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A Study of the Effects of Christianization Upon the Religious Structure of Primitive Society as Reflected Among the Ibo People of Southeasteren Nigeria West Africa-

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN SCENE	8
III. AFRICAN TEMPERAMENT	15
Surface Observations	15
The Spiritual Character of the African Mind	21
IV. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND SOCIETY	27
Problems in Discussing African Beliefs	27
The Force of Mana	30
Belief in the High-God	33
Belief in Lesser Divinities	36
Ancestor Devotion	39
Religious Customs and Practices	46
The Interrelationship of Religion and Social Structure	55
V. MISSIONS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF AFRICAN SOCIETY	58
The Impact of Missions upon African Life	58
New Directions in African Mission Work	69
BIBLIOGRAPHY	76

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As the title of this thesis indicates, the problem under investigation is the effects of Christianization upon the religious structure of primitive society, especially in so far as these effects have been noted among the Ibo peoples of southeastern Nigeria. The emphasis is to be placed upon the word "society." We are interested in the religious beliefs of the African people because they profoundly influence the formation of the tribe. We are not interested in these beliefs from a theological point of view. This means that we shall not delve into the theological implications which are involved in mission activity among any primitive people. It is not our purpose in this paper to discuss or to challenge the validity of mission work. The Gospel imperative is taken to be self-evident. This is especially true for the writer since he has spent two years upon the African mission field. We wish only to analyse, as much as possible, the effects of mission work upon African society. In many cases, these effects will not appear entirely constructive. The Church will be brought to task wherever she has played a role in the process of African social disintegration. But this criticism may well serve as a stimulus toward the Church and toward individual missionaries to shoulder social responsibilities with greater courage and foresight. For though the missions have been one of the causes of social disruption in Africa, they also possess the power to provide the African people with a new basis for social integration.

The observations which are made in this paper must not be taken as a reflection upon our Synodical mission work in southern Nigeria. Our missionaries have been at work for only twenty years in Africa, and consequently have had little effect upon the total Nigerian, or even less, upon the total African, scene. Furthermore, our mission has tended to adopt the policies of other Protestant missions in the area, and hence cannot be held ultimately responsible for negative results.

In chapter two of this paper, a brief overview of the present African situation will be given, especially as it pertains to Nigeria. Since we have spent several years in Nigeria, the problem which this situation presents has existential meaning for us. While in Africa, we could not help observing some of the potent forces which are afoot among the African people. We could not help noticing that the society appeared to be in a stage of transition from the old to the new, the primitive to the civilized. And we observed also that in this transition many destructive forces were being released which the Christian churches seemed incapable of combating. Over the years we became more and more curious about the possible relationship between this social phenomenon and the teaching and activity of the Church. We were especially disturbed over the proportionate correlation which seemed to exist between the corruption and immorality of the members of a given tribe or clan and the amount of Christianization which they had undergone. It seemed evident that those areas which had been the most Christianized were also those areas which reflected the most social problems. In our scattered reading on the subject, we learned that others had also observed this relationship, and competent authorities

on the subject had established a correlation on a scientific basis. The concern with the problem which was generated by these contacts has resulted in the writing of this thesis. It is our hope that it will correspond to the observations and concerns of others who have also worked on African soil.

African society, or the tribe, the African unit of society, forms a very large topic. It would be, of course, impossible to describe all of the aspects and ramifications of African society in a paper of this scope, even though we were to employ the Ibo tribe alone as representative of the African people. Consequently, we shall concentrate upon the religious beliefs and practices of the Ibo people, with regard especially to the part these beliefs play in the upholding of the total tribal structure. This means that we will not touch upon some other important aspects of Ibo society. It is not our purpose, for instance, to describe at any length, the age-groups in the tribe, nor the relative position of male and female, nor even the place of family in the African life picture. Since the family plays such an important role in African society this may seem like an unfortunate oversight. However, the family institution as such cannot be defined as uniquely religious and hence does not come under the subject of this paper. The family unit will be presupposed in our discussion, but will not be directly treated. This means also that we shall not concern ourselves with the problem of polygamy. Again, the practice of polygamy plays a very important part in African society. Furthermore, the attack of the Christian Church upon polygamy has contributed to the breakdown of the African tribal structure. But it is not our purpose to give a complete picture of African social life, but only to

treat of those aspects which have a direct relationship with religious beliefs and practices. As a result, the polygamy problem must fall by the wayside.

Our mission is at work chiefly among the Efik people who, generally speaking, occupy the Province of Calabar in the extreme southeastern corner of Nigeria. It would seem natural that we should choose this tribe as representative of the society which we wish to describe. And we shall draw from our experiences among this tribe, where we think these experiences indicate the validity of our judgments. However, since the tribe numbers less than a million people, and has played a comparatively small role in the development of indigenous religious beliefs or tribal civilizations, we have chosen as representative of African society the Ibo tribe which occupies a larger territory immediately to the west of Efikland. The Ibos number a little over three million people, have a long and honorable history in commerce and tribal government, and have made a name for themselves in all of West Africa as an intelligent and highly aggressive aggregate of people. Furthermore, a number of anthropological studies have been made of the Ibos by both missionaries and trained anthropologists, and these studies have proven invaluable for the understanding of our subject.

The difficulties which have been faced presenting a clear and coherent picture of our problem are manifold. Since we are dealing with a subject which is not immediately familiar to the average reader, we thought it necessary to first describe the general social scene in contemporary Africa, south of the Sahara, both as we have observed it, and as others have reported it. This is the theme of the first chapter. Secondly, it was considered necessary to attempt a partial description

of the African temperament, as it manifests itself in more typical character traits, mental and emotional habits. For temperament and religious attitudes appear to go hand in hand among the African people. The validity of such observations is discussed in chapter three, and the extent of identification which can be made between the African in the abstract and the African in the flesh is at least hinted at. The fourth chapter treats, in more detail, of the religious beliefs and practices of the African people, especially as found among the Ibos. It is shown in this chapter how closely the social structure of the tribe is dependent upon the religious beliefs of the tribe; and how the whole witness of the tribe in ceremony and ritual bolsters up its religious convictions and hence maintains the strength of the structure. In the last chapter, we then indicate at what points the Church has been forced to attack African religious beliefs, and hence attack African social structure. The result should correspond roughly to the present scene as it is briefly described in the second chapter. In order to avoid a negative picture of Christian mission work in Africa, we have indicated, in the last chapter, the more constructive results of Christianization in Africa, and a few areas in which the Church could improve her witness and her social influence in the future of Africa.

Many of the devices used in our analysis of primitive social structure have their source in the discipline of anthropology. The inter-relation of religious belief and tribal structure is a thesis which has its roots in anthropological thinking. The evaluation of the various forms of African tribal worship has been made possible through anthropological study and discovery. We have gathered our

material primarily from anthropologists in the African field. These anthropologists were, for the most part, Christians with scientific training. The relationship of religion to society was borne out in their writings. Only where their proposals have corresponded with the viewpoints of the more general anthropologists have we chosen to quote from the latter. In short, we are not proposing any kind of anthropological position which does not have its basis either upon our own observations, or the observations and the conclusions of others who have worked in the African field. We do not intend to take a theoretical stand on anthropological matters which may be challenged from another anthropological point of view. We stand merely within the limited context of our own field.

The major sources employed are three books by Geoffrey Parrinder, senior lecturer in comparative religion at University College, Ibadan, Nigeria, West Africa: African Traditional Religion, West African Religion and West African Psychology. Also employed extensively: Diedrich Westermann's The African To-Day and African and Christianity; Denys Shropshire's The Church and Primitive Peoples; C. K. Meek's Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe; Mrs. Leith-Ross's African Women; Talbot's Life in Southern Nigeria, and Basden's Niger Ibos. These major sources are supplemented by a considerable number of references to The International Review of Missions, and more general works which direct themselves to the progress of Christian missions in Africa and elsewhere.

We have undertaken to explain the terminology employed in this paper in the fourth chapter where it is immediately applicable. We feel that it will make it easier for the reader if the terms are

defined in context rather than in a meaningless list which would necessitate constant reference in order to be fully understood.

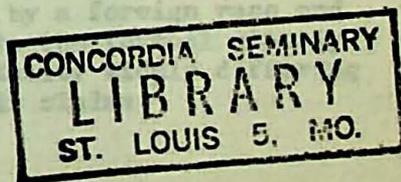
Throughout the paper, the first person will be employed whenever personal experiences are recorded. In relation to judgments and opinions registered, the editorial "we" will be retained.

Africa is like an exploding mass of yeast. Its fermentations are not merely political and economic, but social, cultural, religious. It is springing in a step from black magic to white civilization, although there are plenty of Africans who still believe in black magic.

There is the first great point to make about contemporary Africa—its emergence with exaggerated speed into the advance of modern times. The problems arising inevitably from this evolution are so difficult, so abrasive and bewildering, that they cannot be described in an inch.

This is the first thing to understand in any study of contemporary African life and society. Africa is in a state of upheaval. In the past few decades a definite breakdown in African social structure has occurred. Everywhere over the continent, the impact of Western civilization has been felt. Even in the remotest villages in the bush or in the bush, the African can no longer live out his life in the exact pattern of his ancestors.

After thousands of years of isolation the African continent has been drawn into the whirlpool of modern life. This has led to a revolution of society and particularly of the young or generation of Africans; they are being educated for a life which in many respects is totally different from, and even opposed to, that of their fathers. The dangers resulting from this for the individual and for the community are the greater as the transition from the old to the new is not a work of the African mind nor caused by forces indigenous to Africa, but results from invasion by a foreign race and culture. The Africans are thrown in unprepared, with a technique and mental framework which now put forward their



See further, *White Africa* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), p. 7.

See further, *Africa and Christianity* (London: Oxford Press, 1931), p. 7.

CHAPTER II

THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN SCENE

John Gunther writes in Inside Africa:

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This is the first great point to make about contemporary Africa--its emergence with exaggerated speed into the embrace of modern times. The problems arising inevitably from this evolution are so difficult, so abrasive and perplexing, that they cannot be described in an inch.¹

This is the first thing to understand in any study of contemporary African life and society. Africa is in a state of upheaval. In the past few decades a definite breakdown in African social structure has occurred. Everywhere over the continent, the impact of Western civilization has been felt. Even in the remotest villages in the jungle or in the bush, the African can no longer live out his life in the exact pattern of his ancestors.

After thousands of years of seclusion the African continent has been drawn into the whirlpool of modern life. This has led to a revolution of society and particularly of the younger generation of Africans; they are being educated for a life which is in many respects totally different from, and even opposed to, that of their fathers. The dangers resulting from this for the individual and for the community are the greater as the transition from the old to the new is not a fruit of the African mind nor caused by forces indigenous in Africa, but results from invasion by a foreign race and culture. The Africans are thrown into the turmoil utterly unprepared, with a technique and mentality widely differing from those which now put forward their claims.²

¹John Gunther, Inside Africa (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 3.

²Diedrich Westermann, Africa and Christianity (London: Oxford Press, 1937), p. 3.

The factors in modern civilization which have brought about this turmoil are manifold. It should be stated at the outset that no one cause may be delineated as primary. It is not possible to speak of the effects of Christianization upon African life without keeping in the mind the inter-related effects of Western governments, of missions, of Western economic standards and attitudes.

The impact of European forms of government over the whole of West Africa, the invasion of Western commerce, the evangelization of Christianity, all these have thrown the continent into a ferment. The change is inevitable. It has happened, and the clock cannot be put back. One might paint idyllic pictures of sylvan tranquillity in the past centuries, contrasted with the disintegration of today. They would be visions, seen through the rose-tinted spectacles of the romantic European; reactions from erstwhile descriptions of cities of blood and slavery. There was both good and bad in the old regime, but it cannot return; the future must be vastly different.³

It is only a question of time then until the African civilizations will disappear. For the African is not in a position to select and to examine. He must simply adapt himself as best he can. The new forces are far too strong and too subversive to be incorporated into his own system without mortal injury to that system. This is what makes the question of his future decisive. How is he to live and hold his own in a world which destroys what his mind has created and forces him to adopt alien forms and standards of life?

The most obvious change in African society is an economic one. It is possible to observe this process of economic revolution even within a relatively short period of residence on the African continent. In Nigeria, cities are coming into being solely for the purpose of

³Geoffrey Parrinder, West African Psychology (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), p. 210.

trade and commercial transaction. Railroads are in the process of construction, highways occupy an important place in the thinking of governmental planning boards. The monetary unit has long since ceased to be the cowrie shell or the brass manilla; the people now deal in pounds and shillings. The products of the farm and the palm tree no longer revert exclusively back to their owners. They are often sold to dealers who carry on trade in yams or cassava or beef on a much larger scale. Palm nuts are taken to palm oil refineries where they are crushed and the oil extracted in a matter of hours. Formerly the work was done by hand and involved a long and tedious process. The textile business, in particular, has boomed in the past decades, and many Africans are reaping a phenomenal profit in the buying and selling of the brightly-colored cloth which the average Nigerian finds indispensable in his wardrobe. Every market has a row of tailors and seamstresses taking orders for clothing in the latest styles and sewing on machines of European manufacture.

On the surface, all of this bustle and activity seems to augur for the good of Africa; for no group of people in the modern civilized world can expect to subsist without a healthily aggressive economy. However, there is a darker side to the economic picture which strikes at the very root of the former African tribal life. Mr. E. Amu, writing for The International Review of Missions, states:

To the average illiterate African life has been robbed of much (if not all) of its simplicity; life has become a fierce economic struggle, a struggle which gets fiercer and fiercer every day. The good news he expects from day to day is that of higher prices for his various commodities. To the literate African literacy does not mean primarily

enlightenment and better insight into life, but a means of becoming like the European, of qualifying for highly paid posts, a means of growing into power, hence the clamour for more and more, higher and higher education. The good time to which we look forward is when the African will control the commercial, educational, medical, political and other posts. Thus promises of the things that bring material wealth and power constitute good news.⁴

In my teaching at our Lutheran High School in Nigeria, I was able to observe this kind of motivation in the thoughts and actions of my students. The admitted goal of their academic efforts was the passing of the final West African Examination which came at the end of their six years of study. If they were successful, they could launch themselves upon a lucrative career in a commercial concern, in the government, or in the educational system. If they failed, they were, in a sense, relegated back into the bush from which they were trying to escape. The effort and the zeal which characterized the study of those boys and girls was laudable, but at the same time, frightening. There was something disembodied about it, an effort in a vacuum which excluded the land from which they had come, and the family which had nurtured them.

This points us forward to another general observation which can be made about the present state of affairs in African society. Diedrich Westermann, in his book, The African To-Day, states the problem very succinctly: "The outstanding phenomenon in social development to-day (in Africa) is the emergence of the individual from the group."⁵ The white man, in government, in commerce, in

⁴E. Amu, "The Position of Christianity in Modern Africa," The International Review of Missions, XXIX (October, 1940), 478.

⁵Diedrich Westermann, The African To-Day (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 283.

missions, has created conditions which have unavoidably upset the delicate balance between the individual and the community. We have seen an example of this effect in the contemporary African's new-found economic drive. This drive is symptomatic of the total picture of African life. The fiber of tribal structure has been seriously weakened. The young are breaking away from the family and the clan. The ancient systems of authority which depended largely upon the complete isolation of the group are slowly crumbling away. "There is in Africa a general disregard for the authority of the chief and parental control, and there is a threatened breakdown of the family system."⁶ The African have tried to imbibe Western civilization in giant swallows. They have attempted overnight to develop forms of government and habits of industry which took other countries hundreds of years to develop. They have been expected, in a pitiably short time, to think through the implications of the Christian Gospel in the complexities of the social realm. They have been made to suffer a severe combination of birth and growing pains, the anxieties of puberty and maturity, all at the same time.

The society, as a result, is in a state of cultural disjointedness, in possession of relative economic, political and religious freedom, without the knowledge of how to use that freedom.⁷ A gap has widened between the educated and the uneducated, and the educated

⁶Denys W. Shropshire, The Church and Primitive Peoples (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1938), p. 447.

⁷This statement is truer for British West Africa than for any East African colonies, or especially for the Union of South Africa. For an enlightening treatment of the differences in colonial policies in the various African countries, see John Gunther, Inside Africa.

have misused their advantage. For instance, in Nigeria, bribery is an almost universally accepted practice. The general tone of morality is very low. Social corruption is especially prevalent in the Christian regions. Christian doctrines have often been deliberately perverted for utilitarian ends. Christian forgiveness, for example, has become a source of vindication for moral laxity. Some people feel that they can do anything in their churches or their villages, because their fellow Christians must forgive them when they confess their sins.

Denys Shropshire states that in many typical Christian tribes the Church has been almost totally ineffective in providing a new and dynamic basis for social life:

The sweeping victory of Christianity in earlier days has led to religious stagnation . . . religion is little more . . . than a diversion from every-day activities, and an opportunity for dressing in their best clothes to impress the opposite sex.⁸

And again:

The picture given of recent developments in the religious life of the community is alarming. "Inherited" Christianity is of a much poorer type than that of the first converts; moral stamina is disappearing; civilization is rapidly undermining the moral quality of Native life; the wants of the people are becoming disproportionate to their earnings and contact with the white race is influencing for the worse.⁹

Another writer speaks of "the incredible muddle of old and new which represents the average convert's mind and the almost laughable contradictions and innocent hypocrisies which constitute the average convert's life."¹⁰

⁸Shropshire, op. cit., p. 446.

⁹Henri Philippe Junod, "Anthropology and Missionary Education," The International Review of Missions, XXIV (April, 1935), 215.

¹⁰Sylvia Leith-Ross, African Women (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), p. 292.

These statements are cited in order to indicate the relative lack of success which the missions have had in replacing the old social and ethical standards which are passing away with the coming of new civilizations. The Christian Church has established herself on native soil, but the results have not always been ideal. Christian people have lost their social foundations and have not as yet been able to create new Christian social institutions rooted in the African soil. We shall not probe into the problem more deeply at this point. But after we have described some of the outstanding characteristics of African temperament and society, especially as found among the Ibo people of southeastern Nigeria, we shall return to the Church and the part she has played in the disintegration of African life. It will then be possible to understand a little more fully why the African social system is in the process of breaking down, and why the Christian Church has been relatively ineffective on both an individual and collective level in meeting the needs of the African in his new way of life.

And again Geoffrey Parrinder, writing in African Traditional Religion states that

there is much more kinship between the various peoples of Africa than might appear at first sight. Anthropologists have written many ethnograms on different peoples, and

CHAPTER III

AFRICAN TEMPERAMENT

Surface Observations

Anyone who is so presumptuous as to write about the African temperament or the African mind, is faced with a two-fold problem. First of all, the continent of Africa is an exceedingly large spread of land, with a population of well over seventy million people. Historically speaking, there has been a minimum of contact between the various peoples of Africa. This itself would seem to rule against any continuity of culture or temperament in African society. Is it legitimate to speak of the African mind? Although there is some difference of opinion on the subject, there is strong evidence of a remarkable similarity among the dark peoples of Africa. Professor Westermann writes in Africa and Christianity:

It is generally recognized that backward people have many common features in their social institutions, their mental activities, and their basic magical and religious beliefs. However, in Africa, migrations, age-long culture contact, and intermarriage could not fail to have a levelling effect, and similarity of climate and conditions of life tended towards effacing original distinctions. In this sense, therefore, it may be permissible to speak of Africa and in particular of African Negroes and their civilizations.¹

And again Geoffrey Parrinder, writing in African Traditional Religion states that

there is much more kinship between the various peoples of Africa than might appear at first sight. Anthropologists have written many monographs on different peoples, and

¹Diedrich Westermann, Africa and Christianity (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 4-5.

because little has been done so far to collate and compare their findings, the notion is abroad that every African tribe is very peculiar, if not unique. But the resemblances are far more important than the differences.²

We shall take our lead from these statements and talk of the African in general terms in this section. But it is necessary to strike one note of caution. No general observations have any ultimate scientific value unless verified directly through sociological and anthropological study in any given tribe. It is possible to speak of the African in the general sense only if we make the bases of these observations clear, so that they may be compared with like observations made among African people of different culture and racial stock.

A second warning should be kept in mind. While in Africa, we were often irritated by the expression, "African mind," especially when it was employed by Europeans or Americans. It was generally believed that after a certain amount of contact with Africans, one became aware of African thought patterns. This awareness could then be applied with good advantage in one's dealings with all African people. However, the application was usually a mere excuse for actual contact with the Africans, and when applied indiscriminately, eliminated the necessity of learning to know any African individually. We shall use the phrase in this paper only in connection with mental and emotional tendencies which are profoundly characteristic of the African people.

²Geoffrey Parrinder, African Traditional Religion (London: Hutchisons' University Library, 1954), p. 4.

Finally, when we speak of African characteristics we do not wish in any way to imply that these characteristics are found in all Africans. In fact, all of them will never be found in any one individual. In my intimate contacts with students at our Lutheran High School, I discovered a wide variety of temperaments which ranged from the moody, sensitive or introverted type to the exuberant, outspoken or extroverted type caricatured in our American minstrel shows. The range corresponded generally to that of any cross-section of American young people I have come to know in the past. It is only when the characteristics of the group are totaled and analyzed that certain propensities and attitudes manifest themselves in such a way that they may be distinguished from another racial group.

We wish first to comment upon the surface manifestations of African temperament which one will inevitably mark even after contacts of a relatively short duration. We shall single out especially those traits which have bearing upon the African religious consciousness. The African people do a great deal of laughing. A dog will wander into a Church service and for some reason a woman will titter. Another will follow suit, and before long, the bamboo rafters will be resounding, much to the discomfort of the liturgist or the preacher. A woman, walking alongside the road with a load of bananas or yams on her head, will suddenly lose her balance and go toppling, yams and all, into the ditch. Immediately all of her fellow travelers will howl with laughter, and she will usually take up the refrain. Countless of like examples could be cited, all of which add up to a kind of infectious good humor which seems to lie right at the surface of

the African temperament. This tendency to laugh at the slightest pretext should not be misconstrued as an indication of primitive paradisaic bliss. The African does not laugh because his life is comfortable and untroubled. His life is much the opposite. In fact, his laughter is probably a kind of protection against all of his troubles, an antidote for his surface ills and inconveniences. It is also an indication that the African, historically speaking, has worried little about the past and the future. He has written no histories; he has planned no civilizations. He has lived in his present and believed wholeheartedly that the evils of any given day were sufficient unto that day. "Concentration on the present makes possible a more wholehearted enjoyment of the day and the moment, for the past weighs less heavily on the African, and he troubles less about the future than Europeans."³

However, the African people are also capable of deep and mature experience of life, even at a very young age. A boy of seventeen or eighteen, with some training in expression, can speak of the characteristic human vices and virtues connected with family and community life, sexual relations, exchange of property, and the like, in a way which would be impossible for a boy in the same age group, living a more civilized and hence more isolated existence. At the outset then we may remark this peculiar ambivalence in the African temperament: a lack of concern with his past or his future, and yet a deep appreciation of the very mystery of life itself. This twofold propensity plays a great part in the religious attitudes of the African people.

³Diedrich Westermann, The African To-Day (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 38.

The African tends to be highly emotional in the realm of human relationships. He is strongly attached to his family and his clan. He will support the members of his kinship, for instance, the children of a deceased brother or sister, even though it means economic deprivation for himself. He feels the death of both his relatives and his friends very acutely. He is liable to outbursts of sorrowful hysterics of a type which I have never observed in other cultures. During my second year at the High School one of the school girls fell into a kind of epileptic fit which produced a profound state of unconsciousness. When I arrived on the scene to take the girl to the hospital, her fellow school girls were pummeling her mercilessly and howling at the top of their lungs. When I picked up the girl they threw themselves on the ground and literally groveled in the dirt. Yet the girl was nothing more to them than a school chum. On another occasion I took a boy to visit his sister who had been reported sick with paralysis. As we drove up to the boy's house he noticed a newly dug grave by the side. Immediately he let out a piercing scream and bolted out of the car. Members of the village came running from every direction, and the family of the dead girl literally went wild with grief. After a short time, the wailing subsided, and the boy and I returned to school. I tried to comfort him and he accepted my words; but he never spoke of the incident afterwards.

Of love or charity, as we think of these terms, beyond the family, school, or clan, less can be said. The African has very little sense of civic duty as we understand it here in America. There is no stimulus proved in the non-Christian society (and very little in the Christian society) for the care of the poor, the widows, the diseased.

Each man has his own life to worry about. He has neither the time nor the money to spend on the less fortunate beyond his immediate social circle. Mrs. Leith-Ross, who has made a rather exhaustive study of Ibo women in Nigeria, has the following comments to make on these deficiencies in African ethical attitudes:

Now let us take emotion in a wider, less personal aspect: love of one's fellow beings, pity, charity, love of beauty. As in other tribes, the Ibo possesses family loyalty to a marked degree and this not only towards members of his kindred, but towards all those whom he loosely terms "brother." But I do not think this feeling would extend beyond his family. If the dwellers in a town unrelated to his own, though Ibo-speaking like himself, were starving, I do not think it would even enter his mind that it could be his duty to help them. Only if he were in a distant country would he become conscious that ties of race in themselves demanded such and such actions on his part As for pity, I suppose that capacity for pity cannot exist without capacity for love. Each family is under the obligation to care for its own sick and infirm, but this is a definite obligation laid down by law and custom, and were it only founded on sentiment it would probably not be carried out.

Of charity in the way of almsgiving, the sadaka of the Mohammedans of the North, there appears to be no trace. Indeed, one of my most vivid impressions was the difference in the way an act of mine was received. There was a leper at Ubaha, a pitiful sight, to whom I gave a blanket. It was the rainy season, he had only a grass shelter, and had never asked for anything. A number of villagers were present. A great shout of laughter rose up when they saw what I had done and men and women rocked with mirth. They were quite glad the leper should have the blanket and did not grudge it him, but the idea of giving away a perfectly good blanket to a leper towards whom you were under no obligation appeared to them supremely comic.⁴

Although Mrs. Leith-Ross's remarks are based upon the attitudes of the Ibo peoples, yet they are generally applicable to all primitive

⁴Sylvia Leith-Ross, African Women (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1939), pp. 128-29.

peoples. Charity is a mark of the higher religions. It is quite important for our understanding of the African peoples to realize that their moral habits are developed within the tribal society, and function only in so far as the tribal organization functions. This fact becomes extremely important when we come to treat of the effects which the Christianization process has upon African ethical thinking.

The Spiritual Character of the African Mind

In order to understand some of the more complex aspects of the African temperament, it is necessary to probe a little more deeply into the background of African thinking and emotions. Geoffrey Parrinder writes in West African Religion:

On the whole, it may be said that the West African's outlook is more narrowly religious, and less ethical than that of the European. The former admires the uncanny and unusual type of man, rather than the kindly and good in the European sense of well-doing.⁵

This statement has tremendous implications. If we understand it correctly, we will understand why the African people appear defective in certain ethical areas, not only those thus far mentioned, but in others which will be described in this connection. Diedrich Westermann, expanding upon this very idea, writes:

It is . . . evident that there are differences between the mental activity of the Negro and that of the European A significant difference is that the Negro is more dominated by unconscious or half-conscious impulses than we are; for him emotional thinking outweighs logical reasoning, and when emotion is the guide, ideas and actions may result which are not in conformity with logic.⁶

⁵Geoffrey Parrinder, West African Religion (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), p. 200.

⁶Westermann, The African To-Day, p. 39.

And again, Henri Philippe Junod writes in The International Review of Missions:

Africans are extremely liable to loss of personal consciousness (depersonalization). The second sight so frequent amongst Africans, the puzzling nature of certain dreams, the realm of the unconscious, of the deeper--all this has a tremendous impact on the African's soul.⁷

The African,⁸ according to Western standards, is illogical in his thinking. By this we mean that he does not think in the systematic thought patterns accepted unconsciously or consciously by the majority of educated Europeans and Americans of today. The African is more religious than ethical, states Professor Parrinder. By this he means that the African tends to think in supernatural, rather than natural, categories. His relationships with his fellow men are subsumed under these supernatural categories in his thoughts. His ethics do not stand alone, but have meaning only within the framework of his whole spiritual consciousness. His morality is developed more on an emotional than on a rational plane. His motivating ideas have their source more in the well-spring of the unconscious, the deeper self, the unusual as it manifests itself in the actions of men or other phenomena, than in the decisions of the intellect or will. Hence, the true leader of society is not typically an organizational genius or an arbiter of much discretion, but rather one who exhibits an affinity for the supernatural, an extra measure of spiritual consciousness. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is on the basis of this peculiar

⁷Henri Philippe Junod, "Anthropology and Missionary Education," The International Review of Missions, XXXIV (April, 1935), 223.

⁸By the term, "African," we mean the man who is still living in more or less a traditional African environment. Naturally, a well-educated and well-traveled African would not fit into this category.

consciousness that African society, at least as it has been observed, has been welded together. Denys W. Shropshire bears out this observation:

The religion of the primitive Bantu is more of an orthodoxy, based on religious feeling, than an orthodoxy. It consists more of action than of thought, and more of feeling than of action, seeking not so much truth or works but power.⁹

This underlying spiritual consciousness has its relation to the ethical in that the African generally conceives of sin in ritualistic terms. His purely social misdeeds, as has already been alluded to, are serious in proportion to their public discovery. Outside of the clan or tribal unit, sin has almost no meaning at all. But the infraction of those laws, customs and tabus, which have their source in the spiritual consciousness of the tribe, are deadly serious, and require expiation, as will be described in the next chapter. We can begin to see here already, how our concepts of truth and justice and honesty will have only relative significance in such a pattern of thought, a relative significance which is dependent upon the tribal bond and the mystical affinity which the tribe shares as a whole.

This cursory description of African thought patterns has its implication for the African's grasp of modern scientific developments and techniques, and also for his appreciation and understanding of Christianity. The average African student has a wonderful memory for facts and figures, but it is often remarked in pedagogical circles, that he cannot think himself behind the facts. This observation, we believe, is true. However, it is not a reflection upon the innate

⁹Denys W. Shropshire, The Church and Primitive Peoples (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1938), p. xxxiii.

abilities of the African people. The African has been given no training in his tribal experience to analyze scientific premises or the deductions made from those premises. His mind has not been forced to function in the strongly materialistic atmosphere of Western civilization. He is too much inclined to admit the validity of the irrational and the illogical. He relies to a great extent upon his senses. The wonders of Western civilization make no impression upon him in the abstract. They are merely facts which lie outside the realm of his imagination.¹⁰

This inability to discriminate logically, or to make sharp analyses, also has its effect upon the African's attitude toward religion, even Christianity. Mrs. Leith-Ross comments upon this phenomenon:

The Christian can attend Communion and believe in "medicine," keep, until he is found out, a "church" wife and several "native marriage" wives, tie up preciously in the same corner of a handkerchief his rosary and the shaped bit of "iron for juju" made for him . . . plant side by side in the garden round his new cement and pan-roofed house the hibiscus of "civilization" and the o girisi tree of pagan family rites.¹¹

This statement certainly does not apply to all Christian African people, or families. We suspect that Mrs. Leith-Ross has had limited contact with strongly Christian Ibos. Nevertheless, this religious type of schizophrenia is extremely prevalent among the rank and file of the Christian populace, and any missionary who has spent some time in

¹⁰In this connection, I would like to record a personal anecdote. During my first month of teaching in the Lutheran High School, my English Literature class got upon the subject of modern engineering. I told them of feats of construction and illustrated these feats with a very impressive picture of the New York skyline. I exacted not even a ripple of appreciation. My class had no standard by which to measure a skyscraper, and were not able to conjure one up in their imagination. They were interested in the subject only in so far as it was a fact.

¹¹Leith-Ross, op. cit., p. 293.

Africa will have to admit it. The important thing to remember is that the African has not been trained in his tribal thinking to make logical distinctions in his thought or his practice. This fact must be kept in mind when we begin to analyze the part which the Church plays in present African life.

Two other considerations must be mentioned before we move over into a discussion of actual African religious beliefs. This spiritual consciousness which seems to pervade African thinking and life has a dark as well as a light side. Constructively, we will discover that the African is naturally inclined toward religion, toward a belief in or a sense for God, toward worship, and the like. But at the same time, the African, by his very consciousness of spirit, is driven to fear. He mistrusts the spiritual force which he believes to inhabit both himself, his fellows, and the world. This leaves the door open for witchcraft, tabus, inimical spirits, ancestor worship and other more terrible practices which strike us being outside of the realm of human capability.

At the same time, this consciousness of spiritual forces and powers beyond the ken of man develops in the African the craving for power. This craving is probably the dominating force in African religion.¹² The lust for power has its source and origin, not in logical reflection, but in the mystical feeling of incapacity and the obstinate desire to overcome it. It drives the African to a constant search for means, both natural and supernatural, of maintaining and strengthen-

¹²Cf. Westermann, Africa and Christianity, p. 84.

ing life in the midst of the thousands of dangers, physical and spiritual, which threaten life. This drive will manifest itself again and again in our discussion of African religion.

In closing this chapter, it is necessary again to remind ourselves that the subject of our discussion demands a great breadth of sympathy and understanding. We are delving into areas of human consciousness and practice which have no parallel in the lives of most civilized Americans or Europeans. Hence, we must be cautious, not only in our observations and analyses, but especially in our judgments. Denys W. Shropshire strikes this note of warning:

Though from our point of view his (the African's) thinking is defective, he is not so much illogical as dominantly mystical, having a certain consciousness of mysterious forces. He seeks for reasons as we do but not in the same direction, for he generally ignores secondary causes and looks for his reason in the direction of supernatural and occult powers. His "mind" is not congenitally different from ours for, if we could for a moment discard our own view of the world and take his, we should often fall in with his verdict. The difference is very largely due to his lack of psychological balance, which is affected by his fundamental beliefs of a mystical and magic-religious nature.

His is not a mysticism of synthesis but of homogeneity and undifferentiation, which permeates his whole method of thinking, feeling and acting. Here lies the secret of many of the difficulties between black people and white people.¹³

With a definite consciousness of these difficulties we move over into the discussion of African beliefs, especially as found among the Ibo peoples, and the relation of these beliefs to African social structure.

¹³Shropshire, op. cit., p. xxxiii.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND SOCIETY

Problems in Discussing African Beliefs

In our discussion of African religion with particular emphasis upon the religion of the Ibo tribes of southeastern Nigeria, we must guard against certain presuppositions which by their very nature would render much of this study useless. First of all, we must disassociate ourselves from any thought of doctrine or dogma as we characteristically think of these terms in relation to Christianity or Judaism or even Mohammedanism. The African people do not have religious doctrines in the formal sense of the word. We must remember that the mind of the African is inclined to be mystical rather than rational. This means that it will be rather difficult to make observations and evaluations which have absolute value among a given people or tribe. Since religious doctrines have never been thought out or set down in print, they depend for their existence upon each individual's religious and intellectual potential. An idea or concept might be well formed in one man's mind; in another, the idea might be found only in its insipient stages. Mr. Basden speaks of just this difficulty in Niger Ibos:

There is the further handicap that no two natives will express their beliefs identically, especially if they come from different villages. They speak from their own inner consciousness of what, to them, are vital things, but which have never been put into dogmatic form nor standardized.

The beliefs have been absorbed into their beings from infancy; they have not been learned by rote, nor can the pagan native marshal them in a stereotyped order. He feels rather than knows, and what he feels is very real and potent. These thoughts are his own; suspicion is always active; he is on the alert, hence, he considers it prudent to keep them to himself lest he inadvertently bring trouble upon himself or his family.¹

Fortunately, since Mr. Basden's time, a good deal of progress has been made in anthropological technique, and hence the problem is perhaps no longer as severe as it once was. The observations made in this chapter will apply generally to the whole Ibo tribe, and will in turn have representative value for African religious thinking everywhere south of the Sahara. However, the danger of oversimplification must always be kept in mind. As was found in the case of the African temperament, the religious picture as we develop it here cannot ultimately be applied in its totality to any given African. The picture will only have value, if applied generally without unnecessary Procrustean zeal.

Secondly, we must not load the concept "primitive religion" with preconceived notions. The word "primitive" has been used indiscriminately by a variety of disciplines in the world of modern thought. It has been made synonymous with the savage or cannibal or head-hunter in the thinking of the man of the streets. For this reason the term has lost much of its scientific value. It is meaningless to apply the term to a particular tribe, for each society of people must be studied as a unit within itself. The society stands or falls on the basis of its performance in meeting the needs of the people. And since we are not comparing African society to Western society, but studying it as a unit in itself, we shall not employ the term primitive in relation to it.²

¹G. T. Basden, Niger Ibos (London: Seely, Service & Company), p. 35.

²Cf. Geoffrey Parrinder, African Traditional Religion (London: Hutchisons' University Library, 1954), p. 11.

We have also chosen to discard two other terms which have been often employed in description of African religion. The first term, "fetish" or "fetishism," is well known, and for that reason, is the less serviceable of the two. The term was originally applied to objects believed to be inhabited by spirits of one type or another. In this connection the term had some value, as descriptive of an observable aspect of the animistic outlook upon life. However, the term has gained a much more general meaning: fetishism is now applied to any kind of blind and senseless devotion or worship of the supernatural, and hence is more misleading than helpful. We will find that the African's worship of the spirits is neither blind nor senseless to his way of thinking, no matter how we may choose to describe it, or judge it. It is noteworthy also, that none of the more recent West African scholars employ the term anymore.³

The term "juju" is less known outside of West Africa, but is none the less misleading. The term comes from the French joujou which means "doll," and was originally applied to the little carvings used by certain African tribes in connection with ancestor rites. However, once again, the term has gained a much wider significance which has proportionately subtracted from its value. Already in 1912, P. Amoury Talbot, one of the pioneer anthropologists in Nigeria, warned against the use of the term:

"Juju" is so elusive as to defy definition, but as far as may be gathered from the vague conception of the Ekoi, it includes all uncomprehended, mysterious forces of Nature.

³Cf. Geoffrey Parrinder, West African Religion (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), p. 12.

These vary in importance from elementals, so powerful as to hold almost the position of demi-gods to the "Mana"--to use a Melanesian term--of herb, stone, and metal. In another sense the word also includes the means by which such forces may be controlled or influenced; secrets wrung from the deepest recesses of Nature by men wise above their fellows, or mercifully imparted to some favoured mortal by one or another of the Deities.⁴

It is self-evident that any term which has such a wide variety of meanings will be relatively useless for accurate analysis of African religious beliefs. Hence, we shall describe the various religious phenomena which ordinarily fall under the definition of the word "juju," without employing the term itself. For instance, we shall describe the force of "mana" as a phenomenon in itself, and only then will we make the necessary connection between the force and the objects, which in tribal belief, are occupied by the force.

The Force of Mana

"The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone." We have sung that line since our childhood and are grossly wrong, even if we accept Dr. Aggrey's amendment--"in his hunger." I asked the Director of the great Tirvaren Museum, "In all these thousand of figurines carved by the people of the Belgian Congo, have you any images of God?" "Not one," was the prompt reply.⁵

"The Ibo pagan does not 'bow down to wood and stone.' It is to the spirit dwelling within them that supplicatory and intercessory prayer is made."⁶ There is no popular Christian belief about the heathen which receives more scholarly pummeling than that which is expressed

⁴P. Amoury Talbot, In the Shadow of the Bush (London: William Heinemann, 1912), p. 49.

⁵Edwin Smith, editor, African Ideas of God (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1950), p. 12.

⁶Basden, op. cit., p. 40.

in this famous hymn. We may derive a very important principle from this criticism. The African people are not completely naive in their religious beliefs. They do not worship idols in the strict sense of the word. They rather revere that force which they believe inhabits the world in general and certain objects in particular. For instance, many of the so-called idols which are part of their religious rites are in a sad state of disrepair, shabby and dilapidated. The African is not so much concerned about the state of these objects in themselves. He bows down only to the indwelling spirit therein and "therefore troubles little about the outer husk."⁷

What is this force which the African knows to dwell in the world and the things of this world? This is one of the most difficult problems we face in the analysis of traditional African religion. This force has been recognized in many other communities in the world, especially among the Melanesians. It has been given the name of "mana" from the Polynesian language, but its exact significance is very difficult for the Western mind to grasp.

In many parts of West Africa there is a word nyama, which European writers have sought to translate as energy, power, force vitale, Triebkraft. From the Western Sudan down to the Guinea Coast one finds variants of this word, sometimes used as a title for God, sometimes of human or animal strength, or again as the mysterious force in medicines. Nyama is often conceived of as impersonal unconscious energy, found in man, animals, gods, nature and things.⁸ Nyama is not the outward appearance but the inner essence.

⁷Sylvia Leith-Ross, African Women (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1939), p. 120.

⁸Parrinder, African Traditional Religion, pp. 21-2.

William Howells describes this force as follows:

Typically, mana is a sort of essence of nature; it is not a spirit, and it has no will or purpose of its own. It can very well be compared with electricity, which is impersonal but powerful, and which flows from one thing to another, and can be made to do a variety of things, although in itself it remains the same flowing force.⁹

It should be immediately apparent that we are describing here in an ontological sense that which corresponds to the psychic or spiritual potentiality discovered in the make-up of the African mind. The African is aware, in his innermost being, of the force of mana. This is describing in slightly more technical terms that which we express when we say that African religion is animatistic.¹⁰ The African does not arrive at the existence of spiritual force through an intellectual process; much less does he arrive at such a belief through the vehicle of revelation. He rather senses that the force is there, and only then does he begin to differentiate the possible avenues through which this force manifests itself. It is necessary to search far back into the realm of our own experience in a materialistic civilization before we find evidences of the same inward consciousness. We might find correlates in our reaction to darkness, to graveyards, to the cool interior of a large cathedral, and the like. But on the whole, we are not allowed to develop these resources of our being to any appreciable extent. This is what makes it so difficult to think on the level of the African.

⁹William Howells, The Heathens (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1948), p. 26.

¹⁰Animatism is the belief in the existence of a nonmaterial, supernatural essence, force, or power, which resides in matter. Animism is the belief in individual spiritual beings, found among all peoples in primitive economies. Cf. Melville Jacobs and Bernard J. Stern, General Anthropology (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1952), p. 300.

The animistic beliefs of these people are closely interwoven with daily affairs, indeed, they are bound up in the bundle of life and are as intimately related as the fibre to the tree. It is a complicated subject, calling for close and patient observation. Its study cannot be hurried; to rush through a series of questions will inevitably lead to the compiling of a mass of conflicting and untrustworthy material. Whatever is so collected, even when obtained under seemingly favorable conditions, needs to be thoroughly sifted and probably corrected and rerecorrected. The European needs to develop a sense of the uncanny, otherwise his materialistic temperament will limit his perception of the spiritual ramifications of the animist.¹¹

This consciousness manifests itself in many different ways.

Although almost any objects may contain mana and may thus serve some useful purpose in the total religious picture, the degree to which they contain power is not necessarily equal. In other words, there are various levels in African religion, which in all probability have their source in animistic and animistic consciousness, but which do not manifest themselves on a par with each other. If they did we would be faced with something closer to pantheism than to mana consciousness. Professor Parrinder distinguishes four levels in the religious structure of West African people: (1) Belief in the high-god or creator; (2) Belief in chief divinities and nonhuman spirits; (3) Devotion to human, but divinized ancestors; (4) Use of charms and amulets, which were formerly called fetishes.¹² We shall discuss these levels in that order.

Belief in the High-God

It is beyond question or doubt that the Negrillos and the Bantus as well as all the Blacks of Africa acknowledge and proclaim the existence of a Being superior to all, to whom

¹¹Basden, op. cit., p. 34.

¹²Parrinder, West African Religion, pp. 16-7.

a special name is given, who is distinguished from other spirits, from the shades and elements, and whom we can identify with God.¹³

Almost without exception, throughout the tribes and nations, there is behind all else a belief in a Supreme Being. In some cases, the belief may be vague; in others, it is much more distinct. Livingstone said, "There is no need to speak of the existence of God, or of a future life, even among the lowest tribes, for these are generally accepted truths among them."¹⁴

God, as a concept, is as old and universal as the word man; the idea of God is inseparable from the fact that there is man. Whether God made man in his own image or it is the other way around, the African has always believed that there is God, the Being to whom he attributes all creation.¹⁵

In Zululand, this high-god is Unkulunkulu, in Sierra Leone, Mende, in the Belgian Congo, Akongo, among the Baganda of Uganda, he is Katonda, among the Kikuyu of Mau-Mau infamy, he is Murungu, on the East Coast of Africa, he is Leza, the Ashanti of the Gold Coast call him Nyame, the Ga, Nyanma, among the Yoruba of Nigeria he is known as Olorun, the Efiks, among whom our Lutheran mission has centered its activity, call him Abasi, and the Nigerian Ibos, whom we shall discuss at some length in this paper, call him Chuku or Chineke. The name changes, but the belief is everywhere more or less the same. All Africans are theists, as well as animists, if it is possible to make that distinction.

It is not our purpose to explain this universal phenomenon. Perhaps, we could theorize about the possibility of memories of a past paradisaic state which still persist in African thinking. We

¹³J. J. Williams, Hebrewisms of West Africa (New York: Longmans, Green & Company, 1930), p. 344.

¹⁴Basden, op. cit., p. 413.

¹⁵Mbonu Ojike, My Africa (London: Blandford Press, 1955), p. 180.

shall see that there is some merit for this theory in African mythology. However, we shall not attempt to go beyond the evidence at hand. Certainly, the consciousness of mana plays its part in the belief in a high-god as well as in more mundane spirits. It is curious to note that there is also a widespread belief in an inveterate enemy of the high-god. And yet these beliefs have remained very abstract in African religious thinking. They play a very small part in the life of the people. The high-god is good and just, but still unknown. He is deus incertus, deus remotus. He is almost never the object of a religious cult, although the people might unconsciously realize that all of their sacrifices ultimately reach him. He has almost no significance in practical religion. The people neither fear nor love nor serve him. In this connection we might quote the following comments upon the place of the high-god in African thinking:

The realities of animistic heathenism are polytheism and worship of spirits. Nevertheless, though much obscured, the original has not been entirely defaced. Though supreme, God's supremacy is no longer exclusive. He is not denied; He becomes one of many gods.¹⁶

There is a generally recognized head of the gods and men among the peoples of our field. He is the supreme God, though differing attitudes are taken up towards his worship, and he is considered to be more remote from human affairs and needs than are the gods which are his sons. The African recognizes this God as supreme in theory, but this is not borne out to a great extent in practice.¹⁷

It appears to be a very widespread notion in Africa that at the beginning God and man lived together on earth and talked one to the other; but that owing to misconduct of some sort on the part of a man--or more frequently, of a woman--God

¹⁶Basden, op. cit., p. 414.

¹⁷Parrinder, West African Religion, p. 29.

deserted the earth and went to live in the sky. Ever since then, men have tried to reach his abode either by means of a high tower, or by a kind of suspension ladder, or by journeying to where earth and sky meet and there finding a road to God.¹⁸

The point of this myth is that man is no longer able to reach the high-god. For this reason he is forced to run to lesser gods for his needs. As Robert Redfield says of primitive peoples generally, they think, like Newton, "of an orderly system originally set running by divine will and thereafter exhibiting its immanent order."¹⁹ Whether this is a description of an actual thought process, or whether it is indicative of an unconscious decision, it is a fact that the African, while retaining his belief in a divine creator, turns to lesser deities in the concerns of his daily life.

Belief in Lesser Divinities

West Africa is particularly noted for belief in nature gods. There are sky-gods, earth-gods and goddesses, sun and moon-gods, and often times cults connected with the latter. When a Nigerian Ibo sees the new moon, he says, holding up his hands, "New Moon, protect me as the last moon protected."²⁰ Most Ibo villages have a shrine of the god lightning, whose symbols are a tree with two pots in front. Annual rites are performed here before the yam harvest. Chickens are sacrificed

¹⁸Edwin Smith, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁹Robert Redfield, The Primitive World and Its Transformations (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1953), p. 101.

²⁰Parrinder, African Traditional Religion, p. 46.

which are shared among worshippers and the village chief. Other gods are associated with thunder, rain, clouds, mountains, valleys, streams, groves and the like. It is not necessary to enumerate the names, for they vary in each tribal society. What is important to remember is this: these gods do not fall into the same class as animated objects or beings. There is a great difference between a tree which is worshipped as a god, and a tree which is worshipped because it contains the spirit of an ancestor. We will recognize this distinction even further when we discuss the phenomenon of ancestor devotion.

The earth goddess of the Ibos, Ala (or Ale or Ane), deserves special mention because of the role she plays in the preservation of tribal structure and morals. C. K. Meek writes of Mother Ala in Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe:

Ala is regarded as the owner of men, whether alive or dead. The cult of ancestors is, therefore, closely associated with that of the Earth-deity, who is Queen of the Underworld. Ala is the fount of human morality, and is, in consequence, a principle legal sanction. Homicide, kidnapping, poisoning, stealing, adultery, giving birth to twins or cripples or abnormal children, are all offenses against Ala which must be purged by rites to her. Ala deprives evil men of their lives, and her priests are the guardians of public morality. Laws are made in her name and by her oaths are sworn. She is the mainspring of the social life, and, in many localities, if any one wishes to better his social position by taking a title, he must first secure the good offices of Ala. Ala is, in fact, the unseen president of the community, and no group is complete without a shrine of Ala. The common possession of a shrine of Ala is, indeed, one of the strongest integrating forces in Ibo society.²¹

And again Forde and Jones write of Ala:

Ale (Ala or Ane), the earth spirit, is the most prominent deity and is regarded as the queen of the underworld and the "owner" of men whether dead or alive. The cult of ancestors

²¹C. K. Meek, Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 25.

is closely associated with Ale. She is the source and judge of human morality and accordingly exercises the main ritual sanctions in disputes and offenses. Homicide, kidnapping, poisoning, stealing farm products, adultery and giving birth to twins or abnormal children are all offenses against Ale. Laws are made and oaths sworn in her name. Priests of Ale are guardians of public morality and the cult of Ale is one of the most powerful integrating forces in Ibo society.²²

We are especially interested in the part which Ala plays in the morality of the tribe. She is a binding force, so to speak, the mystical sanction behind the laws of the tribe. Her very existence should, theoretically, preclude the breaking of the moral and the civil commandments. Since, as we have discovered, the African does not attach particular value to the moral law as such, the goddess Ala is virtually indispensable for the preservation of tribal life. Already the possible result which would follow upon the disintegration of Ala-worship can be imagined. In the next chapter, after we have outlined a little more of the tribal structure of Ibos, we will discuss these effects in more detail.

It is interesting to note that the darker side of the African religious life is not connected with the worship of the high-god. God, the creator, does not demand terrible forms of propitiation, human sacrifice, and the like. These atrocities arise primarily in connection with ancestor devotion, and even there spring from a different motivation than that which we normally would associate with the uglier side of African life. Edwin Smith speaks of this paradox in his African Ideas of God:

²²Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria (Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 25.

There is a terribly dark and repulsive side of African religion . . . it is always there lurking in the background--human sacrifice associated with spiritism, witchcraft associated with dynamism. The theism is remarkably free from these horrors. The contributors to this book do not record a single instance of human slaughtered to the glory of the Supreme God.²³

But as we move over into the area of ancestor devotion, the picture becomes more clouded.

Ancestor Devotion

Geoffrey Parrinder suggests that in our understanding of African worship, it would be helpful if we associated latria with the high-god alone, hyperdulia with the lesser gods, and dulia with the ancestors.²⁴ This is a rather helpful distinction, for it gives us a basic insight into the African's attitude toward his ancestors. We might think of the spiritual powers in African religion as forming a triangle: at the apex is the sky, which symbolizes the supreme God from whom all life flows and to whom all returns.

The base is the earth, sometimes personified as a goddess but always important to men as the producer of his food and the burying-place of his dead. On the earth lives man, and his chiefs and kings are rungs in the ladder between himself and God. On the one side of the triangle are the ancestors, rising up in the hierarchy by their increased powers. Dead kings and chiefs are their leaders and potent to help or to harm. On the other side of the triangle are the gods, or natural forces, which must be propitiated lest they become angry at neglect and cause the seasons to fail.²⁵

From this we may gather that the position of the ancestors in African worship cannot be properly equated with that of God or the gods.

²³Smith, op. cit., p. 17.

²⁴Parrinder, African Traditional Religion, p. 66.

²⁵Smith, op. cit., p. 25.

There is considerable difference of opinion among the experts in African religion about the true nature of ancestor worship or dulia. There are some who consider it to be primarily a secular activity with little religious significance. Edwin Smith in his symposium on African Ideas of God includes a number of such opinions. For instance, W. C. Willoughby, writing in Edwin Smith's symposium states that it is "manifest that a worshipper addresses a discarnate spirit in much the same terms that he would use if he were speaking to the same person in the flesh."²⁶

No African prays to his dead grandfather any more than he "prays" to his living father. In both cases the words employed are the same: he asks as of right, or he beseeches, or he expostulates with or he reprimands, or he gives an address to, his ancestors, as he would do to the elders sitting in conclave; but he never uses in this context the words for "prayer" and "worship" which are strictly reserved for his religious dealings with the Absolute Power and the divinities.²⁷

We would concur with Dr. Smith when he states that "only with a narrow definition of religion can the ancestral cult be dismissed as 'purely secular.'²⁸ In my experience with ancestor devotion among the Efik people of Nigeria, I can state, after some observation, that the outward form of devotion is highly religious in character; and the rites which I have heard described by my students can hardly be called "secular" in any sense of the word as we know it. Furthermore, this distinction would place the mana consciousness of the African individual and his tribe in a category outside of religion, and it is

²⁶Ibid., p. 84.

²⁷Ibid., p. 26.

²⁸Ibid., p. 26.

one of the basic theses of this paper that the mana consciousness is the fundamental building block in the African's total religious consciousness. Not only would this unifying factor be splintered off into a number of un-co-ordinated drives in the individual, but also in the society. We wish to indicate rather that the religious consciousness of the African is a seamless robe, and as such, binds the tribe together into an organic whole. Consequently, we shall consider ancestor worship under the general category of religion.²⁹

Almost all Africans believe that the human being is divided into several parts, physical and spiritual, and that one of the spiritual parts survives death and continues to exist. We use the word "several" for a definite reason. In some tribes it is a common belief that a man possesses a number of souls. P. Amoury Talbot reports that the Ibibio, who form a part of the larger Efik tribe in southeastern Nigeria, believe that each man has a minimum of three souls: the ethereal body, the soul proper, and the spirit. "According to the testimony of many informants, it is possible for each of the first two to leave its human habitation during sleep."³⁰ Forde and Jones report that the Ibos believe every human being has, associated with his personality, a genius or spiritual double known as his chi,

²⁹I believe that Mr. Dribery would have to admit that beseechings and exostulations and addresses and even reprimands, when accompanied by rites, certainly gain a distinction which the African would not ordinarily employ in his relations with living human beings. He might use them before a great king or chief, but these personages are mana-imbued, and hence fall into the religious category.

³⁰P. Amoury Talbot, Life in Southern Nigeria (London: Macmillan and Company, 1923), pp. 87-8.

which is associated with him from the moment of conception, to which his abilities, faults and good or bad fortune are ascribed, and into whose care is entrusted the fulfillment of the destiny which Chuku has prescribed.³¹

Unfortunately, we do not have the space to record the interesting complications which this multiple concept of the human being produces in native thinking. Suffice it to say, that the African is by no means a naturalist in his understanding of the human personality. Not only does his propensity to think in spiritual terms allow him to conceive of split personalities among the living, but it is a very natural step for him to conceive of the continuity of the human spirit after the death of the body.

The concept of the immortality of the human spirit leads to some rather confusing complications in African belief which cannot be fully clarified because of the unsystematic quality of African religion. Most Africans believe in both the existence of ancestor spirits and in reincarnation. Parrinder states that "it is now widely recognized that Africans have as strong a belief in reincarnation as have Hindus and members of other religions, such as Buddhism and Jainism."³² And C. K. Meek explains that, when a dead person is reincarnated, he is given a different chi from that possessed by him in his former life.³³ Basden is helpful on this point:

³¹Forde and Jones, op. cit., p. 26.

³²Parrinder, African Traditional Religion, p. 64.

³³Meek, op. cit., p. 55.

The Ibo interprets death as temporary separation. So far is this the case that, when a man dies, he is said to "have gone home," or "gone to the land of the spirits." It is not regarded as a final farewell; it is all part of a wider plan. Men and women come, they stay for a while, they go, they fulfill some purpose in their day and generation, and then they pass on to the beyond and, later, reappear again in this world and so complete the cycle. This is the way a succession of mankind is maintained on the earth! There may be broken links, if not actual gaps in the chain, as when a reborn babe fails to live long enough to fulfill any function in life. The Ibo solves this problem by stating that, though a child may die, and thus fail in its task, yet the lapse may be only a chance misfortune. The loss may be made good on the next occasion, as it is believed that there is no reason why the same child should not be reincarnated and offered another lease on life.³⁴

Basden also suggests that this possibility of reincarnation may be forfeited as the result of bad behavior in the nether world.³⁵ But when an individual's conduct meets the approval of the powers that be, he will be reincarnated and take his place in the present world. He will live his life as in former existences, and at the end of the course be called back to the spirit world. So the cycle of living and dying slowly revolves ad infinitum.

In seeming contrast to the belief in reincarnation is the belief in the existence of ancestral spirits. Although we have never heard it so expressed we should imagine that if pressed, the pagan Ibo or the Efik would confess to neither knowledge or concern as to why the dead remain highly potent spirits active in this world for a while, and then are reincarnated into another body. The spirits of the dead form a community for a length of time; then some, for one reason or another are reincarnated. We can refine the belief no further than this. Nor

³⁴Basden, op. cit., p. 282.

³⁵Ibid., p. 286.

are we going to concern ourselves with reincarnation any further in this paper, for we are primarily interested in ancestral spirits. Suffice it to say that the doctrine of reincarnation is a further unifying factor in the clan or tribe, for many believe that the grandfather is reborn in a grandson, so that in point of fact it is always the same people who form the clan, and who have from the beginning lived on the same land which is owned by the clan.

There is no more potent force in the life of the pagan African than the ancestral spirits.

The dead are thought to be constantly near, even when they are not seen. Every pious West African before drinking will pour out a little wine from his gourd on the floor, for his fathers. Others put a mouthful of food on the ground before eating, and at evening meals pots are not entirely emptied, nor washed till morning, in case the dead come and find nothing to eat. Particularly in the evening, the ancestors are believed to draw nearer to us, and so after nightfall no one will sweep the house, or throw water out into the compound, without first calling out a warning.³⁶

The Ibos believe that any departure from custom is likely to incur the displeasure and vengeance of the ancestors. The ancestors, under the presidency of Ala, are the guardians of morality and the owners of the soil. This means that the cult of the ancestors is one of the strongest forces for maintaining the unity of the society. The head of the group owes his authority largely to the fact that he is the representative and mouthpiece of his ancestors. The belief in the power of the ancestral spirits affects even the relation between parents and children. Many parents show an excessive indulgence towards their children because they will be dependent on their children for their nourishment and status

³⁶Parrinder, West African Religion, p. 126.

in the next world.³⁷ Since the parents are also very wary of their own departed parents, this becomes a rather vicious circle.

There is a great variety of sacred rites and ceremonies connected with ancestor devotion, but it is not to our purpose to describe them. It is enough to know that the devotion to the ancestors is the most potent factor in the total religious picture of West Africa. I discovered this fact myself through conversations with an old pagan who lived near to one of my churches. He told me that he had been ready for some time to confess the Christian faith, that he believed in God and in Jesus Christ as his Savior, but he could not fail his ancestors. He had to go on sacrificing. And there we reached an impasse. The reality of his dead ancestors was too deeply ingrained in his mind.

What is in back of this belief in ancestral spirits? Why has it become so much a part of African life and thought? The anthropologist, Malinowski, gave his viewpoint in his famous essay, "Magic, Science and Religion":

The belief in immortality is the result of a deep emotional revelation, standardized by religion, rather than a primitive philosophic doctrine. Man's conviction of continued life is one of the supreme gifts of religion, which judges and selects the better of the two alternatives suggested by self-preservation --the hope of continued life and the fear of annihilation. The belief in spirits is the result of the belief in immortality.³⁸

Without wishing to comment on the possible pros and cons which Malinowski's considered judgment might arouse, we can say that many of the contemporary students of African religion agree with him. For instance, Edwin Smith writes:

³⁷Meek, op. cit., p. 61.

³⁸Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic, Science and Religion (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955), p. 51.

To many people this ancestral cult appears to be gross superstition. That imperfect men should be elevated to a position only inferior to that of the Supreme Being, that (in many cases) a man should actually, for all practical purposes, take the place of God in the minds of his descendants, what is this but idolatry, a disenthronement of the Almighty? Yet we must recognize that the cult answers to what is deep in human nature-- a desire for survival, the refusal to acknowledge that death ends all.³⁹

If this correlation is accurate, it is possible to see both individual and collective implications in relation to mission teaching and practice among the African people. These implications will be drawn in the next chapter.

Religious Customs and Practices

What now are some of the specific social customs which are based upon the African's spiritual beliefs, especially as we have found them represented among the Ibo tribes of southeastern Nigeria? It has been mentioned that the earth goddess Ala is the spiritual basis for the morality of the tribe. Sins within the tribal society are punishable because they are sins against Ala. When committed, these sins must be removed by acts of ritual propitiation. It is here that we first come across the sacrifice, which is popularly associated with pagan African tribes. Most ritual sins may be propitiated by the sacrifice of a goat or a chicken, or some of the farm produce. But in some cases, the sacrifice of a human being became necessary.

Human beings were offered in sacrifice for specific reasons, some of them on regular occasions, more often they were governed by some untoward circumstance. The community shared fully in the responsibility; it was not customary for individuals to undertake such an important task. The call to sacri-

³⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 27.

fice sprang from some disturbing element which it was feared was threatening the village, or to pray for a visitation to be removed.⁴⁰

The need for sacrifice is a dominant feature in Ibo life. The sacrifice is a kind of antidote for evil, real or imagined. It affords a psychological release for people who are constantly being threatened by both natural and supernatural forces.

To appease these spirits the people resort to sacrifice. Fear is the driving force; the sacrifices do not spring from any inherent desire to give, nor from any spontaneous love to render honour or worship. Sacrifices furnish the only way of escape from evil designs and activities of malignant spirits. Failure to perform propitiatory sacrifices would make life unendurable: every department would labour under imminent threat of possible disaster. . . . It cannot be foretold to what extent, or in what manner, the spirits may manifest their displeasure; the ramifications are many and widespread; hence it behooves the community to take precautionary measures against unknown dangers.⁴¹

It is interesting to note that Basden also describes the ceremony of trespass-transfer which is remarkably akin to the Jewish ceremony of the scapegoat, as we have it recorded in the Old Testament. Both men and animals were used. In the presence of the whole community, the victim would be declared the accursed of God. He would then be dragged around the town while the whole populace treated him as an accursed thing. When he was dead his corpse would either be thrown into the river or deposited in some spot reserved for the bodies of the human sacrifice.⁴²

⁴⁰Basden, op. cit., p. 73.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 55.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 73-4.

C. K. Meek says of ancestor devotion that

the belief in the continued spiritual existence of the ancestors serves many useful purposes. By it social continuity is preserved, hereditary rights are respected, and conduct is regulated in a variety of ways. The belief also serves as a solace to the living in the loss of their dead relatives and friends.⁴³

This belief then is very important for our understanding of total tribal structure. We have seen how the belief in reincarnation makes it possible to preserve perfect continuity in the tribe. The cycle is never-ending and it is never broken. Each tribal unit is a kind of complete world in itself. The law and the authority of each tribe is intimately bound up in its recognition of the ever watchful eyes of the departed spirits. It may be fairly stated that no African tribe can continue as a cohesive social unit without the influence and the control of the ancestral spirits.

There are several important aspects of tribal life which spring from the belief in the continued existence of the departed members of the society. The funeral rites have their basis in this belief. In some respects the departed are treated in death much as they were treated in life. Food and clothing are laid out in the vicinity of the final resting place. The spirit of the departed, which is supposed to hover about his former house, is led out of the house by a devious route, so that he might not immediately return and bother the inhabitants. The Ibos perform a second burial service some months after the initial ceremony, and after this service, it is commonly believed, the spirit of

⁴³Meek, op. cit., p. 78.

the departed one is finally dismissed to the nether world.⁴⁴ In general, great pains are taken to satisfy the ancestral spirit, lest he return and make life miserable for his former relatives and clan members.

This factor has led to one of the most gruesome aspects of African life, the funeral sacrifice. Most people have heard something of the tremendous human sacrifices which were once performed in connection with the death of great kings and chiefs. These sacrifices reached gigantic proportions. It was a regular practice at the death of one of the famous rulers in Nigerian society, the king of Benin, to sacrifice literally hundreds of slaves to accompany him into the next world. These practices have been stopped through both governmental and missionary pressures, and rightfully so. The rite is too horrible to even imagine. But it should be remembered again that the practice sprang from the African belief in the continuation of life. In a sense this softens the crime. The slaves who were sacrificed were merely released from their bodies to accompany their lord. "The grand motif in the funeral sacrifices was the unshakeable conviction in the continuation of life after death, and the quite natural corollary that all important persons who died must be accompanied by due retinue."⁴⁵

In connection with the ancestral cult, we must also make mention of the African secret societies. It is now generally believed that these societies came into being for two reasons: (1) to add weight and importance to initiatory and adolescent rites, hence to strengthen

⁴⁴Cf. W. Thomas Northcote, Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria (London: Harrison and Sons, 1913), p. 78.

⁴⁵Parrinder, West African Religion, p. 128.

male prestige; (2) to honor the ancestors of a tribe or clan, and especially to perform at funeral and mourning ceremonies.⁴⁶ These secret societies are certainly one of the most interesting aspects of native life. In Nigeria they no longer have the stature that they once possessed because of legislation of the British administration. However, once they were a powerful force in the control of tribal affairs. They provided a useful and necessary disciplinary training for the youthful male members of the community, and for adult males they constituted a strong bond of union, besides fulfilling many of the other social purposes of a club. However, they also had their uglier aspects. In order to preserve their secrecy, members of the societies wear gruesome-looking costumes, especially during the month of December when the ghosts are thought to emerge from the nether world. These costumes were (and are) also employed to good advantage in frightening the women and the children of the tribe. Formally, any woman who saw a costumed member of any secret society was put to death.⁴⁷

Furthermore, the societies, in enforcing the laws of the tribe, sometimes committed brutal judicial murders. There are many reports in Efikland of deaths by crucifixion which were inflicted for even such minor offenses as thievery. And it is generally admitted by intelligent Africans that the societies exploited and bullied the women

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 140.

⁴⁷To this day women are not allowed to witness any of the secret ceremonies connected with the male societies, nor are they allowed to see any of the paraphernalia which is connected with the society rites. I purchased a number of masks from an old pagan chief, shortly before I returned to the United States, and I was asked to keep them under cover while still in Nigeria, lest any African woman see them, and either be frightened, or perhaps lost respect for them.

in order to keep them in a state of subjection to the men. For these reasons, it is certainly justifiable that they have been attacked and suppressed by the missions. However, we must keep in mind, for the present, their position in the structure of the tribe, so that we may understand the part which the gradual disintegration of secret societies has played in the upheaval of African life.

The belief in spirits of consciousness of mana has innumerable ramifications in the daily lives of the people. We cannot hope to enumerate them all, nor is it really necessary. We shall merely mention a few aspects of the total picture. Very important in southeastern African society are the witches and witch doctors, the former having destructive functions, the latter, more or less constructive. The witches are demon-possessed creatures, usually women, who have been directly influenced by evil spirits, and consequently make use of their wicked powers. Witches are feared and despised by the African people, and for this reason are hunted out mercilessly. Any person accused of witchcraft must prove his innocence by some type of ritual ordeal, and the result is usually fatal for the accused. Disease and death are especially attributed to witchcraft. To this day, even among the more educated Africans, most diseases are traced back to unnatural causes.⁴⁸

⁴⁸In the case of the boy mentioned before, whose sister died of some kind of paralysis, he was firmly convinced that she had been hexed by someone in the village. When I tried to counteract this idea with some gentle hints about discoveries in modern medicine, he informed me that I had had no experience with witchcraft and hence could not really talk about it intelligently. I could say nothing more.

The great ally of the people against witchcraft is the witch doctor, or diviner or medicine man. If anyone has been troubled by a series of misfortunes he goes to the witch doctor who, for a price, provides him with some kind of antidote against the evil force. Most of the heads of families also have in their possession medicines or amulets to protect the family from witches. There is an endless variety of such devices, charms and talismans, which play a very integral part in the thinking of almost all Africans, even the Christians.⁴⁹ The missionaries are waging a constant battle with their people to overcome their fears of evil forces in their lives, and hence eliminate their use of protective charms. But in many cases the black and white minds do not meet, for the African firmly believes that spiritual power dwells in these countless charms. "The symbols which they use, the masks, the colours, the numbers, the names, the metaphors, all link up with the energy in the desired object; they are not dead symbols."⁵⁰ To attack the charm itself is virtually useless, for the mana-consciousness in the background of the charm is the real reason for its employment.

There is one other area which we shall just touch upon, but which is quite important in our understanding of African life. The Africans generally believe that certain occurrences or happenstances

⁴⁹One of the boys from our High School was expelled during my first year of teaching for keeping a brain charm among his possessions. The charm was supposed to help him through his examinations. Our missionaries are constantly confiscating little charms, or jujus, used by parents for the protection of their children. The belief in evil spirits is maintained, even among the educated, through many stories of supernatural occurrences, many of which defy modern explication.

⁵⁰Smith, op. cit., p. 26.

in life render a person especially pregnant with mana or spiritual force, and consequently make him dangerous to the common man. Kings and chiefs are constantly imbued with this extra measure of spiritual force. The average man is not allowed to touch a great king, for to do so would bring injury. Special slaves are provided for the king's needs, and even they partake of the king's force vitale. Hunters and warriors are filled with this force before and after exercising their vocations. They must be left alone for a period of time until the rites of purification can be performed. Women during the time of menstruation, or before and after giving birth, are especially filled with this strange force. W. Thomas Northcote gives an interesting description of this phenomenon:

In endeavoring to understand birth customs it must be kept in mind that there are two distinct sets of ideas manifesting themselves; in the first place after birth both the mother and the young child are a centre of dangerous force; they have to be set apart therefore, and certain people may not touch or see them, animals may not come near them, and before this state can be changed various ablutions have to be performed.⁵¹

Unfortunately, as was mentioned before, abnormal births of any kind are thought to be an offense against the earth goddess; that is, the child is thought to possess some type of evil force, and hence must be destroyed. The tabus surrounding the growth of children are exceedingly complex among many of the Ibo clans. For instance, the appearance of the lower teeth before the upper is thought to be especially disastrous, and therefore requires the extinction of the child.

⁵¹Northcote, op. cit., p. 71.

The raising of a family is a very fearful business for the average African pagan.

The force of tabu is not only limited to human beings. The implements connected with the worship of the deities, or the rites of the ancestors, are often imbued with the same invisible force, and hence are dangerous. The groves connected with the worship of the tribe or a secret society are always tabu areas, not to be entered without injury of one kind or another. The sacred trees which are thought to be inhabited by the ancestral spirits of the community must not be damaged or removed. Every major pagan village has one of these trees which contains either the mother or father spirit of the clan, and therefore is sacrosanct for the members of the village. The public roads department in Nigeria will not cut down any of these trees, and if need be, will split the road around a tree rather than cut it down. Once on a hunting expedition deep in the bush, another missionary and I wanted to exhibit the fire power of our guns to a backward village. We shot into a large tree in the center of the village square, chipping off sections of bark. The result was instantaneous. The whole crowd began to howl at us; and it was explained to us by our guide that we had shot into their ancestral tree. We apologized, but I suspect the damage was irreparable. The practice is not to be recommended as wise mission policy.⁵²

⁵²It should be mentioned that totemism is relatively unknown among the Ibo tribes.

The Interrelationship of Religion and Social Structure

It will probably seem as if we have wandered more or less at random in the last few pages; nevertheless, there is a unifying thread which runs through all of these practices: namely, the strong consciousness of a spiritual force which animates the total life of man, and binds him together with his immediate fellows into a cohesive community unit. All of his religious beliefs and habits find their place in the total community structure. Each member of the society unconsciously accepts their validity, and the whole society, through its ceremonies and rites, constantly gives witness to their validity on a community basis. If we may quote Malinowski again on this point:

The public concourse gives the emphasis, the powerful testimony to the belief. Public pomp and ceremony take effect through the dignity of unanimous consent, the impressiveness of collective behavior. A multitude enacting as one, an earnest and dignified ceremony carried away even the disinterested observer, still more the affected participant.⁵³

Edwin Smith speaks along the same lines:

Many of his individual needs are, the African believes, to some degree, satisfied by his dynamism and spiritism. Amulets and talismans, vehicles of metaphysical energy, provide protection and good fortune in many directions and produce confidence in times of crisis. His confidence can never, however, be complete, for he never knows whether some malicious person will not get possession of more potent medicines than his. When he joins in communal activities--such as hunting, fighting, iron-melting--dynamism plays, he believes, an indispensable role in securing skill, courage and a happy issue. There is individual as well as communal

⁵³Malinowski, op. cit., p. 63.

approach to the revered ancestors, particularly of those of two previous generations and the more remote the progenitors, and this communion lends sanctity to a tribal custom, and is at once an assertion and a stimulant of that unity in which there is strength.⁵⁴

And Howells speaking generally of the importance of tabu among primitive peoples:

We may not be too pleased at the spectacle of a society goose-stepping to a set of tabus. But it may be accepted that they are better than a vacuum. Values of some sort are necessary; we ourselves need our faith in our own law, our type of government, and our institutions in general; these things support us more than we know. Tabus are a potent agent for a society's control of itself, and it would probably not be possible to organize a community of the complexity of, say, the Polynesians, without the aid of tabu or an equally powerful religious substitute.⁵⁵

It cannot be too often asserted that these religious customs are the sole source of the morality of the tribe. As religion binds the tribe into one, so it also makes the moral law uniformly applicable to all members of the tribe. Where these religious bonds are threatened, the whole tribal society is threatened. All we know of the African up to this point in his history seems to indicate this fact. The African is a completely religious man; he exists in a religious society, and without his religion, his society has no legs upon which to stand. Professor Westermann quotes B. Gutman to this effect:

The African has a spiritual home, the only home he has. If it is taken from him, he will be left homeless. This home is the indigenous bond which unites him to his fellows in kinship, land-occupation and age-class. The girders of this spiritual home are holy to him. He impresses its structure upon his descendants, so that they may never lose themselves outside its protective domain.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Smith, op. cit., p. 29.

⁵⁵Howells, op. cit., p. 45.

⁵⁶Diedrich Westermann, Africa and Christianity (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 148.

It must not be thought that the African society is a kind of panacea for the ills of human kind. Our description of tribal practices should have countered that idea. The religion of clan life has never been strong enough to suppress those baser qualities which are the common heritage of mankind: hatred, jealousy, selfishness, cruelty, slander and idle talk, sluggishness and untruthfulness. But the fact remains, to attack the African's religion is to attack the clan which is the only force in African society which asserts any kind of moral sanction over the individual. As Professor Parrinder has put it in his African Traditional Religion:

The greatest danger in African religious life is that the old should disappear, without some new religious force, to take its place. Unchecked individualism, self-seeking, corruption and materialism are the great enemies of modern Africa. Yet the past has been so thoroughly impregnated with religion and its ethics that it is difficult to see how an ordered society can be established without them.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Parrinder, African Traditional Religion, p. 146.

17. E. Hutton, Problems of African Development (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 33.

¹⁸Benya W. Shropshire, The Church and Traditional Religion (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1967), p. 497.

CHAPTER V

MISSIONS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF AFRICAN SOCIETY

The Impact of Missions upon African Life

It is the purpose of this chapter to indicate that part which the Christian Church has played through her beliefs and the active communication of those beliefs in the gradual breakdown of African society as we have partially described it in the second chapter. We must emphasize again that it is impossible to isolate any one factor as the cause of African cultural disintegration. T. R. Batten, writing from a purely secular point of view in Problems of African Development, bears out just this danger: "There is, in fact, a tendency to hold mission education responsible for many of those evils of the present social situation which should more justly be blamed on recent and very rapid economic change."¹ Consequently, it is self-evident that many of the conditions in African society which we will relate to mission effort have their sources in multiple causes which cannot be delineated within the limits of this thesis.

The early missionaries went into Africa with the desire to wipe out the heathenish beliefs of the people, "the beastly devices of the heathen,"² as Shropshire calls them. These missionaries were a stalwart and single-willed group, ready to brave any kind of hardship,

¹T. R. Batten, Problems of African Development (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 33.

²Denys W. Shropshire, The Church and Primitive Peoples (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1938), p. 446.

including death, in order to carry the message of the Gospel. Most of them sent to West Africa in the early years died for their valor. This fact must never be forgotten. They were true martyrs of the faith. Nevertheless, these missionaries went into the work of missions with little inkling of the complexities involved. This was inevitable for they had no prior knowledge of their people or the society in which they would be laboring. They saw the African scene only in terms of black and white. There was no middle ground. Emory Ross, in a book published as late as 1936, still expressed this viewpoint:

Christianity came to the African as the antithesis of animism. The shortest comparison I can contrive is that it was love versus fear. The basic elements of the two forms of belief were in just short, sharp opposition as that.³

Or again:

Here in Africa is animism, a compound of fears and fetishes, repressive, oppressive, holding a great people in its thrall, keeping them eternally low in the scale of culture and civilization, almost entirely unrelieved by hope or joy. It is a mass of dead weight, really dead, accumulated through the untold past and dead generations of black superstition, and lying suffocatingly upon the spirit of the people.⁴

Regardless of the truth which Mr. Ross expresses in these words, the fact that he expresses them in such uncompromising terms casts a cloud over their total veracity and applicability. It is just this type of attitude which lends itself to unthinking and inflexible mission methods, and often causes great social damage without understanding why.

³Emory Ross, Out of Africa (New York: Friendship Press, 1936), p.121.

⁴Ibid., p. 191.

Furthermore,

it can be said that the older generations of missionaries were inclined to "lay down the law" as observed in their own home communities rather than refer to the spiritual principles lying behind such local applications, and to emphasize the negative rather than the positive aspects of such a custom.⁵

The lack of understanding of the religious beliefs and the structure of a people will naturally produce an undercurrent of legalism in missionary practice, regardless of the evangelical motives behind the practice. When a person does not fully appreciate the reasons for a particular belief or a custom, he is forced to attack it more or less blindly without being aware of the implications. Where the native belief or custom proves stubborn, the only recourse is greater evangelistic fervor, or an equally stubborn legalism. Unfortunately, the latter has been perhaps a little more typical than the former.

The pattern of mission activity has fallen along the following lines. At first the missionary tended to segregate the converts from the tribe, so that the social structure of the pagan community remained relatively intact. This practice, however, proved unsatisfactory, as it has proven so elsewhere in the world. Diedrich Westermann describes the result:

In the early days, attempts were made to separate Christians from their pagan neighbourhood by establishing Christian settlements. Here they lived under the close control of their missionary and were safe from many temptations. But the results of such a life in seclusion were seldom encouraging. The settlements retained an artificial character,

⁵Willis Church Lamott, Revolution in Missions (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1954), p. 130.

the natives living in them became dependent on the white man, and easily fell back into a narrow clan spirit which took little interest in what went on beyond the boundaries of their small village Their influence on their neighbourhood was all but nil.⁶

However, the combined influence of the Christian faith and the impact of Western culture, which the missionary invariably carried with him, proved too strong for the native religions. The Christian beliefs spread rapidly, and very soon the basic tenets of African faith were under attack. It is easy for us to imagine the effect of some of the fundamental Christian doctrines upon tribal beliefs. The Christian missionaries, of course, preached one God. They attacked the African's belief in a multiple spiritual world. The spirits which inhabited the world, the forces which entered into the objects of this world, were taught to be either superstitious products of the African imagination, or the manifestations of the devil. The worship of earth and sky deities was labeled blasphemous. The Protestant missions were especially critical of the ancestral spirits; they represented the worst in African superstition and idolatry. Reincarnation was inconsistent with the Christian belief in final judgment, in heaven and hell. In short, the only point of contact which the missionary could make was with the high-god of African belief, who for most Africans has little significance for or control over the life and morality of the tribe.

⁶Diedrich Westermann, Africa and Christianity (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 167.

Although the reaction upon the African mind was spread over a great many years, still the total effect might very well be compared to a shock treatment. We have seen how intimately the ethics of the tribe were bound up in the belief and worship of the earth-goddess and again of the ancestral spirits. When the existence of these spiritual entities was brought into question, the whole system of morality was also brought into question. We have seen how the African's belief in the existence of his ancestors' spirits is an assertion of hope over against the fact of death. As his belief in his ancestors waned, his hope for immortality waned also, unless properly bolstered by his new Christian faith. When the Church opposed the tyranny and cruelty of African tribal life, she slowly undermined the sacred authority of the chief or clan leader. So the discipline of the tribe was gradually weakened. The missionaries preached against such practices as witchcraft, divining, the use of charms and amulets, the performance of religious rites and ceremonies.

But "attacks on these . . . meant in fact attacking the whole system, for (they) . . . were all parts of one complex pattern of rights and duties."⁷

The Christian Church was forced to oppose the secret societies because of their cruelty and their subjugation of the women. But when the societies began to lose their significance, they also lost their influence in the area of education. Where formerly they had educated the young men in the secrets of life and the laws of the

⁷Batten, op. cit., p. 32.

tribe, now they became little more than social clubs. Where formerly the society had acted as a judicial body, carrying out punishments for infractions of tribal law, now the society became little more than a theatrical group. The members still put on their dances and ceremonies for the delight of themselves and male spectators, but very few people, especially among the educated, took them seriously any more. What then was to take the place of these societies? Who was to educate the young, and imbue the tribe with a consciousness of law?

The mission school became the replacement for the former tribal education; and as such it became a very potent force in the transformation of tribal life. At first, very few Africans understood the importance of missionary education. But as more and more of the young people went to school and discovered the possibilities which education afforded them, the desire grew in every village and every tribe for education and more education. In fact, the lure of education gradually became more powerful than the lure of the Gospel. In the schools the young people were literally pumped full of new and exciting ideas. Not only did they learn of the Christian faith in greater detail, but they also learned of the superiority of Western civilization. Inevitably, they were drawn further and further away from the ancient mores of the tribes. As they made haste to throw over the old and accept the new, their devotion to their parents, their ancestors, their clan and their tribe was seriously weakened. Many left home to go to the cities for work. Thus, mission education, instead of binding the tribe together and revitalizing its laws and

its customs, only contributed to the process of disintegration.

In time, the attraction of Western civilization filtered down to all levels of African society. Unavoidably, the Christian missionary increased that attraction by his mere presence, if by nothing else. He dressed in Western clothes, drove Western cars, used Western products. Very naturally, the African people associated this civilized veneer with the Christian people. Even Christian converts desired to equal the white people, buy his products, live his materially comfortable life. As Mr. E. Amu said, the simplicity of the African's life was lost; he was caught up in a new and fierce economic struggle which he had never known in the old days.⁸ Although the missionary might preach against material goals in life, the African saw many other white people in his vicinity who were not missionaries, who treated Christianity lightly, and thought only in terms of pounds and shillings.

The natives are now recognizing more and more that the scientific and technical culture of Europe is something quite different from what the mission offers them. They realize with astonishment that some Europeans avoid missionaries, and in their conduct give the lie to the social standards of the missionaries and even quite openly show their scepticism of the teaching of Christ. The Natives naturally have little comprehension of the social and religious import of Christianity; what they cannot help seeing is the riches and the power of the whites, and these things they would like to possess.⁹

The spiritual potential of the African people still remained intact, but it often manifested itself in unhealthy forms, religious orgies, prayer and faith healing activities, interest in American hermetic sects and the like. Because these interests, by their very

⁸See pp. 10-11.

⁹Julius Richter, "Missionary Work and Race Education in Africa," The International Review of Missions, XVIII (May, 1929), 77-8.

nature, were esoteric, they were of little use in supplying a new spiritual foundation for tribal life. They only increased the steady process of African social disintegration. Although the missions tried to combat these heresies, and at the same time, control the new-found economic drives of the people, the task proved too great. The old African communities could not find themselves in the new Christian faith. As was mentioned in the second chapter, both the African Christians and the missionaries were unable to think through the implications of the Christian Gospel in the complexities of the social realm, at such short notice.

Unfortunately, most of the missions made very little effort to adapt the Christian Gospel to the tribal structure of the people. Not only did the missionaries necessarily attack tribal beliefs, but often they felt it necessary to reorganize African society in the pattern of Western Christianity. The missionaries,

in common with other Europeans working in Africa, judged the values of African customs and institutions by what they had known in Europe, and their chief aim was to bring them as closely as possible to what was accepted as good among white people.¹⁰

Instead of attempting to institutionalize the Church along the lines of the ancient African tribal society, most missionaries tried to organize the new Christian society along the same lines as their respective denominations in the home country. Thus arose synods and circuits and presbyteries and dioceses and councils and voters assemblies, and the like. Because the missionaries knew little of the complexities of tribal structure, it was inevitable that this kind of organization should arise. But it does not require much effort to

¹⁰Batten, op. cit., p. 33.

imagine the disintegrating effect which these new organizational patterns had upon the structure of tribal society.

Furthermore, many of the missionaries have consciously and unconsciously have tried to reform the temperaments of their converts. Those who came from more taciturn communities in Europe and America thought it necessary to curb the emotional exuberances of their people. Innocent plays and ceremonies, native music and dances were often categorized with more objectionable forms of pagan practice, and hence frowned upon or opposed. This meant that a tremendously necessary outlet of creative expression was denied the African people, especially in connection with their Christian worship. Mrs. Leith-Ross gives her reaction to a typical Protestant service in Iboland, and her observations are very sobering for anyone honestly concerned about the Church's place in West African life:

The service lasted an hour and a half or more and finished up with a collection. What did the people make of this act of worship? What did they bring to it? What did they get from it? Even an onlooker as sympathetic as myself hardly knows what to say. I had expected that the very simplicity of the setting would have lent dignity, the very naiveness of the worshippers would have brought charm, the very fact that this handful of Christians was ringed about by the cohorts of paganism would have awed and inspired, would have given weight and significance to every word and gesture. Instead, I found it ugly, alien, dull. I think it was that that struck one most. How could those people sit through that halting reading of which, even with the reader's comments, they could hardly have understood a word (I remember the last readings I heard were from Malachi and Hebrews), that ear-splitting singing of words which, set to a Western tune, must have lost (Ibo being, as I have said, a tone language) all their meaning? Religion, as expressed in the service, seemed neither to have grace nor color, neither mystery, nor joy, nor life. It seemed to bring nothing into their lives except a new set of formulas, a new field of self-importance and--was this the chief attraction?--a new

financial interest They swallowed it all, hymns and psalms, prayers and Malachi. But when the time came for the collection, it was as if the wind of the Spirit had at last blown through the building.¹¹

In summary, the Christian missions have contributed to the breakdown of African tribal society in the following ways. They have attacked the African's belief in divinities who controlled the ethics of his tribe. They have preached against the worship of ancestral spirits who gave sanction and continuity to tribal existence. They have fought against the sacrifices, the tabus, the magic and divination, by which the African attempted to ward off the dangers of life and preserve his community intact. They have preached against the use of amulets and charms which have their raison d'etre in the African's consciousness of the spiritual force which inhabits the world and again gives sanctity to his communal existence. All of these beliefs and practices in themselves are inconsistent with Christian doctrines, and therefore were bound to come under Christian attack. Unfortunately, as African religious beliefs withered, so did the African tribal structure. And instead of looking to the spiritual content of Christianity for a new basis of social life, most Africans were attracted more by the veneer of civilization which they thought to be a part of Christianity. The drive for material comfort slowly replaced the desire to retain the ancient tribal societies which had served the African people for so many centuries. Under assault from all sides, the tribes have splintered into many smaller fragments, often in competition with each other, for religious or

¹¹Sylvia Leith-Ross, African Women (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1939), pp. 122-23.

economic reasons. And the missions, still bound in many cases, to traditional forms of organization and practice, have as yet been unable to supply the necessary spiritual and institutional foundation upon which the African people can build anew.

Once more we wish to emphasize a point already brought out in the introduction to this paper. We do not want to give the impression that the results of mission teaching and activity have been uniformly destructive. It is largely at the instigation of Christian missionaries that the uglier aspects of African social life have disappeared. There are virtually no more human sacrifices carried on today. The criminal and civil laws have been so developed in Nigeria that no one segment of society has control over the lives of the rest. The dreadful pall which once rested over the fortunes of newborn children has been lifted in Christian areas. Twins are no longer put to death. Christian people have been freed, to a great extent, from their fears of unknown forces, spirits, witches, and the like. They have greater freedom in their thinking and in the area of human relationships. The fears and hostilities which once were a very potent force among villages and clans and tribes have been greatly alleviated. A man may now travel from village to village without fear of losing his life or being sold into slavery. In these, and in many other aspects of African life, the Gospel has truly brought peace and joy to countless African people.

New Directions in African Mission Work

The final portion of this paper, though extremely important, can really be nothing more than a postscript. Our purpose has been to describe in general terms the factors which go into the making of African tribal society so that we may better understand just how the process of Christianization has affected that structure. However, in a sense, we have left the problem hanging in the air. Consequently, we shall try to sketch out some of the possible directives for the Church, as envisioned by various African missionaries and anthropologists, which will enable her to better meet the needs of the current African social crisis. Included also will be some minimal hints for missionary activity among relatively uncivilized tribes which have not as yet been affected by Western acculturation.

The latter problem first. A number of suggestions have been made by Christian authorities in the field of primitive social structure. For instance, they strongly advise that every mission make use of modern anthropological techniques and discoveries in its approach to uncivilized peoples. We will quote a few urgings in this direction:

I believe that anthropology can help us greatly. It can widen our views, it can open our eyes, it can teach us to understand, it can improve our educational policy and point out to us the dangers of the way.¹²

¹²Henri Philippe Junod, "Anthropology and Missionary Education," The International Review of Missions, XXIV (April, 1935), 228.

The missionary must know his material by making a sympathetic study of tribal society and, since, to be more scientific is to be more accurate, a definite course in the study of the science of anthropology is a sine qua non for the Christian missionary.¹³

To make an energetic use of the results of anthropological research is an obligation incumbent on every missionary in order to do his work of effecting religious change, moral reforms and social revolutions or adaptations with more intelligence and clear-sightedness, and consequently better and more effectively.¹⁴

Again, it is strongly suggested by modern observers of both the world mission scene and the scene in Africa that the missionary approach a new pagan society as a whole, rather than as a conglomerate of individual perspective converts. In so doing, he will avoid, as much as possible, the splintering process in the tribal structure, counteracting not only the tendency on the part of the new convert to withdraw his witness from his old society, but also the tendency for the weaker pagan communities to completely disintegrate under the pressure of the new Christian religion. Dr. Westermann describes the possibilities:

It is . . . wise for the Church not to decry or weaken the existing social organism, but to transfer its binding powers to the Christian community. It is natural that Christian children should obey their pagan parents and kin, and Christian men should feel the same obligation of loyalty and obedience towards the traditional authorities as other subjects. If the inherited bonds thus remain intact, the growing Church community will gradually come to be a repository of the valuable elements in the social values, which here find a new life, and, freed from their pettiness of outlook and filled with a new consciousness of

¹³Shropshire, op. cit., p. 427.

¹⁴Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World (New York: International Missionary Council, 1947), p. 343.

wider and deeper brotherhood, may flow into the solid foundation of a community which is as indigenous as it is Christian.¹⁵

And Dr. Hendrik Kraemer speaks of just this subject in his book,

The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World:

The amount of intelligent insight which anthropology has put at our disposal, does not permit us any longer to neglect the basic importance of the group approach in missionary work. In pleading for it no lowering of standards is recommended (as often is erroneously supposed or feared), but, on the contrary, its urge is to do more solid missionary work and to plant Christianity more firmly than is possible by conglomerations of isolated individuals, because it honestly recognizes the impregnable fact that families, clans and tribes by their natural cohesiveness grow best into Christianity along the line of communal response. In this group approach individual conversions continue to play a highly important and fruitful role. This is natural, because Christianity is essentially the religion of individual decisions, and there never can be a communal response that is really conscious of having decided for God and a new life until the individual consciences have been awakened and by virtue of this awakening have appealed to their community.¹⁶

In the communication of the Christian faith nothing is more important than actual contact between missionary and native, real rapport, exchange of ideas and experiences. It is so easy for the missionary to withdraw from the mainstream of native life, withdraw into fine concrete homes, into the shell of a transplanted Western atmosphere. To a great extent, the missionary must do this for his own protection. No man can hope to exist as a normal human being in a completely alien culture. He will naturally transplant something of his own culture into the foreign culture which surrounds him.

¹⁵Westermann, op. cit., p. 168.

¹⁶Kraemer, op. cit., pp. 351-52.

But when this development becomes an obstacle to human relationship, then it serves a negative purpose. When it erects barriers between black and white, especially black and white Christians, it has become un-Christian, in the profoundest sense of the term. It is difficult to keep alive our Christian sensitivities when so much apparently separates the white American and the black African. But unless we make the constant effort to get through to him as a Christian witness and as a human being, our missionary work will be seriously handicapped. For the African is extremely sensitive to the differences between black and white. But he is proportionately overjoyed when those differences are forcefully and lovingly overcome in the unity which is Christ. Mr. Horstead speaks very movingly on this subject in his article, "Co-operation with Africans" in The International Review of Missions: "It can only be . . . by close and intimate co-operation between the few westerners and the few Africans who will themselves share freely with their brethren that Christ will be lifted up in Africa."¹⁷

In conclusion, what specific points of contact can we see between Christianity and pagan beliefs and practices. We must be extremely careful here. In the end analysis, all non-Christian religious beliefs must be either eradicated or completely transformed into that which partakes of the new being in Christ our Lord. There can be no compromise on these issues. However, there do appear to be many areas where pagan religious conceptions allow a certain rapprochement from the Christian point of view. These areas should certainly

¹⁷L.C. Horstead, "Co-operation with Africans," The International Review of Missions, XXIV (April, 1935), 204.

not be disregarded or deliberately effaced in an excess of missionary zeal. Dr. Shropshire, who has made an exhaustive study of just this issue in The Church and Primitive Peoples, suggests the following areas of contact: (1) The African sense of the sacredness of life with its roots in the divine; (2) holiness in the sense of the sacred being the very essence and structure of the whole tribal life; (3) the aptness for institutional Christianity, the sense of the concrete body of the tribe and its necessary rules and law and custom; (4) the secret of living together in fellowship, each for all and all for each; (5) the value of tradition and stability, though not entirely without elasticity; (6) the domestic virtues of obedience to father, love and loyalty to mother and home, and the desire for, and care and training of children in the initiation ceremonies under the eye of religion; (7) the recognition of the divine as the source of physical health and healing and connection of the latter with the spiritual health of the soul; (8) the belief in death as the gate of life and hope; (9) the belief in retribution which may take place in this world but also in the next, and which affects the moral life and conduct in this world; (10) the inchoate belief in the resurrection of the body because of the sense of need of the complete man in the supra-mundane world.¹⁸

Dr. Shropshire also suggests incorporating ceremonial objects such as the drum or other musical instruments and native music into the Christian life of the people. The custom of ritual hand-clapping

¹⁸Shropshire, op. cit., p. 443.

as an expression of joy, plus the periods of profound silence which play such a part in their own worship, might very well be incorporated somehow into the liturgy of the African Church.¹⁹ Rev. T. S. Johnson, formerly Assistant Bishop of Sierra Leone, suggests that ancestral worship may be sublimated under the Christian doctrine of the Communion of Saints.²⁰ And W. C. Willoughby in The Soul of the Bantu hints at a possible correlation between age-group initiation ceremonies, consecration ceremonies at times of battle and of the hunt, and like ceremonies in the Christian tradition such as baptism, confirmation and marriage.²¹

It is possible to see points of contact between Christianity and African paganism in these suggestions, especially in the list of Dr. Shropshire. It is not our purpose to go into the matter any more deeply. Suffice it to say that each area of rapprochement is fraught with pitfalls, and a great deal of analysis and experiment would be necessary before any kind of Christian synthesis could be worked out. Furthermore, it must be recognized that these manifestations of "natural religion" in African tradition and custom do not in any way begin to approach the revelation of God in our Lord Jesus Christ, and the subsequent view which we thereby gain of man, his sinfulness, his need for repentance and a resurrection into the newness of life. These truths will always remain unique. Nevertheless, wherever the opportunity lies in our contacts with non-Christians, there we must gain entrance. And once we have preached, we must also build and unify.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 442.

²⁰T. S. Johnson, The Fear-Fetish: Its Cause and Cure (Freetown: WATIC Printing Works, 1949), p. 85.

²¹W. C. Willoughby, The Soul of the Bantu (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1928), p. 400.

One of the marks of the Kingdom of God is the Ecclesia, the fellowship of the redeemed upon this earth. Within this fellowship, as within the African tribe, the ethical and moral sanctions, which are consistent with God's revelation in Christ, are upheld. Without this fellowship, the witness of Christian people would be much in vain. In Africa, the Ecclesia becomes doubly important. Without a strong, unified Church, there will be little witness to God's work in Christ. Without a strong, unified Church, the African people will have no motivation in their lives to bring forth creative social expression, no force to fan into flame their religious consciousness and at the same time to uphold the sanctions of law and authority in the realm of human behavior. The duty of the Church can be clearly analyzed, but not so easily carried out. The challenge and the obstacles in Africa are so great as to disillusion even the strongest Christian spirit. But those who work in the African mission fields have the overwhelming advantage of God on their side. They shall need His help, for it is our firm conviction and the conviction of all the Christian writers whom we have consulted on the subject, that the Christian faith and the Christian Church will make the difference in the future of Africa. Ultimately, only the Church can supply the profound spiritual and social needs of the African people. And to this end, "the True Vine must enter into vital relationship with all that it is able to assimilate of the African soil if it is to branch and bear fruit in Africa."²²

²²Shropshire, op. cit., p. 442.

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