijah performed while restoring the son of the widow of Zarephath to life is reminiscent of the old diviner’s magical symbolism (cf. 1 Kings 17.20ff).

Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the Lord; 'O Lord my God, let this child's soul come into him again.' And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Elijah.

A similar 'drama' was reported of Elisha when he recalled the son of the Shunammite to life:

Then he went up and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, his hands upon his hands; and as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm. Then he got up again, and walked once to and fro in the house, and went up, and stretched himself upon him; the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes (2 Kings 4.32ff).

Other miraculous acts were reported of the prophets. As both Elijah and Elisha were standing by the Jordan, Elijah took his mantle, and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground (2 Kings 2.8). Surrounded by enemies, 'Elisha prayed to the Lord and said "Strike this people, I pray thee, with blindness." So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha.' In the same way their eyes were subsequently opened (2 Kings 6.18ff). King Jeroboam of Israel attempted to arrest the prophet from Judah because he had prophesied against the altar in Bethel. But his hand which he stretched against the prophet withered up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. But at the intervention of the same prophet, Yahweh restored the king's hand (1 Kings 13.4ff).

The prophets had the power to effect numerous other miracles: Elisha could ensure that a very little supply of oil did not fail (2 Kings 4); he could make iron float (2 Kings 6.6f); he made poisonous food innocuous (2 Kings 4.38ff). A dead man revived when touching the bones of a prophet; and on the whole it was regarded as an advantage to be buried in the grave of a prophet (2 Kings 13.21). A prophet sometimes performed his miraculous acts by external means. Everything that belonged to him was, so to speak, charged with power.

These prophetic miracles are no different from what most of our African prophets are believed to have worked. Kimbangu and Harris in particular were known to have performed almost incredible miracles (cf. pp. 49. 79). Prophet healers also adopt symbolic acts while performing certain healings (cf. p. 116). As Lindblom points out, 'Ecstasy never comes alone. All ecstasies are expected to have the faculty of miracle-working.'<sup>19</sup> These prophetic miracles, according to him, bear a great resemblance to *primitive magic*, and such methods of

carrying out extraordinary deeds are used in all quarters of the world, and are well known to every student of primitive culture and religion.<sup>20</sup>

Concerning Elisha's office and the numerous miracles attributed to him, von Rad says:

Nowhere in the Old Testament are so many miracles crowded into so small a space, and nowhere is such open pleasure taken in the miraculous, or such sheer delight shown at the repeated and astonishing proofs of the prophet's charisma ... Elisha's possession of a charisma which gives him the power to perform miracles is the real subject of the stories. In addition to miracles proper, the stories also credit the prophet with different kinds of parapsychic capabilities, such as clairvoyance and seeing from afar.<sup>21</sup>

Referring to the crop of legends which formed around the person of the arrested Simon Kimbangu, Marie-Louise Martin observes, 'The same is indeed also true to some extent of a few of the Old Testament prophetic figures, such as Elisha.'<sup>22</sup>

### **WATER AND HEALING**

In the African prophetic Churches, water seems to be the outstanding remedy for all diseases and troubles. It is the chief medicament and finds its biblical warrant in many Old Testament and New Testament passages (Exod. 40.7, 30-1; Num. 8.5ff, 19; 2 Kings 5.10ff; John 5.1ff, 9.7ff; etc).

The great Holy Spring of Nkamba-Jerusalem in the Congo is held in respect for its healing power. Its importance can be compared to that of the Pool of Bethzatha, with its five porticoes, by the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. Here multitudes of invalids, blind, lame, or paralyzed, used to lie waiting to procure healing at the movement of the waters (John 5.1ff).

#### ***Divination and 'Inquiry of the Lord'***

Striking similarities exist between the Old Testament attitude to divination and that found in the Independent African Churches (cf. pp. 94, 176). Certain means of ascertaining the will of God or of knowing hidden things are recognized as legitimate, while others are condemned. The legitimate type of divination is referred to as 'Inquiry of the Lord' in both African and Old Testament situations. The Old Testament condemns all illegitimate means of divination, and urges recourse to the prophets.

But in spite of all prohibitions, the desire for occult knowledge was always strong in Israel. Recourse to pagan diviners was so frequent that Elijah had to put the question to the sick Ahaziah, king of Israel: 'Is it because there is

no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron? (2 Kings 1.3). Other passages which indicate that some other kings did practice soothsaying include the case of Saul and the witch of Endor (Sam. 28.6-7), when God refused to answer Saul either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets. Manasseh of Judah was also involved in these pagan practices. Following the reforms of Josiah the abolition of such practices was proclaimed (2 Kings 23.24; cf. also 1 Sam. 28.3).

W. F. Albright has suggested that the early seers in Israel were mostly diviners who had learned indirectly from the elaborate techniques of Mesopotamian and other pagan origins, but were uneducated quacks from the standpoint of a 'graduate' – a '*qôsem!*' Divination was thus a recognized function of the prophet in Israel, for 'Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, "Come let us go to the seer"; for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer' (1 Sam. 9.9). Some of the classical prophets also were known to have been consulted by people in 'spiritual inquiry of the Lord' (cf. Jer. 37.6ff; Ezek. 14.7ff).

In the Independent Churches 'spiritual inquiry' is abundant. We have already expressed fear as to whether the prophet-healer is not taking the place of the traditional pagan diviner. Do their activities not resemble, rather, those of the Israelite primitive seers, which would suggest the role of 'fortune-teller' rather than that of prophet of God. As Monica Wilson points out, 'The Old and New Testaments bear witness to the antiquity and tenacity of belief in divination and it has continued in one form or another in the Christian Church until this century. Not only did Jonah's shipmates cast lots to discover who was the cause of the storm (Jonah 1.7), the Apostles cast lots to choose someone to replace Judas' (Acts 1.26).<sup>23</sup>

According to Wach: 'General divination ... and the interpretation of the will of the Godhead need not be magical if it is done in the spirit of devotion and submission rather than coercion and manipulation.'<sup>24</sup>

The Church of the Lord cannot therefore be condemned merely because its members seek to divine the will of God, especially when it rejects all manipulative divination and confines itself to oracular methods, to 'spiritual inquiry' only.<sup>25</sup>

But such activities have their risks, since:

Often there is no responsible personal relation between the parties, with the result that the content of the reply is reduced to conventional generalities. The prophet then ceases to declare that

‘Thus saith the Lord’, and is reduced to the level of the seer; those who consult him are no longer submitting in faith to the word of God, but are using the supernatural in search of an immediate answer to current problems – ‘Where are my father’s assess?’ (cf. 1 Sam. 9.3).<sup>26</sup>

Whatever the implications of this ‘spiritual inquiry’ may be, it seems to be the best answer to illegitimate pagan divination. To his clients, still wavering in faith, the prophet will surely put the same question as did Elijah to Ahaziah – ‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baalzebub?’

### *Leadership and Prophetic Movement*

In Israel, religious leadership was not an exclusive prerogative of the prophets. As we find at different epochs of Israel’s history, depending on the circumstances various figures or leaders emerged, exercising a multiplicity of functions which were in themselves both political and religious in nature. Some of the Judges were not only military leaders but also directed Israel’s affairs in the field of religion. Yahweh raised up Judges principally on account of Israel’s sin (Judg. 2.16ff), and the stereotyped accounts of their call to ‘save’ Israel underline also the religious aspect of their duties. Gideon and Deborah, for example, were both prophets as well as military leaders.

Samuel held at one and the same time the triple office of Judge, priest, and prophet. Every Israelite king who came to the throne through some political or charismatic manoeuvre was at the same time looked upon as a religious leader, executing justice and protecting the Covenant deliberations according to Yahweh’s moral will. Israel’s misfortunes are largely attributed to the failure of the kingship in this particular function. In another aspect, wars with the pagan nations were considered in Israel as an important religious duty in which every patriotic Israelite was expected to participate. The Judges, kings, and prophets all showed active interest in Israel’s safety by their participation in the Holy Wars (cf. 138ff).

In the Independent African Churches the patterns of leadership, often said to reflect those of the traditional society of the area, resemble also those of Israelite society. In traditional African society the king (or chief) is not merely head of the community, but is in fact the symbol of unity. He exercises multiple functions. He is a priest, magician, ruler, law-giver, and war-leader. In South Africa the pattern of leadership in Zulu society is said to have been adopted by the Zionist prophets of the Independent Churches. The Zionist prophet is at the same time the king, Judge, and of course the official religious leader of the movement. He represents his Church in all external dealings with the state

government, and does not fail to share in the sufferings and anxieties of his people. He may be a Messiah as well as a prophet-healer. Elsewhere we find similar patterns of leadership in the Independent Churches. In Western Nigeria, the head of the Christ Apostolic Church was also the King of Ibadan city.

Another aspect of leadership in the Independent Churches which finds its parallel in the Old Testament is that of succession to the 'throne'. Choice of successors after the death of the prophet-founder presents a difficulty, as we find also in the Israelite monarchy. Often the son of the prophet or leader succeeds in taking up command. This is what we have referred to as 'dynastic leadership' (cf. p. 124). In Israel, the Messiah-King was to be a 'new David', coming from the stock of Jesse (cf. 2 Sam. 7.11ff).

In the Independent Churches, a disciple of the prophet also can succeed his Master, as in the case of Elijah-Elisha. The mantle is simply passed over to him and a smooth succession is effected. Leadership is above all based on charismatic endowments, for leaders with rare charismas are required for any successful movement. But besides the means of rise to power we have mentioned, religious leadership is supremely a divine phenomenon. A religious leader may rise to a sphere of influence by claims to supernatural revelation. This is the most frequent case both in the African and the Israelite situations. Prophets are recognized above all through their claim to have received a divine call, by which they are set apart for a special mission and as 'men of God'.

### *The Figure of Moses*

In both Israelite and African situations the concept of religious vocation and leadership is epitomized in the figure of Moses, which we have discussed in detail in the first two parts of our work.

In biblical tradition Moses is conceived as a unique figure in the entire history of Israel as it began from the Exodus. Many functions have been attributed to Moses all at the same time. He was a prophet, a founder of religion, a law-giver, and above all, he was the liberator of the Hebrew slaves from the hands of Pharaoh and the Egyptian oppressors. In searching for an adequate term to describe his many-sided activities, authors have come to see him as an ideal charismatic leader, whose type Israel never produced again; a man of both religious and political stature (cf. pp. 160ff).

On account of the uniqueness of this figure, it is not surprising that the African prophet so frequently claims to represent a 'new Moses' for the Africans. He exercises a many-sided function as Moses did, and like Moses, he may equally dispense with certain laws which do not suit the Africans (cf. p. 130). In the eyes of some critics such a comparison may look superficial. But the reality is that the African prophet, knowing the Moses of the Israelites for

what he was, has come to look on his position in the Independent movements in the light of the biblical Mosaic figure. What Moses was for the Israelites, the African prophet – religious founder, Messiah, leader in times of emergency – is for the Africans somewhere in a little corner of Africa!

In the face of the similarities which we have seen in both situations, Africa and Israel, there is no doubt that areas of difference also exist. In evaluating these dissimilarities, we shall in the first place point out some of the shortcomings of the African prophetic movements. Secondly we shall consider the unique character of biblical prophetism, which further underlines these areas of difference.

### **SHORTCOMINGS OF THE AFRICAN PROPHETIC MOVEMENTS**

We have already pointed out most of these shortcomings in our treatment of the 'false' prophets in the Independent Churches. Although some of these negative features may be found also in the Israelite situation, what we intend doing here is to point out where the Independent Church movements have fallen short of expectation in contrast to the peculiar character of the prophetic movement in Israel. These shortcomings are found principally in the concept of prophetic vocation in the Independent Churches, and in some aspects of their theology.

#### *The Concept of 'Vocation'*

Although some prophets relate the circumstances leading to their assumption of prophetic office, it is nevertheless evident that a considerable number of the so-called prophets in Africa have no idea of what religious vocation means. It is not unusual for some charlatan to get up any morning claiming that he has been visited by an angel of God. The rate at which calls to prophecy in the Independent Churches multiply makes the whole affair look absurd. The radical breakthrough from purely charismatic leadership to vocational leadership in Israel was the great turning-point in the history of Israelite prophetism. It was no longer bravery in wars, wise judgment, or sheer patriotism that became the decisive factors, but that profound conviction that Yahweh had himself chosen the prophet.

Often non-religious motives, like healing activities or political aspirations, become the basis of a religious vocation. We have many examples where purely political organizations were transformed into religious movements. A well-known example is the 'Amicalism' of André Matswa, which turned into a messianic movement after the founder was imprisoned by the colonial government in the Congo.

The hereditary aspect of leadership or conferment of prophetic power by ordination makes nonsense of any claim to divine call. Even where ordinary charisma in leadership is lacking, the designated successor, often a son of the prophet-founder, is forced to assume the duties of his father. Johannes Galilee Shembe would honestly declare 'I have not that power'. Very often the patterns of 'supernatural' experience resemble those of the traditional witch-hunters in

touch with the supernatural world. Such movements as are described by authors as 'nativistic' have few Christian elements, and their founders can hardly be named 'prophets' in any sense at all.

### *Healing and the Prophetic Mission*

What real connection has healing with religious vocation? Many of the traditional medicine men are recognized in various parts of Africa as experts in the treatment of some tropical diseases which do not respond to Western medicine. These men, Christian or pagan, do their work daily without any claim to supernatural experiences or special call from the divine world. Why should the prophet-healer in the Independent Churches require divine sanction for this kind of work?

The undue attention paid to healing activities in the new Churches in Africa, and the relevance of healing to the authentic prophetic mission in general, are among the phenomena in these movements which call for strict investigation. It is not too much to say that the paramount place given to faith-healing in the Independent Churches is uncalled for. This aspect of their prophetic mission receives the most adverse criticism from authors, even from those who would be ready to see the Independent Churches as genuine religious and cultural revival movements in modern Africa.

Perhaps we should sympathize with the prophets and with their gullible and ever-superstitious followers who are all the time craving for security! Healing no doubt serves an urgent need – it provides work too for the unemployed. The simple truth has to be accepted that if there were no healing mission there would be no meaningful Independent Churches; if there were no sick people or individuals craving for security, there would be no followers. 'No healers – no prophets in Africa.'

### *The Concept of the Spirit*

The general confusion caused by misunderstanding of the biblical meaning of the Holy Spirit in the Independent Churches is liable to be disheartening. Which 'spirit' is it that moves, possesses, and instills confusion in worship, and often drives men to madness? Is it the personal spirit, the 'ancestor', or the Holy Spirit of the Scriptures? Some would question whether it is the Holy Spirit that is at work if it 'knocks people about and makes them fall over', and it is asserted that the true Spirit gives people messages rather than makes them roll about. on this view, all possession would be an occasion for exorcism, but very few have arrived at this advanced conclusion.<sup>1</sup>

The biblical idea of 'Spirit' is something concrete, an activity of God's power. The word '*ruah*' carries the idea of power; it is of God, and it is also the

medium through which God, exerts his controlling power. The '*Ruah-Adonai*' is the power which enters into and controls the prophets. As A. Neher points out further, inspiration by '*ruah*' is not limited to the private and interior drama of the prophet. The prophetic experience is brought into play at another level. The prophet is not only called, he is *sent*. At the point of revelation there emerges this confrontation, which does not belong to the domain of the Spirit ('*ruah*') so much as to that of the Word ('*dabar*').

African authors point out that misunderstanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in Africa is not confined to the so-called 'nativistic' movements; many of the Pentecostal Churches and charismatic movements in the Christian Churches, reveal the same difficulty. Perhaps this is a universal phenomenon today. One cannot fail to be surprised by the rate at which 'the spirit' moves people and 'throws confusion' into the gatherings of charismatics all over Europe and America.

In any case whatever may be their achievements, it could still be said that the prophetic vocation in the Independent African Churches exhibits a dubious character. Our observation may no doubt be seen as 'flogging a dead horse', since most of our critics have already made up their minds concerning the character of this phenomenon in Africa!

### ***The Polygamy Question***

The polygamy issue is among the theological factors which have contributed to the massive separation and formation of new Churches in Africa. Today, in some theological circles, the tendency is toward a re-examination of the problems associated with the polygamy debate and the Church's past attitude.

Although most Africans are sympathetic to the victims of the Church's law on marriage in Africa, it is unlikely that any solution to this African problem may be in sight. The attitude of some of the prophets on this issue does not encourage dialogue, since they themselves take the initiative in the accumulation of wives and concubines. Who is likely to doubt them if the spirit reveals in dreams and visions even the exact number of women that the prophet should procure!

The attitude of the Church of Israel in Rhodesia, which broke away from its mother Church with the expressed purpose, 'to help polygamists enter heaven', does not call for emulation. Nor can the attitude of prophet Harris be justified. According to him, 'God did not intend to make the same law for black and white.' Blacks could take as many wives as they could look after!

Such attitudes are seen by many as unwarranted compromise and surrender to human weakness and lust. Personal aggrandizement thus becomes

the core of religious motives. Such is the basis of the sort of spiritual vagrancy that is characteristic of some of the Independent Churches.

### *Some Recent Evaluations*

Before considering the unique character of Israelite prophetism we shall present here what some authors have said about the African prophets, their evaluation of these prophets and their movements. How many marks do our prophets merit, and what position do they occupy when compared with other religious leaders and similar movements elsewhere?

#### **H. W. TURNER**

For a fuller evaluation of African prophetism, we should have to place it alongside the legitimate, but non-canonical prophets of the Old Testament, their successors in the Church of the first century, and the Montanist movement of the second century, as well as similar revivals of prophecy in later ages.<sup>2</sup>

#### **M. J. FIELD**

They claim that their worship is in the manner of the Christian communities described in the Acts of the Apostles, and that they are possessed and moved by the same Spirit in the same way and in the same large numbers. Any one who has attended their meetings and also reads the Acts with an open mind ... can have little doubt that he is reading about something he has seen.<sup>3</sup>

#### **G. C. OOSTHUIZEN**

These prophets are not only founders of new religion but are charismatic leaders, the mediators between God and his people, who have a concrete historical task in the time of crisis, as had Moses. They are the messengers who proclaim God's will for political, social, and cultic life. As we find, in the initial stages of Israel's religions, the charisma, a person specially endowed, so we find these figures in the prophetic movements.<sup>4</sup>

#### **D. B. BARRETT**

Their assessment would remain a task for the historian and the theologian ... No doubt there are numerous parallels between it [African Independency] and the whole range of earlier movements, both in its visible features and in the background conditioning milieux out of which they emerged ... Any comparison is, in fact,

somewhat flattering to African Independency, which emerges as a far more staid and orthodox movement than many of the early, medieval, or Commonwealth sects. Contemporary African has little to compare with the murderous craving for martyrdom of the Donatist Church's Circumcellions, the Lombardy Apostolics' dressing in swaddling clothes to honour the Infancy of Christ, the Anabaptists running naked through the streets of Amsterdam, the Quaker abolition of all Sacraments, or the Camisard's addiction to child prophecy.<sup>5</sup>

### ***The Unique Character of Biblical Prophetism***

The respect which we owe to the Israelite prophetic figures and their movements has not prevented us from comparing them with the African prophets and other similar world religious founders. Whatever the implications may be, there is no doubt that the prophetic movement in Israel stands out as a unique phenomenon in both Israel's religious and her political history. It has left its indelible character on such movements as have received their inspiration from biblical religion.

But as a result of modern biblical research, it would seem that the unique character of the prophetic movement in Israel has been blurred, especially by the rationalistic spirit of nineteenth-century scholarship. Such ideas have, however, been criticized, and there is substantial recognition of the proposition that we cannot understand either Israel's religious or her political history – much less her literature – unless we begin by recognizing the unique character of the prophetic movement in Israel, and above all the monotheism of Moses.

During the past century historians and theologians have come to agree that the prophetic movement was the culmination of Israel's history ... Without the prophets we could not possibly have Judaism, Christianity, or Islam.<sup>6</sup>

In contemporary biblical research the re-evaluation of the contribution of the prophetic movement in Israel receives great attention. The unique character of Israel's religion is affirmed, the contention being that similarity does not connote common origin, sameness, or even influence.

### ***The Element of Divine Call***

We consider that profound consciousness of a call which is characteristic of the vocational prophets of Israel, as being one of the most important phenomena which constitute the uniqueness of the Israelite prophetism, as compared with

similar movements either elsewhere in the ancient world or in modern times. This element of divine call, which engages a man in the most special way, marks the Israelite prophets out as members of a radical wing which understood its special relationship with Yahweh. The classical prophets, disgusted with the venality of the professional prophets, were to dissociate themselves from that group. 'They were men from every walk of life who had felt the compulsion of Yahweh's word and who had often – probably always – come to their vocation through some experience of call.'<sup>7</sup>

The idea of mission, involving a total dedication of all human and spiritual resources, finds its basis in a conviction and sense of divine call which finds its expression in the conception of '*dabar Yahweh*', a recognition of the divine source of the prophetic utterance. We know of Amos, the man from Tekoa, that he was not a member of the prophetic orders, but a sheep-breeder whose only authentication was a tremendous sense of vocation to speak the word of Yahweh (7. 14ff; 3.3-8).

That is the distinguishing mark of the Israelite prophet, at least of the classical prophet.

Upon a weak and fearful but convinced man is superimposed God's majestic power, a divine revelation with its irresistible force, so that the prophet would lament at that scorching grip of Yahweh's hand:

I used to say, 'I will not think about him. I will not speak in his name any more.' Then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones. The effort to restrain it wearied me, I could not bear it (Jer. 20.7-9).

These were the lamentations of a man who had been shaken by the realities of what he had experienced, a profound, immediate, and personal experience of the divine. 'They must be understood as the written testimony to an intercourse between Yahweh and his prophet that is both striking and unique.'<sup>8</sup>

This experience is not, however, one which destroys the personality or liberty of the prophet, as Gunkel and Hölischer in their theories of abnormal psychology and ecstasy seemed to assert.<sup>9</sup>

It is more appropriately described as an experience which builds, perfects, and leads to a profound discovery of self, leading to a response whatever the hazards involved. With a 'super-human' courage, the prophet is able to proclaim 'Violence and ruin!' (Jer. 20.8).

He is able to confront kings and nations and to pronounce judgment. It is not he who takes the initiative, but God who calls and imposes himself. It is the divine power which confronts and transforms the whole man, imbuing him with

the power to chastise and condemn in the face of persecution and death. With God's support and reassurance, the sudden and challenging call receives a radical and decisive response:

The lion has roared;  
who will not fear?  
The Lord God has spoken;  
who can but prophecy? (Amos 3.8)

Thou art stronger than I,  
Thou hast prevailed (Jer. 20.7).

### *The Moral Teachings of the Prophets*

While the special divine call remains an important distinguishing mark of the Israelite prophet, the type of message which these prophets directed to Israel, as well as to the whole of humanity, reinforces the uniqueness of their movement. Their moral teachings, unparalleled in the entire history of religious movements, were to have an everlasting impact on every aspect of religious worship, wherever and in whatever form this phenomenon has appeared in human history.

The prophets set out to emphasize the unique character of their divine mission to Israel by the announcement of all the moral obligations implicit in Israel's faith in Yahweh as expressed by the term 'ethical monotheism'. It is precisely this monotheistic faith of Israel's which distinguishes her religion sharply from those of the pagan nations. Unlike the Canaanite and other nature religions, Yahwism was a divinely revealed religion, which at the same time demanded absolute moral responsibility for all human acts. In this was involved the question of justice as a divinely constituted order or the universe; a complete theology of sin and righteousness. But it seemed that Israel had fallen short of all expectation. The moral demands of Yahwism had not been met, and the prophets saw a need for a radical change if Israel were to survive as God's people. 'Here we come upon the most astonishing phenomenon in the whole of Israel's history: at a time when Yahwism was being increasingly undermined, and indeed was not far short of disintegration, it was able once again to re-emerge with almost volcanic force in a completely new form – in the message of the prophets.'<sup>10</sup> As von Rad outlines, four features of long standing marked the emergence of the prophets: the degeneracy of Yahwism because of syncretism; the political factors on account of which Israel had thrown off Yahweh's guiding hand; the economic and social developments, which in turn brought a further disintegration of the old social order within the tribes of Israel.

The last feature was connected with the threat from foreign powers directed against Palestine from the eighth century onwards.

In their message, the prophets were to stand out against the evil which emerged from these situations in which Israel found herself, at one time or another throughout her history. With all their might they denounced whatever was contrary to the moral principles involved in the true observance of Yahwistic faith. Monotheism in itself was no abstract phenomenon; its practical implications were immense, and to the Israelite who had closed his ears to the voice of reason the prophets could only be what Elijah was to Ahab, ‘troublers of Israel’ (1 Kings 18.17).

It was Israel’s ‘limping with two different opinions’ which constituted her grave failure and defection, and the prophets were bound to point that out:

Now it was a clear ‘either-or’ question; either Yahweh, the God of the Covenant, or Baal, the god of fertility. Elijah had no interest in discussing Monotheism in theoretical terms, but in terms of life, of allegiance. ‘If Yahweh is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.’ Deity makes a total claim upon men’s loyalty. God is the one whom men serve with heart, soul, and the strength of their being. Israel then stood at the hour of decision. And in the prophet Elijah the Mosaic tradition was reaffirmed Yahweh is the jealous God who will have no other gods beside him.<sup>11</sup>

The continuous struggles to maintain the harmonious relationship between religious practices and their moral demands was to be the supreme task of all Israelite leaders and prophets from Moses to the last Apostle in the New Testament. The struggle is continued in any religious movement or Church which bases its faith on the one true God of the Scriptures. Any prophecy which troubled no conscience, and revealed a new Yahweh of only pleasant words, to whom justice and charity were irrelevancies, was a false prophecy. Only the Israelite who held to the faith of his fathers heard in the prophet the authentic ring of the voice of God. The purpose of prophecy is to maintain the covenant, to establish the right relationship between God and man.

### ***The Prophets and the Messianic Expectation***

One of the elements which made the prophets’ proclamation something absolutely new and hitherto unheard-of in Israel was that, even in the very act of proclaiming judgment, they made known the beginnings of a new movement toward salvation.<sup>12</sup> Yahweh who punishes is the One who saves – that was an expression of an absolute trust in the saving act of Yahweh who intervenes in

history on the side of his people. The realization of this expectation was often incarnated in the figure of a future Messiah, a royal king who would appear in Israel to restore the devastated Israel as well as the covenant which Israel had broken. Serious attention was thus paid to the theory that Yahweh accompanied Israel along her road through history, and to the obligations this involved.<sup>13</sup>

It is admirable to think that the prophets were the witnesses and the artisans of this Catechumenate of mankind, the authorized guides for this spiritual march, and that they revealed and explained the divine design in history. They take a choice place in the immense sign of credibility constituted by the Old Testament. If there ever is a wonder which remains unshakable, it is the attained and preserved miraculous purity of the faith in the one Lord and creator, the prophetic fervour in the expectation of the Messiah.<sup>14</sup>

But whatever might have been the results of the disappointment involved in unfulfilled promises, it was the prophets who still kept the hope alive. Yahweh's intervention in history will come; it may be in the last days! The correlation between the prophets and world-history is the real key to understanding them correctly, for they placed the new historical acts of God which they saw around them in exactly the same category as the old basic events of canonical history – indeed, they gradually came to realize that the new historical action was to surpass, and therefore, to a certain extent, to supersede the old. The prophets were in fact called forth by their conviction that Yahweh was bringing about a new era for his people. The characteristic feature of the prophetic message is thus its actuality, its expectation of something soon to happen. This, according to von Rad, should be the touchstone of the use of the term 'eschatological'.<sup>15</sup> This prophetic teaching is only eschatological when the prophets expelled Israel from the safety of the old saving actions and suddenly shifted the basis of salvation to a future action of God.<sup>16</sup> Hosea would foretell a new entry into the land, Isaiah a new David and a new Zion, Jeremiah a new Covenant, and Deutero-Isaiah a new Exodus. However bright the future may have appeared in the minds of the prophets, their hearers must surely have felt that the call to prepare themselves for a coming act of God and to seek their salvation in it made very strong demands on their religious faith.

In the final analysis, it is right to conclude from the moral teachings of the prophets of Israel, that something unique appeared there, when we compare that phenomenon with similar movements which existed elsewhere, even before Israel came into existence. The central message of the prophets is the insistence that the human situation can be understood only in conjunction with the divine

situation. The absurdity of isolating the human situation and treating it in disregard of the divine involvement is exemplified by the self-defeating course of man-made history. The prophets thus went right to the roots of the problem of morality, showing that all morality involves the heart and is something internal. Their optimism had a supernatural basis. They were convinced that justice and morality will triumph in this world because this is God's plan and he has the power to make it succeed.<sup>17</sup> Such features, peculiar to the teachings of the Israelite prophets, no doubt distinguish the prophetic movement in Israel from other similar movements elsewhere, and are therefore the unmistakable characteristics of that movement and constitute its inseparable and unique element.

### Summary and Conclusion to Part III

The project of our comparative study has enabled us to draw the attention of our leaders to the many 'points of contact' which exist between the African prophetic movements and Old Testament prophetism. These points of contact we see primarily in the factors which contributed to the rise of prophetic movements in both Israel and Africa. These are both political and religious in nature. Other aspects of prophetism in which close similarities emerge include the experiences of the prophets and the problem of ecstasy. The problem of 'false prophetism' is common to both movements, as well as to the ideology expressed in the Zion-Jerusalem theme. Messianic expectations, although not occurring in all the Independent Churches, find expression in the 'messianic Churches' in Southern Africa in particular. Their concept of the Messiah is similar to that of biblical messianism.

Other points of contact include prophetic miracles and divination. The idea of religious leadership, of course borrowed from the biblical accounts, is an important issue. By examining the figures whom the African prophets claim to 'represent' or 'follow', we were able to discuss their functions and to draw parallels.

Similarities already suggest that there are areas of difference. These areas of difference we have indicated by examining the shortcomings of the African prophetic movements. Our consideration of the unique character of Israelite prophetism further enlarges these areas of difference.

In concluding this type of work, which might involve giving a judgment on both movements, based on our findings, many difficult questions arise. Do the African prophets have a real supernatural vocation? Are they really sent by God? Do they merely imitate superficially the prophets of Israel? Are their achievements a positive contribution to religious development in Africa?

These are some of the questions which critics may pose, and to which very few people will venture to supply definitive answers. There can be no 'Yes' or 'No' answers to such questions, for one may have to begin by posing them in the first place about Israelite prophetism, and only then considering other religious movements, ancient and modern, which are said to be 'prophetic' in nature. Critics may also wish to pose similar questions about such 'prophetic' figures as Muhammad, Mani, Buddha, Zarathustra, and a long list of 'prophetic' individuals referred to as '*homines religiosi*'.

We do not presume to supply answers to all the questions posed above. The primary aim of our study has been stated. Among other things its aim is to see, in the light of biblical theology, what the African prophetic movement, confronted with Israelite prophetism, has to say to the Christian Churches and their missionary enterprise in Africa. Following some results of our investigation we shall summarize the impact which these movements have made on Christianity in Africa.

Our investigation has in fact not gone beyond the level of biblical exposition of the various common themes which we have selected for this study, leaving it to our readers to draw their own practical conclusions from the results of such investigation.

While pointing out some positive values found in the Independent Churches, we have not failed to indicate their shortcomings. These we have sternly criticized. In spite of their 'orthodoxy', in so far as they accept most of the tenets of the Christian religion, their excesses in certain cases must also be viewed with serious caution. Of utmost importance is their fundamental interpretation of the Scriptures, which must be reviewed in the light of biblical exegesis.

### *Africa and Israel*

There are many who see both Africa and Israel as scenes of revolutionary religious and political movements, which strictly speaking are said to be prophetic in character. Yahwism has a long history, and the results of those massive movements led by the Israelite prophets are clearly manifested in many world religions which identify themselves with biblical faith. At one time or the other these religions have emerged in history as reactionary movements, and various factors have contributed to their appearance.

There are some, too, who do not fail to see similarities between African history and Israelite history. Many Hebrew ideas, in both the secular and the religious domains, are said to resemble those of Africans, and not a few students of history, cultural anthropology, religion, and the Bible, have undertaken comparative work on issues quite similar to ours. The efforts and motives surrounding such studies are no doubt directed toward a better understanding and evaluation of whatever similarities may exist in the two situations. Above all, efforts are geared toward a discovery of the implications of the results of such investigation for the African situation in particular.

In our present work, we have not equated the African prophetic movements to those of Israel, as bearing the same weight, importance, or significance. The uniqueness and originality of Israelite prophetism have been emphasized.

Now, together with other critics, where do we stand as far as the evaluation of the African prophetic movements is concerned? Where do we place the African prophets in the long list of the world's many charismatic leaders, prophets, and founders of religions past and present? How do they compare at all with the Israelite prophets?

We have nothing very new to add to 'What they say' (cf. p. 258). But it may be necessary to point out that, depending on the 'grades' of the prophetic figures, we may well find among the African prophets some who would compare well with the Israelite prophets, spread along Israel's history from primitive nabism to the last of the Old Testament prophets. But on the basis of the concept of vocation, the African prophets fall short of expectation. Perhaps a new type of 'prophetic revolution' may be required before they arrive at the high standard of prophetic consciousness set by those Israelite prophets known as the 'vocational prophets'.

From a strictly Christian point of view, it can be said that some of the movements have not achieved a standard of moral values by which they could be described as authentic Christian movements, without any fear of false generalization. Surely, to reach such a standard, some sort of training is essential. Some of their ideologies need radical purification on the basis of Christian principles, if the Independent Churches are to be said to have contributed positively to the religious development of Africa.

Compared with some other similar movements outside the Bible, the suggestion that the African prophetic movements have a lot in common with the Montanist movement of the late second century AD had strong support. The stress laid upon the apocalyptic expectation, the continuing prophetic gifts of the Spirit, and strict ascetic discipline, constitute the predominant features of the Montanist movement. The 'Zion ideology' common to all the Independent Churches confirms close similarities with Montanism (cf. p. 216). The African prophetic Churches also have a lot in common with the sixteenth-century religious movement which was marked by rejection or modification of some aspects of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. History is only repeating itself, as thousands of African prophets and preachers, like the 'Reformers' of the sixteenth century, exhibit fanatical interest in the interpretation of Scripture. The danger that some of them may finish up with the claim that Scripture alone is the rule of faith is always there, as 'authentic' interpreters of the Bible quote endless numbers of Scriptural passages to support the arguments for whatever they do.

Whatever the implications of dissimilarities may be, it must not be forgotten that close similarities exist between the African prophetic movements and those of biblical tradition. The movements in general have sought to

establish the Christianity of the Bible, as they see it, in harmony with Africa's cultural heritage.

## **Epilogue**

*Impact of  
the Independent African*

## *Churches*

19

### **The Independent Churches: A Challenge to the Christian Religion in Africa**

We must not conclude this study without a look at the impact of the Independent religious movements on Christianity in Africa. One of our contributors spelled this out when he said: ‘Through this type of study, much can further be known about these “spiritual Churches” in Nigeria, what their motives are, their achievements as well as their defects.’

‘And not only in Nigeria, but in Africa as a whole’, we have to add since this phenomenon is widely spread all over the continent, and is not confined to Nigeria. But may be Nigeria serves as an interesting example on this issue. According to statistics released by *Jeune Afrique*, 1971-2, showing the spread of

Islam in black Africa, 47 per cent of Nigeria's inhabitants are Muslims, and 35 per cent believed to be Christians. Although it is not possible to arrive at the exact figure of the members of the Independent Churches, it is probably safe to presume that over half of the percentage assumed to be Christians are adherents of the new Churches, constituting again the highest number in the whole of the black continent. (The percentages for Nigeria were based on the old census figure, when the Nigerian population was almost 53 million. Today Nigeria has over 80 million inhabitants. According to *Jeune Afrique's* figures, there were in 1972 about 145 million Muslims in Africa, against 104 million said to be 'pagans', and 97 million Christians.)

We have repeatedly, throughout this study, pointed out the defects of the new Church movements. These we have equally criticized. It may not be out of place to consider also some positive aspects of the movements.

### **'ACTION, NOT CONDEMNATION'**

That was the title of a lecture delivered by one of the outstanding critics of the Independent Churches in Nigeria, in a seminar held recently on the new religious movements. It is interesting to note that there has been over the past few years a general change of attitude among critics and some Church leaders toward the new Churches. This amounts to a rethinking of former attitudes toward the phenomenon afoot in Africa today. A measure of recognition of the achievements of these Churches has been noticed; at least a recognition that they constitute a challenge to Christianity in Africa. The above contributor to the seminar in Nigeria writes about the impact of the Independent Churches:

Prayer Houses are a challenge to all of us. It is no good criticizing or condemning them. We must provide healthy alternative ones for our people ... The old preoccupation with trying to 'win over' and 'keep people' in our Church by mere appeals to cold intellectual arguments on the true Church vis-à-vis the false Churches are not of much lasting value to a people for whom religion is primarily emotional and utilitarian. For these people syllogisms and appeals to authority and tradition mean nothing. What matters to them is religious satisfaction.

The proliferation of the new Churches is also seen in some circles as a dark spot in the evangelization programme in Africa, a depressing and scandalous phenomenon. What is responsible for the growth of these Churches? The question could be more directly put: 'What genuine spiritual need have we failed to satisfy but which the new enthusiastic groups promise to satisfy? Have

we not failed to relate the Gospel message to our concrete situation? Too often people have been made to learn the Catechism only formally, and very little explanation has been given that would relate it to the actual human problems of our people. It is concretely observed:

But a lot of these ‘religious leaders’ and their followers are not fresh or direct converts from traditional religion, but rather have come from our Christian Churches, including the Catholic Church. This may be their fault, but it also reflects, in some way, our collective failure. We ought to examine our consciences and ask ourselves what has really gone wrong.

What has really gone wrong? What is at stake? These are the ever-recurring questions. In the eyes of most of our Christians, the stories told about the Independent Churches are no longer a matter of speculation. They are not merely ‘mushroom Churches’, ‘hand-clapping’, ‘band-beating’, vision-seeing’ Churches, springing up like fungus in all nooks and corners of Africa. At last many have come to realize that mere calling of names or adverse criticism will not resolve the problem.

These do not contribute anything toward the response to the challenge which the new Churches have posed. Perhaps it is not too late to do something.

But unfortunately, very few African authors have shown any interest in the study of these religious movements. It has been suggested that this may reflect the attitude of many of the African elite and of ‘orthodox’ Christians, who are still suspicious of the motives of the new Churches. Their open attacks and condemnation of the Independent Churches, both in Church circles and in the press, confirm these views.

It is painful to note that it is the Europeans who are appealing to Africans to recognize what is happening in the African continent!

### *An African Expression of Christianity*

What seems to have emerged from the new religious movements is what many have referred to as the ‘African expression of Christianity’. That the African chooses to express his Christian faith in a way adapted to his own culture and religious sentiments is nothing new in the religious world of change and adaptation. It cannot be seen as a *threat* to Christianity, but as a *challenge*. It is only a clash of cultures – one African, the other European – that has brought about the emergence of the Independent Church movement in Africa.

It is a well-known fact that in religion the African feels God, experiences Him, before reflecting meaningfully about Him. He does not begin with

contemplation or meditation. He rather responds to a religious impulse whose reality he has already experienced. That is why in his religion he likes to feel God, he likes to feel religion. While critics are busy interpreting what some refer to as ‘syncretistic’ and ‘nativistic’ religious movements in Africa, it is necessary to investigate and to ask how far the old has been transformed so as to become ‘an expression of Christianity’ adapted to change and to African tradition.

### *A post-Christian Movement?*

One would in particular sympathize with G. C. Oosthuizen (in reference to the views expressed in his *Post-Christianity in Africa*). It is this inability on the part of certain authors to appreciate the problems of the Church in Africa that has led them and some ethnologists to look for traces of non-Christian religion in everything which has to do with the Independent Churches.

On the part of many Africans as well, it is common today to describe the Christian religion as an imported religion – the religion of the colonial masters – and to feel that it should be replaced by something new. This reaction is to a large extent justified when one examines the series of events which led to the establishment of Christian Churches in Africa, the contradictions and confusion which accompanied the missionary activities. The truth was that in their zeal to save the souls of the Africans from eternal damnation, the early missionaries mixed Christian principles with Western culture, not to say beliefs. The situation was further complicated by the sectarian characteristics of the foreign missionary bodies, each with its own distinctive tradition. The God who was introduced to the Africans was a completely foreign God, and this robbed Christianity of its universality. In spite of its civilizing and educating nature, this religion became spiritually unsatisfactory.

Many questions necessarily arise. If the English, Scots, Germans, Swedish, Dutch could establish Churches of a national character, what is wrong with the establishment in black Africa of an ‘African Independent Church’? The point was that the Africans could not see ‘Western Christianity’ as their religion, and worse still, they had not been given the opportunity to study the religion and to see it from their own perspective. Their attempt, therefore, to establish ‘a truly African Church’ is represented by the massive proliferation of Independent religious and renewal movements.

The phenomenon is described as an ‘African expression of Christianity’, or as David Barrett would prefer it, ‘African Initiatives in Religion’, ‘Schism and Renewal in Africa’. For T. A. Beetham, it is ‘a revolt against European domination in Church and State – a revolt against the limitation of spontaneous

expression in worship, or in the application of the Christian faith to healing and the related world of witchcraft.’

But this ‘African expression of Christianity’ does not represent a mere ‘revolt’. It should also be seen as a response of the Holy Spirit to the questioning spirit of man, in a situation where the existing Churches were not helping the people to meet their needs. It was to inspire this man or that woman with the gift of prophecy. The ‘Spirit revolution’ or ‘liturgical revolution’ is a response to the spiritually unsatisfactory answers provide by the mission Churches to the religious longings of Africans. It was to manifest that the Holy Spirit can speak directly to Africans. The despised blacks can have their own prophets and religious leaders. They can now worship freely without unjustified and unwarranted restrictions. Not only white people can be great and powerful!

### *Dynamic Worship*

No assessment of the impact of the Independent Churches on Christian renewal in Africa can be complete without an honest appreciation of their dynamic worship, a pathetic recall of the issue at stake:

The whole world knows that Africans love music, that they love rhythm, and that they are particularly endowed with a very rich cultural heritage; with indigenous lyrics, idioms, and proverbs. Early Christianity did not see anything good in African music. Everything was labeled pagan and therefore anathematized. The Western system of worship was introduced. That this is entirely alien and unrelated to the African way of worship is still evident in the uninspiring, boring and monotonous order of worship in most of the older Churches.<sup>1</sup>

The mission Churches’ opposition to the basic elements of African ways of religious expression thus constituted basically the parting of the ways. Worship in which formalism prevails, where movement, spontaneity, and gaiety are restricted or disapproved, has little place in the African situation. Concreteness of expression in worship, regard for group dynamics – concrete experience in dramatic forms are some of the elements which have enhanced the Independent Churches’ efforts to bring religion home to the African.

In the African situation, the place of worship is not conceived as a cold, noiseless zone of a town, where only the adult may enter and children are kept outside. It is not a place where people worship in silent meditation, with arms folded, while the ‘dramatists’ perform alone on the stage.

For most Africans, and the members of the Independent Churches in particular, the place of worship is accessible to everyone – from the most dignified Apostle to the smallest toddler. It is a place of free movement and total participation by everyone in the acts of worship. The movement should be vigorous and often spontaneous, able to produce some perspiration and leading to spiritual satisfaction and enjoyment. In such a gathering the singing is loud and is for all present. There is no place for a carefully selected group called choristers, for no one has a monopoly of this ‘joyful noise unto the Lord’.

While in the Christian Churches, especially in Catholic worship, the celebration of the Mass may not last for more than forty-five minutes these days, including the ‘sermon’ or ‘homily’ which is normally not expected to take more than ten minutes of the time, in the Independent Churches worship takes up to four hours on Sundays and even on weekdays, and people do not get bored. The prophet is free to preach as long as he can, and his listeners rarely complain. What is the captivating element in this type of worship? What is extraordinary about the Independent Churches’ performance, that they have succeeded to a large extent in attracting people from all walks of life to their community – high government officials, university lecturers and students, professionals of various types – to mention only a few groups that rarely show up these days in the mission Churches? It is here that some sort of reflection is required, an assessment of the failure of the mission Churches in the Christian renewal movement.

Certainly this has become one of the most prominent factors that attracts people to the independent Churches, as the mission Churches are deserted in large numbers. As attempts are made to provide ‘more elaborate liturgy’ in Catholic worship, one official remarks: ‘Our people’s traditional mode of worship makes use of signs and gestures, as well as colour, sounds, etc. Although God must be worshipped “in spirit and truth, yet not in an abstract way”. In the last analysis, it is all an endeavour to provide a “place” for the African, where he can feel at home and get involved actively and meaningfully in the act of worship.’

### ***Prayer and Faith-Healing***

Whatever may be the reasons behind the emphasis on prayer and faith in the Independent Churches – to procure healing or for security purposes – the truth is that the Christian Churches elsewhere have no reason to condemn such attitudes. ‘Praying groups’, ‘prayer houses’, ‘Aladura’ (prayer Church) – are names which suggest attachment to the value of prayer and faith in God.

But in spite of what seem to be good Christian elements in the new movements, some critics are quick to interpret this as ‘a weak and incipient faith

which has its primary aim turned toward the solution of personal problems in this world.’ The prophet’s religion is said to be self-centred religion which attracts followers because these are in need. They want their sicknesses cured, their trade fostered, and of course their security assured.

In spite of their ‘excesses’, it is hard to see any justification for such criticisms or to condemn members of the Independent Churches on account of their turning to God when they are in need. They are not just doing it for fun when they rise up daily, morning and night, and pray for hours! The inevitable question is: ‘How much do our own Christians in the older Churches pray?’

That the role of prayer has not been misinterpreted is illustrated by the words of the founder of the Cherubim and Seraphim in Nigeria:

God always answers prayers. Unfulfilled intercessions might be due to any of these three causes: praying without faith; asking for things that would bring nothing beneficial to the supplicant; and praying for God’s grace when past sins have not been remitted.

On faith-healing, there is no doubt that the achievements of the healing Churches have been great. It cannot be disputed that very many of the so-called ‘orthodox’ Christians, including Catholics and highly educated individuals, also flock to the new Churches seeking for refuge from their unseen enemies. The prophet-healer, quite aware of their predicament, provides answers to their existential problems. It is therefore not only the prophets and their followers who should be accused of practicing self-centred or self-interested religion’ (if this ever applies to the situation). All of us emphasize this-worldly goals, whatever the level of our education and our spiritual orientation. And whether people emphasize them or not, the problems are there.

The sense of insecurity is perpetuated in the African milieu by fears of evil spirits, the phenomenon of ‘poisoning’, the ‘*ogbanje*’ (the ever-recurring death of children, who are believed to re-enter their mother’s womb to be born again), the unlimited anxiety over fruitfulness in marriage, and so on.

It is the urge to have these problems solved which drives people to the doors of the Aladura prophets. A problem is not solved by pretending that it is not there, which is what the mission Churches do. The Aladura prophet is, therefore, a more realistic counselor, because he accepts the supplicant as one with genuine spiritual or existential problems, and tries conscientiously to find solutions to them.

### ***Which Way Forward?***

In any critical approach to such problems as those created by the new religious movements in Africa, a solution or recommendation for action may be expected.

While we are not presuming to offer any satisfactory solution, or definitive way forward, it is not out of place to point out that the greatest obstacle to any solution is that posed by those who are still very sceptical and critical of the motives of the new Churches for responding to some of the challenges tend to come up against cynical questions: ‘Are we going to begin imitating the band-beating people?’ ‘Are we going to turn our Churches into Aladura and Cherubim and Seraphim congregations?’ ‘Should the Christian Churches be turned into healing homes or hospitals?’ There have been warnings of the need for ‘extra caution’ against imitating the new movements. But which is actually imitating the other? And there is another question now: ‘Have these “extra cautions” yielded better results?’ The Independent Churches have not been imposed from the outside. Both their members and those who still remain in Christian Churches belong to the same people, with the same religious sentiments. Consequently, there is enough evidence to assume that the proliferation will continue.

In Nigeria, in particular, the prophets or leaders of the new Churches are called ‘Jesus freaks’, and priests and pastors warn their members against what they refer to as ‘the consequences of losing their souls by double dealing or disloyalty’, by attending ‘false Churches’. The few ‘researchers’ who have attempted to investigate the activities of the new Churches have usually come out with recommendations on how to ‘combat’ the spread of the movements, or how to ‘check’ people from deserting the mission Churches and from attending the ‘prayer houses’. The challenging questions put to such critics by the Vicar of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Benin City call for attention:

What on earth is the Reverend gentleman doing while the Aladura Churches continue to win his members to their fold? Is it not his duty to strengthen their faith?... If what he termed ‘mushroom’, hand-clapping, band-beating, vision-seeing Churches could be daring enough to almost empty a Church, I would therefore appeal to the Catholic authorities in Nigeria to re-examine the ministerial priesthood ... Priests should be warned to desist from self-defense action and from pointing accusing fingers at others, for much depends on them as good soul-winners for Christ. Moreover, they should be taught that greater soul-winning is neither done in the Church pulpit, nor in the sanctuary, nor in vicarages, but in the high-ways and hedges.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever ‘absurdities’ critics may find in the activities of the Independent Churches, it must be pointed out that these are nothing new in the long history of religious and reformation movements all over the world. For those who are still sceptical, it may be necessary to reflect upon what Dr. G. Ikeobi, organizer of Catholic ‘prayer meetings’ in Onitsha, Nigeria, says about the Independent Churches, in answer to his critics:

My view of these Aladura and ‘Alleluia’ Churches is that the God I call upon and worship wants me to get a feedback from them. To me, it is part of Christian charity and humanity to recognize the good in others especially when I have failed sometimes woefully to be good myself. These Churches are making the incarnation and adaptation we have failed to make. They are trying to bring God to the *life experiences* of the people. They are not interested in saying and doing things that do not relate to the actual conditions of their hearers. In doing this, they may make mistakes, but my spirit tells me that if God spoke through an *ass* to a prophet in the past. He can today speak to me through them. So if some of the things we do resemble their own, so much the better. Nobody has the monopoly of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

A twentieth-century ‘spiritual’ or ‘prophetic’ revolution – whatever authors may choose to call it, and whatever may have aided the emergence and proliferation of this phenomenon, it is essential that the impact of the Independent African religious movements be recognized. A phenomenon which has produced well over twenty million adherents cannot just be dismissed as an insignificant matter. It calls for deep reflection.

One of the many speculations in Europe and America concerning the future of Christianity in the secularized world is that its survival might find a favourable and lasting support on black African soil. But whether the ‘lovers’ of Africa merely want to speculate or not, they do not, in fact, know how close they are to the truth!

One question, however, remains still unanswered, and with Victor Hayward we ask: ‘Are the factors which have already led to the separate formation of hundreds and hundreds of Independent Churches in Africa likely to increase their number in the future?’<sup>4</sup>

### ***Prophecy in an Age of Fear***

There is surely renewed interest in prophecy at the present time, and this is not limited to the African and biblical situation nor to the religious sphere. The

message of the prophets – old and modern, true or false – is no less relevant to modern times, since many factors seem to evoke speculations about the outcome of the present age. It is what J. P. Milton refers to as ‘an Age of Fear’ that has characterized the present historical epoch – an age in which men are fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming upon the world (cf. Luke 21.20ff).<sup>5</sup>

It is an atomic age, an age of sharply clashing ideologies, an age of rising international tensions and of revolutionary technological, political, and social change. ‘An Age of Fear’ – it has certainly brought about renewed interest in prophecy and eschatology. In times of anxiety and distress, the cry of fear may be heard: ‘What will the end of these events look like?’

In every historical epoch, prophets have arisen – some to express hope and assurance in world stability, in economic and social progress. And in the eyes of many these are the ‘true’ prophets of salvation and *shalom*. Theirs is the message of peace and hope in the face of a deteriorating situation. For them, there is no cause for alarm.

On the other hand, the ‘doom’ prophets may equally arise, emphasizing the hopelessness of the situation and the inevitable and imminent catastrophic end of the age. Whether it strikes the possibility of a third world war, an energy crisis, inflation problems, population explosion, moral degradation, crime and juvenile delinquency, international strife and world scandal, earthquakes, drought, and other natural catastrophes – one thing is certain – such crises must come to pass in spite of man’s optimism and wishful thinking. For the prophets, these things have been predestined to happen. Man cannot change the course of events.

Of particular interest to soothsayers and individuals interested in African affairs is the predicted outcome of events as seen from the African perspective. As the possibility of a third world war looms, there is talk about ‘disarray in the West over Africa’, as the Eastern and Western ‘lovers’ of Africa seem determined to pitch their battle on the innocent black African soil.

Under the guise of defending Africa from the attacks of her alleged potential enemies, there is no doubt that their sole interest is that of ‘neo-colonialism’ in Africa for economic and political purposes. Instead of tackling Africa’s major problems – the issue of majority rule in white-dominated Southern Africa, the question of one-man one-vote, the problem of poverty and disease – the big powers and their allies are out to ensure the destruction of the very people whom they claim to defend.

In apparent contradiction to their long-declared support for democratic governments, they are not ashamed to uphold dictatorships and corrupt governments in Africa, provided that their selfish political, economic, and

military interests are safeguarded. History is only repeating itself, as some misguided leaders of African governments, like the ignorant chiefs and slave-dealers of the past, gang up with the West and the old colonial masters to deliver Africa into bondage again for equally worthless and selfish reasons (cf. Matt. 23.29-31).

Certainly the world is in need of prophets – Isaiahs, Jeremiahs, Amoses, Hoseas – to speak out against injustice and social evil, to warn this generation against the consequences of closing their ears to reason. The rich and the arms-producing nations must not go uncondemned, for with their sale of destructive weapons they have continued to increase their wealth to the detriment of peace and world stability. By promoting armed conflict among the poorer nations, they have continued to endanger the economic survival of these nations, with the possible extinction of certain races. These are nations where the purchase of arms is given priority in government budgets while poverty and wretchedness continue to bring a large percentage of their populations to an untimely death.

The condemnation of evil is also the task facing every man of good-will – Christian or non-Christian. It is above all one of the primary tasks of ministers of religion, especially those who claim divine sanction for their mission among the brethren, and who are expected to give account of the stewardship implied in their high office. They are all expected to condemn evil in whatever quarter it is found. They should play the role of social reformers, aim at constructing a human society worthy of God’s people; and to further this, they must become forceful defenders of fundamental human rights and promote equality and fraternity. They must be revolutionaries, although this revolution should be geared to the reform of men’s hearts:

‘Set the trumpet to your lips,  
for a vulture hovers over Yahweh’s house  
because they have broken my Covenant and  
transgressed the law’ (Hos. 8.1-5)

Prophets and ministers of religion should also direct the appropriate message to all Christians who find themselves in the oppressors’ camp. Yahweh is not a pagan god to be placated with gifts and sacrifices – a god who shows no interest in the moral disposition of his subjects. Men cannot be going through the motions of formerly honouring God while their everyday action proves that they have none of the love of God that alone gives sacrifice a meaning. Men may not drown the cries of the oppressed with the noise of hymns, for the execution of justice cannot be separated from the moral demands of the Christian faith (Mic. 6.8; Matt. 23.23-4).

It is therefore not without cause that in the era of modern prophecy, and strictly in the theological domain, an activist vision of the hot gospel finds echo in the popular theology designated as 'prophetic'. Prophetic theologians proclaim a total liberation of man from whatever evils obstruct his self-realization, citing the gospel to prove that Christians must side with the poor and the oppressed, and condemn all social injustice and enslavement, even to the point of sometimes backing violent revolution (Matt. 10.34; Luke 12.49-51).

The stories of strife and human suffering are thus seen as the results of man's lack of compassion and loss of true human values. The present crises are seen as no more than microcosmic revelations of the violence that human nature is prone to; they are forerunners of the greater blood-bath to come, an impending worldwide catastrophe, a cataclysm already predicted by soothsayers and prophets. For the men of this age, filled with fear, the biblical predictions find their literal fulfillments in today's important events – political and religious. The great God has prophesied these specific events by the mouth of his prophets and he alone has the final say in this regard.

Viewed from its proper perspective, it should not surprise anybody that 'an Age of Fear, should produce a multitude of prophets within and outside the established Churches – prophets of every caliber, dreamers of dreams, visionaries, healers, and - Messiahs – all directing one prophetic movement or another. In Christian circles, such a prophetic rebirth is referred to as a 'New Pentecost', as men are moved by the spirit, all claiming to possess extraordinary spiritual powers of prophecy and glossolalia. Certain questions are therefore bound to arise: Have Joel's last days' arrived? (cf. Acts 2.17-18; Joel 2.28-32). Are there signs in history which provide clues for seeing into the future? Were the Old Testament writers given insight far beyond their own particular times? Did they realize that they were addressing more than their own historic epoch? What is prophecy after all? Who are the 'true' prophets and who are the 'false' ones? In other words, what are the criteria for determining who has been sent and who is roaming about in sheep's clothing (Luke 6.15)?

Whatever men of this age may think about the fulfillment of prophecies, it is obvious that none of the biblical prophets can be separated from the contemporary political or social situations in which they appeared. There is evidence of historical contemporaneity in the message of the prophets. The sin indicted was actual in that situation and the judgment predicted imminent (Luke 11. 46-51).

But although the first significance of prophecy is as a message for the prophet's own day, the relevance of prophecy may extend beyond its historical contemporaneity. In such a framework, the moral content of the biblical prophetic message has retained its everlasting and existential impact both in the

contemporary situation and beyond it to a situation not even visualized by the prophets themselves:

It is you who have devoured the vineyard,  
the loot of the poor is in your houses,  
What do you mean by crushing my people,  
by grinding the face of the poor?

Oracle of *Yahweh Sabaoth!* (Isa. 3.14-15)

## ILLUSTRATIONS

### **INSERT PICTURE NO 1 [ON PAGE 58 OF THE TEXT]**

Senior Apostle Isaac Apeh, founder of the influential Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim branch in Enugu-Ezike, Nigeria, with other high-ranking ‘ministers’ and two ‘Levites’.

### **INSERT PICTURE NO 2 [ON PAGE 60 OF THE TEXT]**

The presence of ‘Levites’ or prophet-assistants in the hierarchical and often over-staffed Independent Churches is not a sign of show or pomp. It underlines the element of reform and protest against the white man’s domination in Church and politics. The Zionist prophet is master at least in his own Church, and duties are shared out to members.

### **INSERT PICTURE NO 3 [ON PAGE 62 OF THE TEXT]**

Holy water is a very important sacramental in the Independent Churches. The prophet’s duty includes the blessing of water which members bring to him in containers of every shape and size.

**INSERT PICTURE NO 4 [ON PAGE 65 OF THE TEXT]**

The ‘holy Book’ is the prophet’s indispensable companion, from which the new religious movements draw their inspiration and faith. Armed with a Bible and holy rod, and perhaps a cross and a bell, the prophet is ready to demonstrate his commitment to God and the Church he has founded, to discipleship and mission.

**INSERT PICTURE NO 5 [ON PAGE 67 OF THE TEXT]**

‘My house shall be called a house of prayer.’ In the ‘prayer houses’ members kneel in silent prayer and meditation.

**INSERT PICTURE NO 5 [ON PAGE 67 OF THE TEXT]**

But at prayer meetings one is also free to pray ‘according to the promptings of the ‘Spirit’. Silent prayers may be followed by murmurings and angry shoutings, by an outbreak of ‘confusion’ and frivolous antics.

**INSERT PICTURE NO 6 [ON PAGE 73 OF THE TEXT]**

‘The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe ...’ Senior Apostle Emecheta with Apostle Apeh in the pulpit at Mount of Grace. Belief in the one almighty God, repentance for sin, and the need for Spirit baptism, are regular themes.

**INSERT PICTURE NO 7[ON PAGE 78 OF THE TEXT]**

There is no monopoly of leadership in the Independent Churches. The respect and credence given to leaders are due to their ability to manifest charismatic gifts and impart them on others. Many widely revered prophets and prophetesses have founded religious groups. Husband and wife together run an influential Aladura branch in Ibadan

**INSERT PICTURE NO 8 [ON PAGGE 81 OF THE TEXT]**

‘I saw the Lord Jehovah... and two seraphim before him, calling “Holy, Holy Holy”.’ This wall-painting doubtless represents Isaiah’s vision at his call. In the Independent Churches visions play a unique role in the prophet’s career. For most of the prophets it is God who calls them, as he called Isaiah, Jeremiah, Moses and other prophets of the Old Testament.

**INSERT PICTURE NO 9 [ON PAGE 86 OF THE TEXT]**

The prophet is a ‘man of God’ with great spiritual powers. ‘Spirit-possession’ is common after laying-on of hands in blessing and healing, and it is a great privilege to receive his blessing. A prophet blesses a mother and her new child.

**INSERT PICTURE NO 10 [ON PAGE 91 OF THE TEXT]**

In the Independent Churches witchcraft is not rejected as nonsense. A sharp distinction is made between the Spirit of God and the power of the Devil or demonic spirits that bring trouble and disease. By the power of the Holy Spirit prophets set out to exorcise a ‘bewitched’ house. After sprinkling with holy water it is once again habitable and free from the menace of evil spirits

**INSERT PICTURE NO 11 [ ON PAGE 99 OF THE TEXT]**

There is a mad rush to acquire supernatural powers. ‘Prophetic bands’ are formed and aspiring prophets trained for leadership, so that prophets multiply even to the extent of outnumbering the ordinary adherents! Men and women aspirants to prophetic office are senior members of an ever-growing Cherubim and Seraphim congregation.

**INSERT PICTURE NO 12 [ ON PAGE 103 OF THE TEXT]**

Many of the prayer houses are in poor condition because members are mostly the sick and the poor. But in the cities the story is different, as the New Salem Church in Benin City shows. And some of the ministers are said to be rich and to enjoy privileged positions in government circles. President Houphouet Boigny of Ivory Coast (centre) accompanies high dignitaries of the Harrist Church.

**Appendix:**

**Questionnaire**

**Reference Notes**

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## **Index**

### **Appendix: Questionnaire**

Questionnaires administered to over 100 Aladura and other 'Pentecostal' Churches in Nigeria.

#### **SECTION 1**

1. Name and address of Informant.
2. Name of the prophet or Church leader (Title).
3. Name of his Church or Prophetic Assembly, date of foundation, etc.
4. Age, Christian denomination to which he formerly belonged, occupation before prophetic call, marital status, etc.
5. Size of the Church, approximate number of adherents.
6. Are there healing services? How massive?

#### **SECTION 2**

1. Does the prophet or Church leader feel that he has a ‘supernatural’ vocation? Has he been called? By whom? Where?
2. In what form was the call experienced (e.g. vision, audition, dreams, message from someone)?
3. Ask him to describe his experiences (in detail).
4. What was his immediate reaction?
5. Did he receive any specific message? What?
6. How did the founding of a Church come about?
7. What importance does he attach to healing?
8. Did people acknowledge the presence of the ‘new power’ in him? What were their first reactions? What ‘spirit’ works in him? (exact words).
9. In what other terms does the named prophet describe the ‘new force’ in him?
10. What special powers has he (in order of importance) – healing, exorcism, prophecy, etc.?
11. What does he mean by prophecy?

### **SECTION 3**

1. Does the prophet in question equate himself to the biblical prophets? On what ground? Does he know about them at all? Which prophets?
2. What ‘supernatural’ phenomena does he experience (ecstasy, ‘possession’, etc.)?
3. Is he aware of the conflict between the ‘true’ prophets and ‘false’ prophets in biblical tradition? What of the New Testament warnings against ‘false’ prophets?
4. How would he distinguish between ‘true’ prophets and ‘false’ prophets?
5. Does he agree that among the many African modern prophets, there are also false prophets?
6. If one called him ‘false’ prophet, what would be his reaction? Why?
7. Some of the Old Testament prophets worked ‘miracles’. Does he? Which miracles has he worked?
8. Do people come to consult him in time of crisis? How regular? What other complaints, outside sickness, do they bring?

### **SECTION 4**

1. Ask the prophet to describe the state of ‘ecstatic frenzy’ or ‘spirit possession’ which he experiences.
2. How does it come about – stimulated by intensive prayer, meditation, fasting, or by music and dancing?
3. Can he do without music in his Church?

4. Accuse him that the 'ecstatic-frenzy' is 'self-induced' – i.e. provoked merely by music and wild dancing or even by other external stimulants; that there is nothing mysterious about it!
5. What is his reaction?
6. (To the Informant) What do you personally think about these 'epileptic-fits' in the Prophetic Churches?

## **SECTION 5**

1. What messages has our prophet for this generation?
2. What are his moral and social teachings?
3. How does he manifest his prophetic consciousness when he gives messages? Does he use any formula(s)?
4. If so, on what ground? Or is he only imitating the biblical prophets?

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

1. Describe in detail a typical prayer meeting or worship service.
2. Describe any healing or exorcism scene.
3. Are there any of the Church songs you can include?
4. What are your impressions generally about the new religious movements?
5. Do you think that any other important issue has been left out?
6. Could you please supply it?

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Full bibliographical details are given here only for sources not included in the Bibliography on pp. 310-14). The following abbreviations are used in these Reference Notes and in the Bibliography:

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<i>ET</i>	English Translation.
<i>IDB</i>	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, New York.
<i>JBC</i>	Jerome Bible Commentary, London.
<i>JBT</i>	Journal of Biblical Theology, Philadelphia.
<i>JRA</i>	Journal of Religion in Africa, Leiden.
<i>JTSA</i>	Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, Cape Town.
<i>ThDNT</i>	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Michigan.
<i>ThWzAT</i>	Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament, Munich.

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### Part III

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## Index

The following abbreviations are used in the Index:

IAC Independent African Churches  
OT Old Testament

**Bold type** is used to indicate the main references under certain headings.

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