RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND POLITICS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

It is important to make clear from the beginning what this review will cover and what it will not. Its focus will be on "traditional" and Christian religious movements in the last hundred years. By movements are meant widespread and grassroots adherence to religious ideas, symbols and rituals, sometimes brief in duration, sometimes long-lasting; sometimes lacking and sometimes acquiring formal organizational structures. The review will deal, therefore, with questions of "popular consciousness" rather than with the development of formal theologies. It will not review the literature on African Islam nor have much to say about religious movements and politics in pre-colonial Africa. Both these, of course, are major omissions, not only leaving out topics which are of great importance in themselves but also depriving analysis of modern traditional and Christian movements of an invaluable comparative and historical context. To seek to cover them also in one review, however, would be to risk a mere listing. It seems more useful to develop an argument on the past, present, and future direction of work on the interaction of religious movements and politics by focusing on a limited, but nevertheless still huge, topic and period.

It is, nevertheless, necessary at once to recognize some of the intellectual disadvantages of such concentration. Islam has competed with Christianity in most of West Africa, in Uganda, and along the East African coast. Islam was not the religion of the colonial power nor of western education, and it has different international connections and its own particular formulations of the relations of sacred and secular power. It thus offers a crucial comparative case for Christianity. Moreover, concentrating mainly on the colonial and post-colonial periods runs the danger of compounding the faults of much of the existing literature. Many writers on religious movements and politics during the last hundred years have accepted too uncritically the definitions of those terms given to them by the colonial context. In too much of the literature "politics" has meant only the politics of relating in some
way to colonialism or to the post-colonial state. In too much of the literature also it has been assumed that "religious movements" are in themselves a peculiarly modern phenomenon. Such movements have been seen as emerging in contrast and opposition to colonial religious institutions, whether those of mission churches or of reified traditional religion. In the pre-colonial period of flexible custom, it has been assumed, religious movements did not arise. Hence nearly all religious movements, whether witchcraft eradication movements or millenarian sects, have been treated as new and as explicable in terms of the special pressures and transformations of colonialism. Scholarly treatment of the interactions of religion and politics in modern Africa began with these definitions and assumptions. Much of the subsequent critique of this early work has involved challenging them.

The mid 1950s and 1960s saw the publication of a number of influential theses on the political significance of religious movements in Africa (Balandier, 1955, 1965, 1971; Lanternari, 1960, 1963; Ranger, 1968; Schlosser, 1949, 1958). Few of the hypotheses of these works have stood the test of time, partly because they focused too narrowly on colonialism as the sole causative and explanatory factor. It is clear, for example, that Vittorio Lanternari was mistaken to suppose that black independent churches arose particularly in zones of intensive and direct colonial exploitations and as a consequence of land alienation and forced labor. Indeed, Lanternari (1985) has recently abandoned most of the propositions he originally made about religious movements in Africa. Subsequent work on religious movements in post-colonial Ghana has compelled him to realize that one cannot restrict analysis of such spirit churches to the context of colonial oppression, nor explain them largely in terms of land alienation. For Lanternari the West African material challenges all the deductions he made from the South African material. He now thinks that for West Africa religious movements have to be understood as responses to cultural and psychological tensions and not as expressions of political antagonisms. Furthermore, since the obscure, undefinable sickness which cultural shock induces has deepened with the rapid modernizations of post-colonial West Africa, decolonization has accelerated the growth of religious movements rather than bringing them to an end.¹

I have myself abandoned the attempt to demonstrate that African independent church movements in Central Africa constituted a stage in the evolution of anti-colonial protest, lying between early armed resistance and the rise of modern mass nationalist parties. In recent work I lay emphasis rather on the disjunctions between rural consciousness and formal national parties, arguing that there is no natural sequential flow from one into another, and that it has only been under rare and special circumstances that formal nationalism has been able to make a mobilizing connection with either the religious or the secular manifestations of rural discontent (Ranger, 1986b). Balandier does not appear to have made any such public confession of error, but he has Robert Buijtenhuijs (1976, 1985) to do it for him.

Buijtenhuijs has exposed Balandier's proposition that "in Black Africa religious innovations constitute the pre-history of modern nationalism," to a series of very effective criticisms. In many African countries, he says, nationalism and religious independency were more or less simultaneous rather than sequential and there were few connections between them; no important nationalist movement has sprung directly out of an independent church or messianic movement; in South Africa black
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churches have sought government recognition, their trajectory paralleling that of political nationalism, neither sustaining the other, and black churches of the Zionist type appear to flourish within apartheid. In West Africa, where the colonial presence has been less oppressive, a direct expression of political nationalism has been possible, and "Ethiopian" churches, not repressed by colonial authority, do not need political allies. In South Africa, with its very rigid repression, leaders of "Ethiopian" churches have been little inclined to compromise their relative autonomy by allying themselves to nationalist parties, and the latter have no hope of continuing political activities under a religious cover. Only in an intermediate situation of colonial oppression, such as Buijtenhuijs thinks to have existed in Kenya, can collaboration between Ethiopianism and political nationalism be established.

As for Zionism, Buijtenhuijs holds that movements of this type are counter-societies rather than political challenges to colonialism. They seek to withdraw from power rather than seeking to capture it; they usually are not violent, though the colonial state is violent in suppressing them; they represent coherent ideological alternatives to dominant assumptions but they never make a rational analysis of the balance of political and economic forces nor construct an effective strategy to attain power. Links between such churches and a nationalist or revolutionary movement would be difficult to establish—indeed, it would be a grave error on the part of secular politicians or revolutionaries to seek to establish them. In short, writes Buijtenhuijs (1976: 37):

Nationalist parties recruit their adherents among those who experience the colonial situation above all as political and economic oppression.... The Zionist churches recruit their faithful among those who experience the colonial situation above all as a social destruction and cultural upheaval more than a political. The Zionist churches are thus the expression not of particular classes but of a situation of particular disequilibrium in which the destruction of traditional socio-cultural norms is felt by many as an injury more grievous than political and economic injustice.

Though first made nearly ten years ago, Buijtenhuijs' case against Balandier has been re-iterated again this year (Buijtenhuijs, 1985). With unsleeping vigilance Buijtenhuijs has this time challenged what he sees as an implicit follower of Balandier, and disputes Audrey Wipper's (1977) interpretation of the Dini ya Msambwa movement in western Kenya. Predictably, he finds that Dini ya Msambwa "is not a political protest movement but a social and cultural protest movement." Meanwhile a markedly ferocious exchange between Jan De Wolf (1983) and Audrey Wipper (1983) herself has further spelled out their conflicting interpretations of this western Kenyan case study.

These recantations and criticisms do not really break from the notion that colonialism has essentially determined the character of modern African religious movements. Both Lanternari and Buijtenhuijs still invoke the effects of colonialism, though not the directly political effects. Too sharp a contrast is drawn between cultural and political, symbolic and instrumental—"a false dichotomy," as Wipper (1983: 277) says, "which has serious consequences for research." Still, although Lanternari's reformulation and Buijtenhuijs' restated propositions already appear old-fashioned in the light of the most recent innovative work, they have proved enough
to discredit any straight-forward correlation between religious movements and anti-colonial politics.

In reaction some scholars have maintained that since it is no longer convincing to regard such movements as a form of or as a precursor to nationalism, we should abandon attempts at political analysis and seek to understand them in quite other terms. One way of doing this is to assert that African religious movements must be seen precisely as such—that is as movements of religion which fall into the field of departments of religious studies rather than of politics or history (Turner, 1966, 1969, 1977, 1979):

We hear the whole phenomenon being described as "protest movements" when some of these movements are not making any particular protest against anybody or anything but seeking spiritual power in a new religious system for their very own personal or practical purposes of healing and security. And again these same movements may be regarded as "the religions of the oppressed" in spite of the fact that there is no necessary connection between social and political oppression and the appearance of many of the independent churches (Turner, 1966: 14-15).

"The nature of the field of study," asserts Turner (1979: 1, 6), "must provide the major control over the methods employed"; African religious movements require to be studied by "someone trained in the study of religions...with concentration upon the religious dimension itself rather than upon all the ramifications of interaction with the milieu."

There is a second, and very different way of asserting that African religious movements have no connection with a properly political history. This argument picks up and develops one aspect of Buijtenhuijs' analysis. He asserts (1976: 34) that in all movements of the Zionist type "political analysis is absent...and the true sources of colonial domination are not realised." Such movements therefore represent a false consciousness which is the direct opposite of true political understanding just as their fantastic and escapist actions are the very negation of political practice. This notion of African religious movements as a dangerous alternative to politics, preventing the emergence of genuine and rational political association, is strongly expressed in much Marxist scholarship (Buettner, 1980; Ksenofontova, 1980). The idea is most strikingly expressed by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (1982: 5, 17, 22, 23). Primary resistance movements led, she says, "to a retreat to the past where the final atavar engendered veritable ground-swells of religion...more favourable in the long-run to acceptance than to confrontation"; under early colonialism, "mass conversion to new religions appeared as the last refuge of a sinking society"; later, the religious element in rural culture was often "capable of...deviating, even aborting, protest movements of a more modernizing inspiration," draining them of "dynamic political content." Here is a veritable anthology of various types of false consciousness.2

These attempts to portray African religious movements as either purer than or inferior to political activity are no more convincing, however, than previous notions that they were essentially part of the sequence of anti-colonial nationalism. Few can study these movements without feeling that even if they were not unequivocally anti-colonial they constituted a form of politics; without sensing a rationality in their
irrationality; without being struck by the instrumentality of their symbols. There is clearly a need to construct a more convincing account of the senses in which these movements were political--"the question to ask," as Beinart and Bundy (1986: Chapter 8, 43) put it, "is not so much whether they were 'political' but what form their religious and political activity took."

Meanwhile, while not resolving the particular question of how best to understand the political significance of religious movements, the study of religion in Africa has developed in rich and varied ways. Van Binsbergen and Schoffeleers (1985: 2-4) discern two main tendencies, one "the discovery that local religious systems have a history--and the subsequent exploration of that history...as one began to explore the transformation of historical African religious forms;" the other "towards the formulation of broad, general principles concerning such topics as thought, language, meaning, symbolism and the social process in small groups. This development connects with the work of a number of American scholars including Fernandez, MacGaffey, Janzen, Fabian and Jules-Rosette." The problem which now faces African religious studies, they think, is how to arrive at a fruitful "relation between contextualized, social-structural analyses, on the one hand, and non-contextualised, culture-specific, symbolic analyses on the other."

There is much in all this work to provide suggestions of how to approach the politics of African religious movements more fruitfully. But, to bring new approaches to fruition, to justify van Binsbergen's and Schoffeleers claim (1985:2) that African religious studies can be "a field where new insights in social, political and economic relations [are] being formulated which promise to be of importance also for the analysis of non-religious aspects of modern Africa," it was necessary not only for the different tendencies to begin to interact but also for each to pose for itself more explicitly the political question. This is precisely what has begun to happen.

**THE NEW INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT FOR STUDIES OF AFRICAN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS**

Merely in terms of the internal dynamics of the academic study of African religious movements, therefore, the time is ripe for a re-examination of their political significance. We cannot understand the revival of academic interest, however, without setting it in the context of a whole series of wider intellectual developments.

First, events throughout the world have persuaded men and women of the Left that they ignore religious commitment at their own peril. Two examples of a new determination to go beyond the idea of "false consciousness" suffice to make the point. In the summer of 1983 the British History Workshop movement, which characterizes itself as both socialist and feminist, held a conference on the social history of religion. Its preliminary statement (History Workshop, 1983) affirmed the "centrality of religion to any study of society, culture or politics." It went on to remark that the Islamic revolution in Iran, or the Catholic workers' movement in Poland, were "something for which neither history nor sociology had prepared us." In the summer of 1984 the American socialist journal, *Monthly Review* (1984),
published a special issue on "Religion and the Left." Despite an apparently irreversible rupture, a preface stated, "a widespread rapprochement between religion and the left is actually taking place." In the Third World, it went on, the religious dimensions of anti-colonial protest were giving way to theologies of liberation: religious movements were not only anti-colonial but anti-systemic. An introductory article by the black American scholar, Cornel West (1984: 17-18), author of Prophetic Deliverance! An Afro-American Christianity (West, 1982), invoked the name of Gramsci and challenged Marxists to understand the oppressed peoples whom they championed:

After a century of heralding the cause of liberation of oppressed peoples, Marxists have little understanding and appreciation of the culture of these peoples.... Though Marxists have sometimes viewed oppressed peoples as political agents, they have rarely viewed them as cultural agents. Yet without such a view there can be no adequate conception of the capacity of an oppressed people--the capacity to change the world and sustain the change in an emancipatory manner. To take seriously the culture of the oppressed is not to privilege religion, but...to believe that oppressed people have already expressed some of their potential in their actual products, their actual practices.

The same international events which have compelled the re-opening of the question of religion and politics on the Left have also stimulated academic Africanists. A series of papers at the 1983 History Workshop conference, for example, made the point that counter-establishment religious movements among the Ashanti, or the practicalities of South African rural religiosity, or the role of "traditional" religion in the Zimbabwean guerilla war were also "something for which neither history nor sociology had prepared us" (History Workshop, 1983). Karen Fields (1985: 22-23) in her new study of Watchtower in Central Africa writes in her introduction:

Sociologists of religion did not predict the political resurgence of "old-time religion" here in America.... And we did not foresee that religion could fire a potent revolutionary engine in Iran.... But in 1979, what had to be reconstructed in imagination as mere possibility could be witnessed live, in one's American living room, on satellite television.... I watched as crowds of demonstrators shouting "God is Great!" exploded the foundations of the Iranian monarchy. Imagine the excitement of a scholar fascinated by exotic deeds of Watchtower militants operating half a century or more ago, half a world away!

Fields, like Cornel West, goes on to challenge Marxists to believe that oppressed people had already expressed some of their potential in their actual religious products and practices.

A second wider intellectual development has been a continuing interest from the side of men of religion in the causes of the Left, in liberation theology and in "basic communities," and a determined attempt to apply these concepts to Africa (Pro Mundi Vita, 1980, 1984). This has reached a remarkable climax in the South African theologians' Kairos document of September 1985 (The Kairos Theologians, 1985: 14, 16, 17):
True justice, God's justice, demands a radical change of structures. This can only come from below, from the oppressed themselves. God will bring about change through the oppressed. "Church theology" lacks an adequate understanding of politics and political strategy. Changing the structures of a society is fundamentally a matter of politics. It is into this political situation that the Church has to bring the Gospel.

Some of these efforts come close at times to politicizing African religious movements by secularizing them—an ironic achievement just as secular intellectuals of the Left are becoming fascinated by the religious imagination! But there is also a development of an exploration of the indirectness of religious politics, of a solution to the "problem of rationality" that does not involve reducing religion to rationalism. Thus Adrian Hastings, in his inaugural lecture at the University of Zimbabwe in June 1983, warned against what he called "over-politicisation" in assessing the great African prophets of late nineteenth century Zimbabwe (Hastings, 1985):

Their truly religious and prophetic function should not, in interpretation, be over-politicised. theirs was not so much one of straight-forward political leadership. It is in fact unlikely to prove a prophetic stance for a priest to become a prime minister even in a state of emergency. His influence is not thereby enhanced. The prophetic role is rather one of the instilling of enthusiasm and a more than rational conviction, of moral interpretation, of the construction and enhancement of an ongoing tradition of meaning, of the symbolisation of the cause in a single person. Of course some prophets are, and need to be, a good deal more overtly political than others. On the whole, however, their raison d'être is not to organise the coming kingdom on the model of some immediate revolutionary programme. The prophet's task is rather to insinuate and symbolise his vision in a more immediately unpractical and more ultimately undefeatable way.

Moving along the same lines is the long and sophisticated treatment of the African independent church movement in Eboussi Boulaga's Christianisme sans fetiche (1981). Boulaga seeks a Christian engagement with political realities which goes deeper than politics. He (Boulaga, 1984: 74, 76) seeks to replace shallow African liberation theologians who "hasten to place themselves at the service of new princes and new chauvinisms," by prophets who confront the true "cultural, historical and economic-political condition of Africa," and who achieve "the triumph of life over death as they experience that triumph in their daily existence."

In this way Cornel West and Karen Fields focus our attention on the cultural capacity of oppressed peoples, and Eboussi Boulaga focuses it on the emancipatory role of the prophet. These themes arise also in the most recent academic work on African religious movements, which display a number of distinct but converging tendencies.

To begin with it seems to me that both the main tendencies which van Binsbergen and Schoffeleers (1985) define within African religious studies--the "historical" and the "semantic"--have begun to move not only to an encounter with each other but also towards a re-exploration of the relations of religion and politics. Thus the tendency which they associate with a focus on "thought, language,
meaning and symbolism," and to which they attach the names of Fernandez and Jules-Rosette, has recently produced some general reviews of the literature which confront this issue very directly. Both these writers have argued that we need to understand the African religious "argument of images" (Fernandez, 1978) not for itself alone, still less in order to move away from the large social, political, and economic issues towards microcosmic internal perceptions, but in order to comprehend how people perceive and act within and upon development and politics.

In a long review, for instance, Fernandez confronts the work of the socio-structural analysts, and in particular that of van Binsbergen (1977) whom he takes to be their leading representative. He praises van Binsbergen for seeking some general theory of how "problems of politics and the organisation of power" shape "our understanding of African religious movements," and for his combination of "both materialist and ideological perspectives, showing them in dynamic interaction." Fernandez (1978: 214-215) continues in a more critical vein:

While van Binsbergen satisfies several intellectual constituencies, the constituency that matters most, at least for the anthropologist...may not be satisfied at all. That constituency is the local one, the peoples and cultures who are the objects of study.... Though the van Binsbergen analysis has much to be said for it...the enlightenment it brings is once again a Western enlightenment.... Our real enlightenment lies not in the application of imageless ideas exported from the West but in beginning with African images and by a careful method learning what they imply---what is embedded within them. In this approach we may discover other dialectics.

Fernandez (1978: 228-29) urges that "we stay close to those grounded images and by methodic micro-analysis proceed from them to what they imply." Some of what they imply is certainly not in any sense political, concerning rather "the purification of the inner and the lustration of the outer." However,

In religious movements we discover imagination struggling with more challenging displacements in which the outer has become a greater reality than the inner...a more attractive reality. We miss the heart of such religious thought if we neglect the fact that this decentering and the acute sense of peripherality it produces is imaginatively negotioted in primary images...and only secondly in theological or "logic of science" idioms.... What we have pointed to here are approaches which are ontologic.... Such approaches keep us focused on the African struggle to maintain the integrity of their worlds in transitional circumstances and they enable us...to be most profoundly in communication with what development really means to Africans.

In a briefer review of "The New Religions of Africa," Bennetta Jules-Rosette (1985: 5, 7) notes that in African societies, "the political domain has traditionally been defined and reinforced by sacred symbols and beliefs that are fundamental to the communities involved." Hence the transformation or innovation of sacred symbols can have profound significance:
A challenge to the existing social order is implicit in many African religious movements.... In this regard, the meanings and uses of new religious movements for their own group members become central issues for study. One must ask how these group members envision the sacred and the secular and what symbolic challenge they perceive themselves as making.

If one does this the calumny of false consciousness is laid to rest. So far from constituting fantastic retreats into impotence:

as movements of protest many new African religious groups have become vehicles for the creation, exercise and legitimation of power by their adherents. Those who were formerly powerless have found in religion a means of altering their situation and even reversing their status in both symbolic and social terms. The adherents of these new religions have created and manipulated sacred symbols to attain secular goals.

Fernandez's concept of an "argument of images" developed as a critique of the excessive rationalism in many accounts of West African religious change; Jules-Rosette's emphasis on cosmology is a reaction against the functionalism of many Central African studies. Work based on these methods and assumptions, she claims (1985) necessitates modification of ideas about the relationship between the sacred and the secular, between religion and politics. As examples she offers her own "ethnographic and socio-linguistic" studies of Apostolic churches in Zaire, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (Jules-Rosette, 1975, 1981). She also cites Fernandez's (1982) magisterial treatment of the Bwiti cult of West Equatorial Africa, described in its subtitle as an "Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa." Here indeed the tendency which Fernandez represents has produced its masterpiece. Bwiti could be crudely seen as blatant false consciousness--a mere patching together of bits and pieces of ancestral observances borrowed from other African peoples, of distorted Christian concepts and symbols, of hallucinogenic visions. Fernandez instead brilliantly shows how Bwiti's "argument of images" bridges the discontinuities of experience and responds creatively to colonial dislocation.

Meanwhile two leading representatives of the second main tendency--the historical and socio-structural--have recently reflected both on Fernandez's propositions and on the future directions of their own work. Van Binsbergen and Schoffeleers (1985: 8) recognize that:

where so much has been written, in African religious studies, on the structural side, time has come to render the nature of structure both more relative and more dynamic in the light of participants' concrete transactions in concrete situations that have religious relevance.

They admire the work of Johannes Fabian (1971, 1979a, 1979b, 1981, 1985), whom they see as representing much the same approach as that of Fernandez. They retain some reservations, however (1985: 24-25):

One advantage of Fabian's approach is that it allows for the incorporation of...the transactional element in religious behaviour.... But does his ethnographic approach also allow for the incorporation of the more
permanent, structured, collective elements? The latter may have been overemphasised in the study of religion, but surely they have not disappeared with the emergence of transactional approaches. It is certainly true that the ethnographic sequence to some extent creates its own context; yet there is a wider social-structural context, which the participants in any specific religion do not themselves create, but take for granted and from which they derive most of the form and content of their actual exchanges.... The "ethnographic" approach advocated by Fabian does not seem particularly well equipped to explore this wider context and assess its religious significance but it lays a timely stress on participants' freedom to manipulate and innovate that context in concrete situations.

They offer an analogy from linguistics as a model for a future desirable synthesis (1985: 7):

Internal analyses of African belief systems, rituals and myths could be regarded as syntaxes of religious symbols. Contextualized analyses of the way African religious symbols are related to the various non-religious aspects of the societies in which they occur, could then be regarded as syntaxes of social structure. Both types of syntaxes are actualized by participants whose more or less ephemeral cognitive and material transactions (being creative, manipulative, and at times deviant) would display a tension vis-a-vis both symbolic and social structures, a tension not unsimilar to that between syntax and natural speech.

Maybe not surprisingly, they do not feel that such a synthesis has been achieved. When it is, they believe, it will enable us to explore African rural politics as well as African rural religion in a newly revealing way.

While scholars whose main pre-occupation has been with the study of African religion have thus re-examining their own work and each other's, other scholars are turning to look at African religious movements as a necessary corollary of their primary concern with class, or consciousness or culture. The first such group consists of those radical historians who have begun to focus on consciousness as a crucial dimension in the study of class formation, class differentiation, and class war. In Southern African studies, for example, there has been a transition from the un-peopled structures of political economy to a primary concern with experience and consciousness (Marks and Rathbone, 1982). Among much other work, one may cite the forthcoming collection by Beinart and Bundy (1986). It is their aim, they say to capture (Beinart and Bundy, 1986: 2):

shifts in ideology and consciousness.... How Transkeians identified themselves; how they viewed their relationships with others; how they perceived their interests and the possibilities of action in pursuit of these; in short, how they sought to comprehend and come to terms with their historical situation.

They (Beinart and Bundy, 1986: 32) comment that:

Simply to prescribe class analysis does not in itself clarify the pattern of rural politics nor does any mechanistic application of preconceived class
divisions to a given rural society provide any precise content to the forms, tempo and ideology of rural conflicts. On the contrary, it is the details of existence and struggle which must be used so as to arrive at the process of class formation. Objectively and subjectively, there is an important cultural dimension to rural differentiation.

John Comaroff, commenting in a letter on an earlier draft of this paper, remarked that while it was useful "to herald a long overdue revelation on the part of a group of historians which, for all its enormous creativity, has shown a lack of sensitivity to the cultural dimensions of the social, the revelation itself reads a little like the belated discovery of America." Historians like Bundy and Beinart, however, are not merely arriving in the same place as long established anthropological pioneers. Because they come to it from different directions, the place itself looks different when they get there.

The second group of scholars who are turning or returning to the study of African religion with fresh eyes consists of anthropologists themselves. British social anthropologists are seeking to re-instate culture as a key element in the discourse about twentieth century African societies. Many younger American and French anthropologists, for whom culture was always a central concept, now seek to situate the concept within political economy, process, and class action. A particularly interesting example here is the work of John and Jean Comaroff, who draw upon both the British and the American tradition, and who have sought, both jointly and individually, to redefine the embracing imagery which they bring to an understanding of the African past and present. The Comaroffs are concerned to apply new insights to the study of politics, law, ideology, and popular culture as well as to religion. But their work on religious movements is especially relevant to this paper (Jean Comaroff, 1980, 1981, 1985; John L. Comaroff, 1982; in preparation, J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff, 1985).

Jean Comaroff's recent book (1985) well illustrates their preoccupations. So great has been the power of the South African state, she writes (1985: 39-40), that:

one might expect the Tshidi to have been reluctantly acquiescent, increasingly determined by a set of historical forces that they could no longer act upon with any effect... I shall argue that such an impression would be false, however, for the Tshidi response has been far more complex. Indeed, the forms of social practice that have emerged here are neither the product of global determination alone nor of indigenous cultural structures; rather, [it] is the outcome of a dynamic interaction between the two in a continuing quest for creative action upon the world. And, in order to understand contemporary Tshidi culture in these terms, it is necessary to examine the evolution of their symbolic order in relation to their changing position within the overarching South African social system.

Comaroff is pre-eminently, though by no means exclusively, concerned with the religious components of the Tshidi synthetic symbolic scheme, and in particular with Tshidi Christian independency. She (Comaroff, 1985: 168-69) comments on scholarly treatments of independency:
Much of the...work on black religious movements in central and southern Africa has failed to match Sundkler's sensitivity to their broad structural significance, and to their character as complex symbolic systems. A host of more explicitly sociological studies have provided ample evidence of their mediating role under conditions of rapid and uneven transformation, often viewing them as buffers in the wake of social dislocation.... In reaction to the limitations of such sociological analysis, there have been efforts to understand the religious movements in idealist terms. But like the sociological focus it ostensibly opposes, this idealist perspective fails to situate these movements within more encompassing structural orders; indeed, by regarding them as either "religious associations" or "modes of explanation and control" it extends to them a literalist, ethnocentric theory of meaning which ignores their embeddedness in total sociocultural systems. Notwithstanding the clear evidence that their emergence is tied to the politico-economic processes of colonial domination few studies have given these processes full analytic weight...and the practices of "sectarian" movements have seldom been treated adequately as modes of cultural signification, as meaningful creations more complex than the mere literal "explanation" of things threatening or strange.

Jean Comaroff is thus setting herself something of the same unifying project as that laid down by van Binsbergen and Schoffeleers. She seeks in her own work to give "real analytic weight" to the processes of colonial domination and also to treat independent churches adequately as modes of cultural signification. More than that, she seeks to set both the colonial state and the localized culture within the context of global determination, thus combining what Fernandez calls the imageless concepts of mode of production, class formation, and under-development, with a profound exploration of the argument of images in Tshidi Zionism.

In other parts of Africa, where there has been no white settler presence and where the power of the colonial state was much less omnipresent, the task of integrating indigenous cultural structures and global determination is a rather different one. The vigor of indigenous cultural structures in many parts of West Africa, for example, is more readily apparent than the structures of national and international political economy. Nevertheless, essentially the same project of integration has been successfully pursued there (Peel, 1983).

A third developing academic tendency is an interest in the symbolic and ideological dimensions of power and hence of resistance to power. Some of the recently published general works on these themes have had African resonances and references (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Horne, 1984; McKenzie, 1984). Many of the questions posed by such works have begun to be raised in studies of African religions. One recent example is Holger Hansen's (1984) massive study of the interactions of the colonial state and mission Christian ideologies in Uganda. The most recent study of a resistance movement powered by traditional religious ideologies, Stephen Ellis' (1985) account of the Menelampa movement in Madagascar between 1895 and 1899, shows considerable sensitivity to the symbolic dimensions of regional, central and colonial political power.3

But the work most explicit in its theoretical interests is Karen Fields' (1985) recent study of African religious movements in colonial Northern Rhodesia. Fields
The political approach emphasizes the links between millenarianism and the secular forms of social movement that have succeeded it. According to this view, millenarianism represents an under-developed mode in which the downtrodden express their discontent. According to advocates of the cultural view, if millenarianism has any political content at all, this content is expressive not instrumental, fantastic not practical, and certainly not rational.

Those who favor the political approach hardly bother to discuss baptism, prayer, and healing, even though those activities were central to members of the religious movements themselves; cultural analysts discuss them in detail, but as purely symbolic—"they too fail to look up from their labour long enough to note the sustained interest administrators took in mere symbolic action of this kind." Hence, Fields remarks (1985: 19), "we do not learn to ask, 'What did the converts do and with what consequences?' Instead we learn to ask the inverse, 'Why did they not do what it would have been rational for them to do?'" She goes on (Fields, 1985: 19-20):

The common ancestor of both [approaches] is the vulgar Marxist conception that social conditions cause religious ideology. According to the political view, the cause of extraordinary belief lies in real social discontent; while for the cultural view, it is the stress occasioned by [real] cultural change. The family resemblance between the two is this. Wherever in reality the cause is sought, the sense of a senseless world awaits reconstruction at a considerable distance from what converts actually do and say. Since, in either case, millenarians cannot be conceived of as making sense in their own terms, whatever sense they make to each other comes across this distance as garbled, faint or even as not directly observable at all.

Fields shows that we do not need depth psychologists or even French structuralists to comprehend the sense of African religious movements. In opposing her own answer to those of the political or cultural schools she says (1985: 21-22):

I will examine not only the extraordinary content of millenarian revival, but also its ordinary context. The context of the Watchtower revival was a community where...the distinction between religious and secular things cannot be drawn. I intend to show that the colonial structure had a ready-made space for the God of the Watchtower millenium, because quieter but kindred gods were cemented into its very foundation, because the propagation of belief helped to maintain it erect. For a structure of this kind, revival is an inevitable byproduct of normal use. Given in such a structure is the possibility that baptism and "talking in the unknown tongue" can be reasonable--and effective--political tools.

African millenial movements made sense, therefore, in the same way that the colonial state itself made sense.
All these academic developments have in common their belief that oppressed people have already expressed some of their potential in their actual products and practices; all focus on how actual people identified themselves, viewed their relationships with others, perceived their interests, and sought to come to terms with their historical situation.

All ask pre-eminently, what did the people do and with what consequences? All are products of the concern to place real people within the hitherto unpeopled structures of political economy. They all add up--to borrow a phrase from John Peel's comment on an earlier draft of this paper--"to an insistence on the essential ambivalence of religious symbols and discourse, which invalidates any reductionism in the treatment of religion's sources or consequences."

AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE STUDY: WATCHTOWER IN CENTRAL AFRICA

Some of the fresh approaches to African religious movements have been described. In order to show how they interact with earlier approaches and how far they succeed in improving on earlier models, it is most effective to take a particular example. The African Watchtower movement is ideal for this purpose since it has been analyzed by many able scholars over a long period of time, during which nationalist, class, religious, and ideological explanations have in turn been proffered.

Nationalist interpretations of the 1960s held that Watchtower was essentially and in intention thinly disguised anti-colonial politics. According to Rotberg (1965: 56), "the conquered people cloaked their rejection of colonialism in religious garb," such movements providing "the only means by which Africans might reject foreign domination." According to Pachai (1969, 1973, 1980), Kenani Kamwana, who introduced Watchtower into Central Africa, was chiefly concerned to promote African discontent and disenchantment against the existing order in church and state. According to Meebelo (1971: 76), Watchtower upheavals in north-eastern Northern Rhodesia after the First World War were "in their own ways manifestations of African nationalism."

Subsequent writers, however, have shown that so straight-forward a nationalist or proto-nationalist interpretation is unconvincing both for Kamwana and for the Northern Rodesian north-east. Thus a recent University of Malawi seminar paper by W. Ndope Chijere Chirwa (1984) shows that so far from making specifically proto-nationalist modifications to Watchtower doctrines, Kamwana followed faithfully the themes of American Watchtower literature. Drawing for the first time on the twenty-four tracts which Kamwana wrote while in detention, Chirwa (1984: 25) shows that in Kamwana's view, "all those who worship in the names of kingdoms, nationalities, or under the symbol of secular rulers are idolatrous." If Kamwana struck a telling blow against colonial ideology by condemning as "idolatry elements" the observation of Armistice Day, Empire Day, National Anthems, and so forth, he also clearly pre-figured the later refusal of Watchtower adherents to celebrate nationalist anniversaries or to sing nationalist anthems. Chirwa (1984: 23) notes that Kamwana's refusal "to participate personally in the Native Associations and later in Congress after his return in 1937 disappointed many who had thought that he
would take part in the nationalist struggle." Finally, he notes (Chirwa, 1984: 24) that not only the Jehovah's Witnesses but also Kamwana's own Mlonda Mission have been under violent attack in independent Malawi, that the Mlonda Mission was banned for "refusal to buy party cards," and that "force was applied against it" during the 1973-74 cholera vaccination campaign. As for northeastern Rhodesia, Sholto Cross (1973) has discounted a nationalist interpretation after a most exhaustive examination of the available data, pointing out that to place Watchtower as an intermediary stage between primary and secondary resistance movements against colonialism obscures the wide range of social meanings carried by the movement.

It seems clear, then, that the motives of Watchtower prophets and core members of their movement were not nationalist or proto-nationalist, even though some of their ideas could be made use of in a more diffuse anti-colonialism. A good deal of work has proceeded to replace a nationalist with a class or proto-class interpretation. George Bond (1979: 137-39), writing of African religious movements in Zambia in general, criticizes earlier assumptions:

The assumption that the movements arose in response to European colonial domination has tended to obscure the fact that many of the basic conditions which Balandier describes as constituting the "colonial situation" and which have been conducive to the rise and proliferation of prophetic movements, may still obtain even after African countries have gained their political independence.... In one phase of its development a prophetic movement may appear to be anti-colonial or anti-European, but in another it may become apparent that its opposition was and is to secular authorities, whether European or African.

In Bond's own view, African religious movements are best seen "as part of the complex historical processes that are contributing to what may be termed the making of an African 'common people'...[a term which may be] used to capture the nature of new social formations and consciousness of pre-capitalist societies experiencing new modes of capitalist production which both transcend and incorporate the peasantry of the countryside and the labouring poor of the towns." To Bond the term "common people" implies a period of populist unity prior to the emergence of class consciousness. The Yombe, whom he has studied, "are neither peasants nor proletarians--or rather they are both--so they cannot be expected to demonstrate class consciousness.... Instead what they exhibit is the more diffuse conciousness of a common labouring people...eminently receptive to new religious movements.... New social formations such as the rise of the common people produce new ideological forms."

Others, however, have sought to link Watchtower more directly to proletarian or proto-proletarian consciousness. Sholto Cross (1972) interpreted Watchtower as an example of what he called a "social movement," a term which he intended to focus attention "on the zonal scale of social change, on the underlying unifying processes, and on the diffuse, shifting and uneven nature of change." Watchtower's "zone of impact," writes Cross (1972: 1-2):

was not merely fortuitous.... Rather it does reflect the basic process of proletarianisation which gave a far more cogent unity to the area of
discussion than do the concepts of local political and cultural units created by colonial boundaries. The vast majority of adherents of Watchtower were labour migrants.... It was through labour migration that the ideology spread, and both in ideological content and associational form it was particularly suited to those whose lives alternated between the compound and the village.... In discussing the Watchtower as a social movement, it will be argued that in the urban areas at least, it operated as a primitive labour movement.

Cross (1972: 3) argues that "the idea of the confrontation between the black man and the white man...common to all forms of Watchtower belief," gives the appearance of "radicalism and anti-colonialism." But "more important from the social historical point of view...was its new form of expression...which reflects the formation of social groups with common interests derived ultimately from their common participation in industrialism."

Cross' doctoral thesis (1973) is a massive and subtle work, most unfortunately never published, which stresses the multiple significance of Watchtower in different phases and different places. His argument of an essential connection with the process of proletarianization is cautiously made. Less cautious is John Higginson (1983, forthcoming), whose work focuses on Watchtower in Katangese towns from the 1920s to the 1940s. Higginson argues that in the towns of Katanga Watchtower became the catalyst for the emergence of a working class ideology. He believes that a second, more secular, phase of Watchtower began in the 1920s, divided into two streams, kitawala and kitower. The first was associated with Tomo Nyirenda, Mwana Lesa, who Higginson (forthcoming: 8, 11, 12) thinks "planned to systematically assassinate whites and Africans, particularly chiefs, who were loyal to the colonial governments." Kitawala thus became an ideology of insurrectionist violence. Kitower under Gondwe, on the other hand, urged a "quietist ideology of withdrawal from the worksites and the industrial towns." Nyirenda's mantle was inherited after his arrest by Mumbwa Napoleon Jacob, whose banapoleoni carried "mass baptism and instrumental violence" to Elisabethville and the mining compounds. Their "roughly hewn concepts of insurrection" proved appropriate to urban conditions at a moment when the towns became the main site of protest rather than the countryside. "Working class aspirations were thus deeply insinuated into the more particular ones of the African Watchtower movement." Higginson maintains that Watchtower leaders were prominent in the organization of strikes and boycotts and that Watchtower ideology fueled worker militancy. "African Watchtower was important in the initial stages of this protest, but proved an insufficient ideology in the long run"; nevertheless (Higginson, 1983: 207), despite "their defeat at the hands of their employers and the various colonial regimes...the African working class moved to something akin to class conciousness in the 1930s and 1940s."

Now here one needs to make the same judgement as that passed on the nationalist interpretation. Watchtower ideas were certainly picked up and used in popular protest movements--as in the peasant risings of eastern Zaire in 1944, which Coquery-Vidrovitch (1985: 228-29) describes as "the greatest jacquerie of the century," and whose leader, Bushiri, was a labor migrant inspired by Kitawala teachings. It seems highly unlikely though, that Tomo Nyirenda really planned a systematic assassination of chiefs and whites--at any rate, his followers did not attack
any whites and some chiefs in Northern Rhodesia and Katanga worked with his movement. Indeed, others who have worked through the mass of archival material on *Mwana Lesa* in the Northern Rhodesian and the Katangese archives have come to doubt that Nyirenda had a primary anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, or insurrectionary intention at all. The recent publication (Verbeek and Vellut, 1983) of the documents relating to *Mwana Lesa* in the Sakania region of the Katanga shows that the essential concern of his movement was to cleanse and restructure African rural societies and not to make war on colonialism or to attack European employers. The very useful inclusion of Verbeek's oral interviews about *Mwana Lesa*, carried out in the 1970s shows that Tomo Nyirenda is not at all remembered in the Sakania countryside as a political revolutionary but as a martyr prophet. As Vellut (1983: vii) comments:

The oral material defines sharply the image left by the prophet in the collective conciousness. Nyirenda appears in Franciscan guise: he preaches charity towards both men and animals. Popular memory has retained the rigours of repression and the famine which followed the pillage of the police operation.... It has retained the cruelty of the fate reserved for Nyirenda, his arms amputated following ill-treatment after his arrest. "From that moment he ate with his teeth and not with his hands." It also evokes the prodigies which accompanied his intercessions.5

Higginson can certainly point to genuine insurrections in the Katangese towns, but it seems possible that the proto-proletarian interpretation may depend as heavily on the para-noic fears of colonial administrators as did the nationalist. Sholto Cross (1977b) has dealt in some detail with the para-noia of the Belgians in the face of African religious movements and with the difficulty for the historian in knowing how to interpret colonial assertions that Watchtower adherents planned insurrection. That same para-noia comes out very clearly from the Sakania archival collection (Verbeek and Vellut, 1983). Robert Smith's account (1981: 234) of the suppression of the Mpeve healing movement in Kwilu in 1946 shows the Belgian authorities deporting men merely because they "healed" and arresting all those who "made prayers to God."

Faced with these extravagant overestimates of the political character of the *Mwana Lesa* movement, I came close to a purely religious interpretation after I had worked through the Northern Rhodesian archival material, seeing Tomo Nyirenda himself as a would-be Christian reformer, who both exploited and was exploited by the fears of the distrustd rural peoples of the copper-mining zone (Ranger, 1975). Similarly Smith (1981: 241) concludes that the Mpeve movement aimed merely at "a better life at the local level: health, peace and happiness." Neither Smith nor I, however, have done the field work which would allow us to develop an argument of images.

This long sequence of work on Watchtower and related movements ends unsatisfactorily in a double mystery. Smith (1981: 237-41) explains that the Belgians feared that such movements might bring members of different tribes together; that the "delirium" characteristic of them might inflame the emotions of people undergoing economic distress; that they introduced dangerous American and Pan-African influences. Yet Smith is not really convinced by the reasons advanced
for arresting those who "made prayers to God"; there is an apparent irrationality in the response which mirrors the apparent irrationality of adherents of the movements themselves. And on the other hand, if none of the mono-causal, evolutionary interpretations convince—if Watchtower was not essentially proto-nationalist nor essentially an expression of proto-class consciousness—nevertheless, the notion of sweeping regional movements aiming merely at "a better life at the local level" also remains unsatisfying. There is certainly something more largely significant. But what?

Karen Fields' new book (1985) addresses itself to both these questions. It takes as its starting point the same paranoid fears which throw doubt on Higginson's data and which puzzle Smith. It also seeks to arrive at the larger sense of Watchtower; to understand Watchtower ideology in its own terms and within its own context rather than as a more or less distorted and unsatisfactory forerunner of nationalism or of class consciousness. In addressing itself to these questions it has many strengths. It is very much a book of the new moment; a book which seeks to dissolve the barriers between the socio-structural and the cultural tendencies of explanation; a book which seeks to pursue an argument of images, not only within African religious movements themselves, but also within colonized African society as a whole and within the colonial state itself. It takes our understanding of Watchtower a good deal further. Like her other fascinating work on colonial missionaries, on charismatic religion and on twentieth century witchcraft belief (Fields, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c), her book grasps the essential integrity of culture and politics. It develops an insight enunciated in one of the earlier articles (Fields, 1982c: 593):

How cultural patterns are articulated to systems of political domination is a question as important to pose as it is elusive to answer systematically. But we can say for certain that, in times of upheaval, those who move into action grasp its importance immediately, whatever side they are on. There is no genuine revolution which is not at the same time cultural revolution. And there is no serious political repression which does not invade the realm of culture.

Fields begins her book (1985: 3) with a story, reminiscent of Smith's account of Mpeve. A Catholic priest on an autumn afternoon in 1918 travelling along a bush path in Isoka district in north-east Northern Rhodesia comes across an African preaching, "Take care, God is great. Pray to God alone." The priest at once accuses the man of sedition, fires shots in the air, arrests the man, and has him flogged. Then he hurries to the local Justice of the Peace, who soon comes to share his alarm. "What I have just recounted," says Fields (1985: 4-5), "is a common sort of alarm, which lit and relit colonial Central Africa.... They are queer alarms, in that they reveal twentieth century men bristling at threats of supernatural harm. And the queer alarms signalled queer rebellions." The only violence in the story, after all, was committed by the Catholic priest himself and "he reacted neither to actual violence nor to the threat of it, rather, to a certain kind of talk with and about God. He was neither the first or the last to do so."

She sets out to discover why colonial regimes took this "certain kind of talk about God" so seriously. In detail, of course, much of what they suspected was totally mistaken. Fields concludes (1985: 21), however, that they were right to
regard the discourse of Watchtower as threatening to colonial rule. This was because colonial rule itself was an archaic form of polity, critically dependent on religious ideologies. "Belief [comes] into view as routine common sense.... The supernatural was embedded in mundane social relations.... The officials who did not scoff at missionaries' equating heresy and rebellion made perfect sense." Colonial rule in Northern Rhodesia depended on two irreconcilable religious ideologies--on progressive Christianity as taught by the missionaries and on the traditional religious beliefs which gave authority to chiefs within systems of Indirect Rule. Hence the ideology of colonial Northern Rhodesia was profoundly ambiguous (Fields, 1985: 41):

On the one hand, missions served the regime. They aided it practically by mediating the spread of western culture and morally by helping to legitimise colonial rule.... On the other hand, they undermined the regime. Indirect Rule pre-supposed the continuance of customary authority: but the missions attacked as "heathenism" much that was customary.

In this situation, African religious movements which repudiated both mission Christianity and traditional religion--which indeed attacked mission Christianity partly for being too tolerant of traditional religion--were striking at the very heart of colonial ideology. In this situation, the religious language of African peasants was the language of reality (Fields, 1985: 274-77):

The [millenarians] knew how the colonial machinery worked. They knew because it worked on them.... The colonial state was a throwback...exploiting not only the ideological resources of Christian churches but also their organizational means.... The colonial state simply did not hold the territory in its grip with a uniform law, a rational hierarchy, or an uncompromisingly "modern" vision.... We can accept Hobsbawm's judgement that millenarianism is an "archaic" form of social movement only if we add this: In our case, an archaic form of movement threw itself against an archaic form of state.... Millenarians could attack strategically, because they could see how the colonial machinery worked.... Ordinary actors possess a knowledge of social structure...the actors with whom we are concerned appreciate better than we moderns can what will happen in reality if a spirit speaks through someone's mouth or if Jesus sends a sign.... If Marx, a native in his own social world, could see beyond the symbols, what would stop a Shadrach [Sinkala, a Watchtower leader] from doing so? ...Shadrach learned to see the machinery "through struggle" as Marx would have said....

Hence the colonial state which "never moved to deploy force against groups of constitutionalist talkers," did so move against the millenarians.
A SECOND CASE STUDY: RECENT INTERPRETATIONS OF RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

It would be too laborious to traverse a similar sequence of interpretation for African independent churches in South Africa. It was in South Africa, after all, that the first systematic studies of such churches were made, and the subsequent literature is vast (Sundkler, 1948, 1961, 1976). Despite all this industry, however, something of the same impasse exists for South African religious movements that existed for Central African Watchtower before the intervention of Fields. On the one hand, various theories of the political or class radicalism of Zionism have not been sustained; on the other hand, the apparent alternative views of Zionist churches as purely religious or as passive false conciousness seem very unsatisfactory.

Yet the question of interpretation has been made more urgent by recent events and statements. In April 1985, for example, more than three million members of Lekganyane's Zion Christian Church (ZCC) gathered at Moria where they listened to an address from President P.W. Botha. Botha took the opportunity to deliver his own sermon on the interaction of religion and politics (Citizen, 8 April 1985):

The Bible had a message for the governments and the governed of the world, Mr. Botha went on. "Thus we read in Romans 13 that every person is subject to the governing authorities. There is no authority except from God. Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad conduct. Do what is good and you will recieve the approval of the ruler. He is God's servant for your good."

Lekganyane himself wrote in the first issue of The ZCC Messenger (April, 1985):

I am proud to make this announcement about my late father and grandfather; as the first Christian of Zion Christian Church must be taught to respect the laws of their chiefs, governments and of South Africa. This is the relevant key to peace. I also lead the members of the Church along the same footsteps. I believe in respect for authority.... Man cannot be a true follower of God without rendering due respect to the earthly governments, just as cheerfully as he obeys the higher laws of his God.... It is not for the individual to judge the law, it is for the individual to obey the law.

Meanwhile, members of South African independent churches have published a document "Speaking for Ourselves," reporting on a pilot study on thier history and theology (Ngada, 1985: 1, 3, 10, 25, 26):

Until now all the research and all the literature about the so-called "African Independent Churches" has been the work of outsiders. Anthropologists, sociologists and theologians...have been studying us for many years.... It is not surprising that we do not recognise ourselves in their writings.... They are full of misunderstandings, misconceptions and falsehoods. In trying to understand us outsiders suffer serious handicaps. They have their own frame of reference: the assumptions of anthropology or sociology or a Western theology. We find ourselves judged in terms of these norms.... The outsiders who study us and write about us do not only misunderstand us but they also
disagree amongst themselves about us. These authors present their readers with a bewildering variety of opinions....

There is one enormous omission throughout the whole history that has been written by outsiders. The work of the Holy Spirit throughout our history has simply been left out. The events of our history have been recorded as if everything could be accounted for simply by sociology and anthropology.... We would like to write our own history from the point of view of the Holy Spirit....

Everything comes from the Spirit of God. Our prophets are called by the Spirit and they dream dreams and see visions.... Our communities are sometimes accused of being too inward-looking and people ask about politics. It is difficult for us to know how to answer this question. The members of our Churches are the poorest of the poor.... We are what they call the "working class...." Our people, therefore, know what it means to be oppressed, exploited and crushed.... But we also know that God does not approve of this evil and that racial discrimination and oppression is rejected by the Bible. And so what do our people do about it? They join political organisations or trade unions and take part in the struggle for liberation. But it is a matter of individual choice.... Politics is not a Church matter. People meet together in our Churches to pray and to worship and to experience the healing of the Spirit. They go to political organisations in order to take action against the government.... The "Churches of the People" and the political organisations of the people have different roles to play.

What a challenge this document offers to outsiders who want to understand Zionism (Gray, 1986). Here if anywhere there is need for a non-denominational social science; for a treatment of Zionist religious culture in which they will recognize themselves, and yet which at the same time challenges the polarization of religion and politics on which they insist. None of the recent writers on South African independent churches would claim to have done this successfully. Nevertheless, much of the recent work will prove useful to Zionists who want to understand their past and their present.

Two books in particular advance understanding--the collection of essays by Colin Bundy and William Beinart (1986) and Jean Comaroff’s book on the Tshidi (1985). The two books come from very different directions. Bundy and Beinart come from the political economy school, Jean Comaroff from cultural and symbolic anthropology. Yet one can see these two tendencies beginning to converge.

Bundy and Beinart have the paradoxical advantage of not focusing especially on religious movements. They come across them among many other manifestations of rural consciousness and hence are not tempted to overstate the extent to which they uniquely or especially represent rural reactions to colonialism or capitalism. At the same time, they are able to avoid characterizing African peasants as victims of millennial mania. African religious movements in the work of Beinart and Bundy fit into a complex universe in which fractions of the peasantry, and sometimes the peasantry as a whole, are exploring ways of expressing their perceptions, aspirations and interests. In such a context religious movements make eminent sense, though
not in quite the same way as in Karen Fields' book. Bundy and Beinart's treatment of rural religion, in fact, is part of an overall attempt to rescue South African peasant societies from the neglect and condescension of a radicalism focused on the urban proletariat.

Just as Fields begins her book with a story, so Bundy and Beinart begin theirs in specificity--with a resolution of the 1928 session of the United Transkeian Territory Council, or Bunga, calling for an inquiry into "native unrest" and especially into the movement of populist religion associated with Wellington Buthelezi. They quote Councillor Charles Sakwe (Beinart and Bundy, 1986: 1) insisting that neither elite Africans nor white magistrates knew anything about the Wellington movement:

It was only the natives themselves who knew about the movement thoroughly, because it happened in their midst away in the locations.

The authors thus establish from the very beginning the manifest significance of rural religious movements, their local political character, and their remoteness from elite and official comprehension.

The societies in which such religious movements arose were complex (Beinart and Bundy, 1986: 3); 'proletarianism seeped rather than swept through the communities...people clung tenaciously to their rural identities'; the experience of labor migrants was "diffused back into a rural culture that was changing, but that remained deeply embedded in its pre-colonial past." Hence (Beinart and Bundy, 1986: 3-4):

Popular consciousness evinced complex and contradictory forms. New ideas and ideologies were intertwined with old...[in] an intricate imbrication of different vocabularies and symbols.... An individual might be appealed to as a peasant threatened with new taxes or loss of land; as a member of a former chiefdom or kinsmen in a local lineage; as an elder in a separatist church; or as a recently returned migrant.

The rural religious idiom was part of a spectrum of grassroots response and mobilization, and the way in which the different elements combined differed from time to time and from place to place. Each combination, say Beinart and Bundy, has to be reconstructed: "peasants and migrants have to be re-inserted as actors and shapers."

Yet some generalizations they do venture. One relates to rural differentiation in early twentieth century Transvaal. Here they argue that religious affiliation did not so much emerge out of and reflect class consciousness as assist in itself to define class. They discern (Beinart and Bundy, 1986: 11-12) four distinct social, cultural, and religious groupings. One consisted of "the educated elite, many of whom remained in the mission churches, and who were able to maintain their economic position through the storms and pressures of these years." Another consisted of the less well educated "members of the old loyal communites, often Christians, peasants, transport-riders and workers in small towns" who found it difficult to hold on to positions as craftsmen and who had no capital to invest in farming. Yet they "had the cost of a highly commoditised lifestyle to sustain and were often still attached to
incorporationist ideology." Bundy and Beinart believe that it was these communities in which "the impulses of radical separatist Christianity and Africanist thought took root and grew; their leaders sought to bridge the gap with the traditionalists through populist politics and the use of a common language of protest." The third group were the traditional leaders, chiefs and headmen. The fourth consisted of their followers, characterized by:

a cautious or selective traditionalism...rejecting Christianity and the assimilationist ideas that accompanied it [but] prepared to enter political alliances with Christians and radical Africanists when there were appropriate targets to fight.

The case studies which follow ring the changes on these four groups and four positions. In one the authors discuss the importance of the first wave of Ethiopian Africanist Christianity, which became central to the protest of substantial Qumbu peasant farmers under economic pressure in the 1890s and which briefly mobilized a wider constituency, but was then undercut by the return of the exiled paramount chief and the rise of ethnic politics. They discuss in another (Beinart and Bundy, 1986: 24-25) how "the second wave of religious independency in the Cape--which this time involved not only a split from the mission, but the formation of a new religion," opened the way in the 1920s "for the development of mass rural political movements which could bridge the conciousness of Christian and traditionalist underclasses." Taking the example of the Herschel district, they argue that the Wellington movement was a particular example of features common to many religious, secular, and traditional responses in the Transkei--"their radical separatism, attempts to boycott the state's institutions, to withdraw." They argue that this "radical separatism" was in no sense escapist, reactionary, or accomodationist even if it proved easier in the long run for the segregationist state to manipulate and distort it than for Congress, which still "thought of capturing the state," to make alliances with it. The only modern movement which came close to linking up with this style of rural conciousness was the Independent Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, whose activities in East London in the 1920s form the subject of another case study (Beinart and Bundy, 1986: 26). The ICU leaders were able to appeal:

to a tradition of local anti-colonial resistance, used African nationalist ideology, millenial and separatist church imagery, as well as dreams and prophecies rooted in Xhosa traditional culture.

Arising out of these case studies they come to some emphatic conclusions (Beinart and Bundy,1986: 27,35-36). Local political life in the Transkei displayed great "vitality, intensity and inventiveness"; it was characterized and in many ways defined by "struggle and resistance." Moreover:

The notion that rural communities were unable to "represent themselves" has to be modified. The local struggles constantly threw up intellectuals: individuals capable of expressing the economic, social and political interests of a social group.... Too much is sometimes made of the archaic or
primitive elements in rural politics.... Such millenial and archaic features that were present were almost always linked with more instrumental thinking.

Bundy and Beinart (1986: 37) conclude:

The 1920s saw an emergent popular culture which to some degree bridged town and countryside, farms and reserves, traditionalists and Christians. It fused elements of earlier thought with aspects of Graveyism, nationalism and independent Christianity, producing a new amalgam..."rural Africanism": it involved a struggle for local religious and political independence.

Bundy and Beinart's approach cannot, of course, be adopted for all African rural societies. If proletarianization seeped rather than swept through the Transkei it nevertheless colored African rural responses as it did not, for instance, in West Africa. In Beinart and Bundy's Transkei traditionalism is something of a residual category, which goes more or less unanalyzed; ethnicity an occasional variable. Independent churches in Nigeria, by contrast, represent themselves as communities with a cross-class membership rather than accepting, as the South African churches do, that their membership consists of the exploited, oppressed, and crushed. Many Nigerian prophetic churches, again, could hardly be characterized as part of a "radical separatism" since their prophetic leaders regularly intervene with prediction and advice at the very center of Nigerian politics (Amadi, 1982; Mullings, 1975, 1979; Peel, 1968). Moreover, even in the South African context, Karen Fields would no doubt find in these studies still too much of the old dichotomy between archaic and modern, millenial and instrumental. Bundy and Beinart (1986: 33) themselves admit that "the internal logic of popular consciousness is only partially disclosed," and this is perhaps especially true of its religious elements since they fall short of explaining just why it was religion which played the role they ascribe to it. They could certainly go further towards showing the sense of African religious images in themselves other than as part of an overall peasant ensemble of ideas. Nevertheless, they have put the topics of rural consciousness and rural agency--including rural religious consciousness and religious agency--firmly on the agenda for both South African historiography and for contemporary South African political analysis. And in particular they have shown that withdrawal was a political act rather than utopian escapism.

Jean Comaroff's new book (1985) sets out to do many of the same things as Bundy and Beinart's. She also endeavors to bring together a notion of rural stratification with exploration of forms of symbolic defiance. In other ways, though, her work has strength where Bundy and Beinart are weakest--and perhaps some weaknesses in the area of their greatest strengths. Where they take as their unit of study the whole of the Transkei, she focusses on the Tshidi, one Barolong chiefdom, which emerged as an independent polity at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Her concentration on this single unit and her reconstruction of Tshidi culture between 1800 and the first conjuncture with agents of colonialism in 1830, gives her a firm basis from which to analyze the internal logic of popular consciousness in its later manifestations. She achieves this without treating something called Tshidi culture in isolation--indeed the whole thrust of her book is to show it in interaction
with the encompassing colonial economic, political, and ideological system. Nor can she be accused of over-valuing traditional cultural purity since she goes to considerable lengths to demonstrate the sense in Tshidi synthetic and syncretic ideas.

At all stages religion is central to Comaroff's exposition. She begins with Tshidi religious ideas as they operated around 1830. She argues (Jean Comaroff, 1985: 42) that in their early contacts with colonialism:

"the Barolong peoples struggled to reproduce their socio-cultural forms. In response to repeated evictions from their territorial domains and to the destabilization of their productive base, the chiefdoms recreated their pre-existing socio-spatial arrangements and political order. These pre-colonial structural forms...continued to be reproduced as long as the indigenous leadership exercised control over the primary means of production."

Religion was crucial to the definition and operation of these pre-colonial forms:

"The relationship between the structural order and the world of everyday experience was mediated by a system of signs, whose silent language conveyed a repertoire of values and predispositions to living actors."

Comaroff (1985: 53) is anxious not to present a traditional Tshidi society as a self-perpetuating organism:

"Identity was manifestly problematic in many senses, and this was evident in the attention devoted to defining interpersonal relations by experts in the management of crisis. But such management also revealed a cosmology in which persons, spirit forces and material objects were interdependent. Human practice occurred within an axiomatic framework very different from the order of being subsequently projected by Protestantism with its concept of the reified individual."

There is certainly enough dynamism in her model (Jean Comaroff, 1985: 119) to allow for Tshidi religious ideas to play an active part in interactions with colonialism:

"In the nineteenth century system, communal rites played a major role in reproducing established systems of inequality and in managing the tensions they embodied. But ritual is never merely universal and conservative, papering over the cracks in the cause of hegemonic social forms. [For its] power may come to be used, under certain conditions, to objectify conflict in the everyday world, and to attempt to transcend it. This became particularly evident when engagement with the colonial system began to alter the precolonial order...to engender a discrepancy between dominant ideological forms and practical experience. As historical exigency introduced new contradictions and new orders of symbolic mediation, "traditional" ritual was to serve increasingly as a symbol of a lost world of order and control."

Comaroff argues (1985: 119-20) that in colonial situations novel symbolic orders come into being through a process of reorganization:
a *bricolage* which not only alters existing relations between signs, but also integrates them with others bearing forms and forces of external origin. Complexes of signs are thus disengaged from their former contexts and take on transformed meanings in their new associations.... We shall see, in the Tshidi case, how such syncretism...created a dynamic force-field in which the people themselves acted upon the circumstances of articulation.... The attempt to regain control over the practical world most frequently entailed implicit symbolic reformulation but it also took the form of concerted action through syncretic ritual.

She then turns (1985: 27, 30, 33) to the contrasting logic of missionary Methodism, arguing that:

the mission was an essential medium of, and forerunner to, colonial articulation; it was *the* significant agent of ideological innovation.... The coherent cultural scheme of the mission--its concepts of civilization, person, property, work and time--was made up of categories which anticipated and laid the ground for the process of proletarianization. [And yet] in time these categories would also provide the basis for expressions of resistance.... The style of evangelism which developed among the Tswana brought the Christian challenge *within* the bounds of the indigenous polity itself: not only did it introduce an ideological contrast which was to give new voice to existing internal cleavages; it also became the basis of the renegotiation of power relations.... The status of Methodism as "state church" was formally established, expressing the growing incorporation of the Tshidi into a colonial cultural discourse in which Protestantism was central.... [Methodism] not only mediated the process of proletarianization [but] also gave coherence to the black national culture emerging at this period.

Comaroff (1985: 143, 147, 155, 156) shows the transforming effect of literacy both on consciousness and on the Tshidi social system; she discusses the ideological element in the process of peasantization. Yet this was no mere triumph of capitalist over pre-capitalist modes of thought and action. What emerged were novel formations which were neither traditional nor capitalist and which challenged the dualist categories of conventional social science.

By thus demonstrating the interaction of traditional and Methodist religion in fundamental political and economic processes, and by thus pursuing her own argument of signs, Comaroff sets the context for the rest of her book, which is a discussion of Tshidi Zionism (1985: Part 3). As in Fields' Zambia, a Zionist cultural statement was bound in this context to be also a political statement. As in Bundy and Beinart's Transkei, many Tshidi reacted to the disillusionments of participation in the colonial economy by seeking to separate from it; to reconstitute collective identity in new ways. Thus (Jean Comaroff, 1985: 164, 166) many Tshidi "sought to disengage their local world from the exogenous structures that encompassed it, and to reconstitute a bounded community." But in doing so they by no means merely sought to revive traditional signs and structures. "For some of those most dispossessed by the neo-colonial system, the less orthodox forms of the western Protestant tradition were to provide the very basis for a more radical
expression of cultural resistance." Through Methodist Protestantism itself Tshidi had derived a symbolic language which enabled them to comprehend the colonial world and to achieve "an awareness of social differentiation—if not a consciousness of class." It was logical that when they sought to go beyond this and to establish an effective critique of Methodist assumptions themselves they should draw upon the counter-establishment sects of Europe and America.

Based as she now is in Chicago, Comaroff is in a strong position to pay more attention than most previous Africanists to the social and ideological origin of these sects. In a fascinating section (Jean Comaroff, 1985: 177-84) entitled "The Cultural Logic of the American Zion," she describes the emergence of John Alexander Dowie's Zion City, Illinois. She finds striking resonances between the story of Zion City and "the historical experience of such peripheralized peoples as the Tshidi"; a real overlap "between the cultural forms of the American church and the consciousness of black South Africans." Dowie's Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion drew its American following from impoverished urban groups in the Midwest (Jean Comaroff, 1985: 177):

Not only was there a structural equivalence between the two populations of the newly proletarianized dispossessed in South Africa and the United States, but both alike sought a language through which to protest the inappropriate image of themselves presented in the established church and in the dominant culture at large. Both cases, too, involve the expression of class conflict, not explicitly voiced or nicely articulated as class consciousness per se, but couched in the flexible symbols of Christian dissent.

Jean Comaroff discusses at length the force of Zionist ideology in such a context (1985: 179, 181-182):

God must acquire again the direct material power denied him by the orthodox churches, a power which would revitalize the children of Zion, and reverse the marginality and impotence brought upon them by an evil world.... The runaway urban world would be reclaimed again, its alienating logic replaced by that of the "original" theocracy.... [It was not surprising that] movements trying to reverse the experience of estrangement, and to protest the established ideologies, should do so in the idiom of physical illness...and seek a healing power both personalised and spiritualized.

Tshidi Zionism, then, was a particular manifestation of a global religious response; of an ideology peculiarly appropriate to people who stood in a peripheral relationship to capitalism and who were unable to perceive themselves clearly in class terms (Jean Comaroff, 1985: 188-89,191):

Orthodox Protestantism was now explicitly associated with the establishment, both local and national, while Zionism stood for the repudiation of hegemonies [expressing] the cleavage which set Tshidi peasant-proletarians off from the mainstream culture and from their bourgeois and petit bourgeois fellows.... The rise of Zionism marks the emergence, within a formerly unitary semantic universe, of a systematic counter-culture...associated with those estranged from the centers of power and communication.
Despite all appearances to the contrary, Zionism is *resistance*: "a purposive attempt to defy the authority of the hegemonic order."

As Comaroff writes (1985: 237-38), the Tshidi "structural pericardam is in no sense unique and, in general outline, [Tshidi] Zionism is strikingly similar to the creative responses of peoples elsewhere on the periphery of the European world." And yet Tshidi culture had continued to operate as a factor in the dialectical encounter, ensuring that Tshidi Zionism has its own very particular characteristics:

In the Tshidi case it was introduced into a sociocultural context whose indigenous elements were themselves undergoing re-alignment.... The Zion Christian Church represents a particular transformation of the Zionist order.

Thus (Jean Comaroff, 1985: 254), although "Zionism is part of a second global culture...lying in the shadow of the first, whose distinct but similar symbolic orders are the imaginative constructions of the resistant periphery of the world system," it has taken very specific forms among the Tshidi, which Comaroff illustrates by a contrast with Zulu Zion (Jean Comaroff, 1985: 255-58).

It would be fascinating to know what Bishop Barnabas Lekganyane would make of this account of the Zion Christian Church as resistance, or to have a response from Archbishop Ngada and the other members of the African Spiritual Churches Association--the authors of *Speaking for Ourselves*--to Jean Comaroff's book. No doubt they would find some of it difficult reading--it is always more straightforwardly lucid to perform signs than it is to write about them. There is in their own statement, however, an attempt to strike the balance between Anglo-American counter-establishment influences and their own cultural agency; a realization of correlation between membership of the Spiritual Churches and the "marginal and impotent" (Ngada, 1985)--"the members of our Churches are the poorest of the poor, the people with the lowest jobs or no jobs at all. When people become highly educated and begin to earn big salaries they usually leave our Churches." There exists in their statement, moreover, a tension between their insistence on the separation of religion and politics and their fascination with the idea of resistance (Ngada, 1985: 9, 27):

We found the history in the books very interesting and we learnt a lot but we also felt that there were gaps in this written history. Things that we felt it would be important to know about were left out or glossed over. What really happened at the Bambata Rebellion and what did the members of our Churches who took part have to say about it? What is the people's story about the events that led up to the massacre of the "Israelites" at Bulhoek?... In the early days before they were banned some active members of the ANC and PAC were also members of our Churches. And if we go even further back we find that during the Bambata Rebellion of 1906 many of those killed were members of our Churches. Sometimes our Churches themselves were suspected and persecuted by the authorities. We would like to study this aspect of our history more closely especially the notorious massacre at Bulhoek [where] the Church of the Israelites, led by Enoch Mgijima, seemed to have been involved in an armed conflict with the system.... What does this mean for our theology? We will have to do more study on this matter of religion and politics.
No doubt in this further study they will find the books of Bundy and Beinart and Jean Comaroff illuminating, perhaps especially for their demonstration that resistance need not take the form of armed conflict.

These two cases, then, the Central and the South African, have led in broadly the same direction. A similar movement can be seen elsewhere, though with significant variations depending on the intellectual tradition in which scholars are working and the characteristics of local African societies. For the Ivory Coast, for example, the leading anthropological pioneer, Marc Augé, operates out of a different intellectual tradition from Fields or Jean Comaroff but with something like the same objective. In the Preface to his *The Anthropological Circle*, for example, he defends the narrowness of his theoretical speculations in much the same way as I would have to defend my own selection of case studies (Augé, 1982: vii):

The reader will perhaps be surprised to find that, in my treatment of current anthropological perspectives, I have devoted the best part of this book to French authors and theoretical tendencies. I have chosen to speak of research in progress, of new and tentative approaches and of realignments that in some cases have hardly assumed a definite shape at all... In this respect my knowledge of recent or half-completed work, of provocative intellectual currents and theoretical developments abroad, cannot help but be less profound and less in touch, hence my focus on French research.... I would maintain that French anthropology...is at present assembling the basic elements for a novel reflection on the necessary conditions for, and a meaning of, a synthetic science, both anthropological and historical, of men in society.

Augé is critical of an ethno-scientific analysis of African cultures which privileges indigenous beliefs and presents tribesmen who "die better than we, live better than we, know better than we the secrets of both life and death and the mysterious texture of the real, and how to see and turn away from the sterile scheme of analytic thought." "Can the newspapers," he asks (Augé, 1982: 4), "have captured the full irony or drama of the followers of Lumumba or Mulele believing themselves to be bullet-proof if, now that they are dead, we allow ourselves the luxury of believing in the efficacy of their magic?" But he applies his own "synthetic science, both anthropological and historical" to profound cultural studies of Ivorian sects and their interaction with politics (Augé, 1982b).

Similarly, the major religious movement in the Ivory Coast--the Harris movement of the 1910s--has to be set in a different context from either Watchtower or Tshidi Zionism. So far from representing a reaction against the symbolic and ideological modes of mission Christianity, Harris' teaching constituted a preparation for it (Walker, 1979: 17-18):

It is not an exaggeration to say that all of the non-traditional institutions that presently exist in the southern Ivory Coast owe their origins or their establishment in the area, to the influence of the Prophet Harris.... Harris told the tens of thousands of people he baptized to go to church.... The number of people who sought membership in the Catholic church grew by leaps and bounds.... When the Protestant missionaries arrived in 1924...they were immediately overwhelmed by people seeking to join their churches.
Yet Sheila Walker, who has published the most penetrating study (1983) of the Harris movement and its political implications, argues that Harris' own mode of communication prepared not only for adherence to the missions but also, and simultaneously, for repudiation of them (Walker, 1979: 31):

The justification for...belonging to the Harrist Church comes not only from Harris's verbal message but also from his behavioural message, the cues of which counter-balanced some aspects of his verbal message... His verbal cues associated him with one cultural tradition and his behavioral cues with another.

Verbally Harris expounded Christian orthodoxy; behaviorally--in his attire, his ceremonials, his songs, his symbols--he articulated an argument of images which seemed to many to lead in other directions.

Harris himself, and those of his followers who joined the Harrist Church, could hold the verbal and the behavioral messages together but others could--or did--not (Walker, 1979: 50):

Whereas the Harrist Church is based on a combination of both Harris's verbal and behavioural messages, the other religious movements that developed as a result of Harris's activities reflect an almost total emphasis on his behavioural message. These movements took on much of the form of his activities without the essence of his intended content, thus understanding his message only partially. Taking on the form of his behavioural message, they clothed it with the traditionally oriented content that it suggested to them, rather than the fundamental Christian content that Harris had intended.

It seems likely, however, that what was involved here was not so much a misunderstanding; rather, there were many different directions in which to go after the fundamental rupture achieved by Harris. As Walker says (1979: 50), "All of the new religious groups do share the central elements of Harris's message: to cease worshipping the traditional deities and destroy the objects representing them."

None of the works I have discussed show African religious movements as essentially proto-nationalist or nationalist. In 1956 Amos-Djoro discussed Harris in a nationalist perspective in his *Prophetisme et Nationalisme Africains* (1956), but while Walker (1979: 27) describes the response to Harris as "the largest multiethnic mass movement in the Ivory Coast prior to the nationalist movement of the 1940s," she does not argue for any sequential connection. For Karen Fields, nationalism is the response to a later stage of Northern Rhodesian colonialism, one which seeks to base its hegemony on more secular, more explicitly political structures and ideologies. The separatist movements of the Transkei presented for Beinart and Bundy an acute and unsolved problem for the black nationalist tradition of South Africa. Local representatives of that nationalist tradition were often the specific targets of rural separatism and central nationalist leaders were rarely able to comprehend or link up with the assumptions of separatist ideology. In Jean Comaroff's book, little is said about nationalism as such, but the whole thrust of it is to present a picture of a consciousness which certainly is resistant, yet not in class or nationalist terms.
Nevertheless, it is obvious that if the religious movements described in these studies have not been in any way nationalist, they have been eminently political in other senses. Each makes sense as a combined cultural/ideological/social/political response to its situation. For Walker, the Harris movement made sense as a repudiation of a multitude of small-scale and ineffective cults and polities. For Fields, the Watchtower movement in Northern Rhodesia made sense as the natural response to a particular form of colonial ideological hegemony. For Bundy and Beinart, the various Transkeian movements made an excellent instrumental sense as a response to and critique of the rural political economy of South Africa in the 1920s. For Comaroff, Tshidi Zionism was the form of consciousness most appropriate to a peripheral relationship to colonial political economy and culture. As each author shows, however, if such movements made sense, they did not make the only available sense, nor satisfying sense for everybody. We are nowhere dealing with single, homogenous rural cultures or societies—in the Transkei, for example, neither Ethiopianism nor apostolic church separatism in the 1920s were majority responses in the districts concerned, and what fascinates Bundy and Beinart is the depth of conflict in rural society. Hence the politics in which such movements are imbricated are by no means solely or even mainly responses to colonial political economy and culture; they are also very much the politics of contestation between African groupings within the rural areas themselves. Moreover, such movements have their own politics in the sense that they generate power and flows of patronage which are eminently worth contesting for. In addition to contestations for leadership within religious movements, there are also the different expectations and experiences of their male and female members. The sense that these movements make for their own members is multiple and mutable.

Complex and ambiguous as these movements are, however, all the authors cited agree that they are not therefore to be consigned to the pre-political, the irrational, the realm of false consciousness. For one thing, all movements, including overtly political ones, are complex and ambiguous. For another, if African religious movements are difficult to articulate with nationalism, or with secular revolutionary parties, this is as much a critique of nationalist or socialist perceptions, or of their class character, as it is a critique of the backwardness of peasant consciousness. If academics have found them difficult to understand this has been due not so much to their incoherence as to the restrictive assumptions of academic inquiry itself. As Jean Comaroff concludes (1985: 263) "the fact that the oppressed are frequently forced to raise their voice their protests in domains seemingly marginal to the real exercise of power made them 'primitive' and 'pre-political' only to a vulgar, ethnocentric social science." She adds that peoples like the Tshidi constitute a challenge to the academic world, since their histories "lie not only in the shadow of the modern world system, but of the mode of social inquiry it has generated."

Each of these works, then, is a conscious challenge to established methods and propositions: as Augé writes (1982: vii), "while I have no intention of repudiating the official canon, I take it that these new approaches do supersede it and that they delineate a possible future for a critical analysis of the logics of social institutions." Taken collectively they may harden into a new orthodoxy, which will generate challenge in its own turn. There is plenty to be gained, however, from further refinement and application of these approaches before that next challenge arises.
Maybe there has been a circularity of argument sometimes, with religious movements making so much sense that they seem not only understandable but inevitable as responses to this or that colonial culture or political economy. Maybe there has not been enough consideration of religious movements which have failed to make a creative response and which have constituted dangerous dead ends. In general, though, the new work has opened up exciting prospects for the study of religious movements and politics in sub-Saharan Africa.

EXTENDING THE ARGUMENT BEYOND MOVEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INDEPENDENCY

Up to this point, this review has focused mainly on movements of African independent Christianity. In order to situate these, all the authors cited have written at length about mission Christian churches, but usually to set up the contrast with the dynamic movements which are their main concern. As for African traditional religion, it is too often seen merely as providing legitimacy for the pre-colonial establishment. In Fields' book (1985) it features mainly as the ideology of tribal patriarchalism, though elsewhere Fields, (1982c) conducts a much more complex discussion. In Bundy and Beinart's book (1986) traditional religion serves much the same role, though it also provides mythic themes to which radical trade union leaders make appeal. For Walker (1983) conservative traditional religion contrasts with the dynamic institution of the Harris Church. Even in Jean Comaroff's treatment (1985), and despite her insistence on its participation in dialectic interaction, traditional religion largely represents pre-colonial solidarities and subsequent nostalgia for them rather than being shown as capable of dynamic change in itself.

And yet the concept of religious movements can hardly leave out either mission churches or traditional religions. If both are for much of the time establishments, for some of the time both can generate movements.

MISSION CHRISTIANITY AS A MOVEMENT: MOVEMENTS WITHIN MISSION CHRISTIANITY

Two phases in the history of mission Christianity in Africa seem particularly appropriate to classification as movements. One of these is the initial expansion of Christianity. Another is the phenomenon of Revival, whether in its first phase under the leadership of evangelistic missionaries or in its second phase under the leadership of African members of the mission churches.

An oddity of much recent historiography of early mission Christianity is that it has greatly overplayed the manifest political and economic factors in its expansion and has greatly underplayed the cultural and religious. In case after case we have been told how chiefs or elders accepted missionaries for political advantage or economic gain, but few historians of East, Central, or Southern Africa have explored the attraction of Christian rites and symbols or the emergence of a Christian culture. Even the formal church historians, writing from within the missionary societies, have emphasized institutional achievements, the build-up of schools and clinics and have hardly discussed the impact of missionaries and their African catechists on the cultural imagination of Africans.
The exception to this has been the historiography of Africa's western coast and its interior, where Christianity manifestly spread as a movement before colonialism. Ann Hilton's (1985) recent history of the kingdom of Kongo brilliantly discusses the way in which Catholic Christianity intervened in the Kongolesse argument of images, and also the way in which precisely because of its mythic and symbolic power it came to play a crucial political role as a royal cult. The nineteenth century history of the "Christian Movement" in West Africa has been explored as a major topic ever since the rise of schools of Nigerian historiography. It was the subject of the early books of Kenneth Dike (1957), Jacob Ajayi (1965) and E.A. Ayandele (1966). The idea that Christianity and Islam spread because of their ideas and forms co-incided with the internal dynamics of African intellectual and symbolic change has generated perhaps the best known controversy in African religious studies (Fisher, 1973; Horton, 1970, 1971, 1975; Horton and Peel, 1976). The topic continues to preoccupy younger West African historians such as Kalu (1980) and Sanneh (1983). Sanneh, for instance writes (1983: xi-xviii):

To fuse the theme of the African religious response with the political theme and annex it as a sub-plot of the great nationalist cause is to overlook the explicit religious concerns of those concerned.... The African religious response to Christianity seems clear and consistent enough to deserve serious attention. This means interpreting the history of Christianity by reference to African religious models, with local African agency as an indispensable link in the historical chain of transmission.... Africans presided over the momentous changes of the time with competence and foresight.... We devote our time to the real business of investigating the process whereby Africa captured [Christianity] for herself.

Christianity spread through East, Central, and Southern Africa in different circumstances and in the context of colonial and settler power. Nevertheless, there is much evidence that early Christianity even in these areas spread like other African religious movements--through rumors of prophecy and healing, by seizure of those Christian rites and symbols which resonated most in a particular society, often accompanied by an enthusiastic surrender of charms and medicines. Thus in addition to the importance of early missionaries in political history of African kingdoms and chiefdoms we have to add the more diffused political significance of early Christianity as a popular movement. In some cases the Christian movement took on the character of a witchcraft eradication cult and was used by young men to immobilize the power of chiefs and diviners. In other cases the unofficial African evangelists, often returned migrant laborers pushing ahead of the missionary frontier, used the powerful symbols and rituals of their new religion to set up their own villages and to become headmen in their own right. Nationalist historians have often emphasized that most of the early Christian expansion was the work of African mission agents rather than of missionaries (Temu, 1972). All too often, however, such nationalist historians have disregarded the transformative character of the Christian argument of images. As Robert Strayer writes (1978: 2), in his study of the reception of Christianity in Kenya:

Nationalist historians had largely ignored the mission-African interaction at the level of religious encounter, in part at least in an effort to reaffirm the
validity of traditional religious systems against European presumptions of the superiority of Christianity.... Yet we now know that the expansion of Christianity in Africa had important religious dimensions as both individuals and societies found on occasion in the immigrant religion symbols, techniques and ideas which seemed appropriate to meeting old needs and which could facilitate their adjustment to the new and wider world increasingly impinging upon them.

Recent historians have shown, for example, that in parts of eastern and southern Africa the Christian movement was headed by outstanding prophetic figures, independent of formal attachment to any mission church. Harris in the Ivory Coast has a strange parallel in the Nsikana in the early nineteenth century Cape (Hodgson, 1980, 1984). Janet Hodgson (1980: 3-4) describes how:

early one morning, as he was admiring his cattle in the kraal, he saw a bright ray of light from the rising sun strike the side of his favourite ox, Hulushe.... When Nsikana took his family to a dance at a neighbouring kraal...a raging wind arose out of a clear sky forcing all the dancers to stop. Tradition has it that he now became aware that the Holy Spirit had entered into him.

She also contrasts his role as prophet of the Christian movement with that of Nxele, leader of a millenial resistance movement (1980: 2):

Nsikana's Christianity emphasised grace for change within the material and historical order, while Nxele is thaumaturgical and millenarian, seeking new ways of obtaining power within his old world of reference.

Plainly, though, both prophets and their movements could and should be analyzed in the same sort of way.

These sort of interventions in the African argument of images, however, were not only made by African evangelists or prophets. The division we usually make between the ethnocentric and ignorant early missionary and his bewildered black audience often distorts the imaginative realities of the encounter. Some early white missionaries are remembered in the oral history of African churches as wonder-working prophetic figures hardly distinguishable from African prophets themselves, and as capable of achieving the same symbolic/political transformations. Take, for example, Wyatt MacGaffey's (1983: 28-30) fascinating account of the "Pentecost of the Congo." MacGaffey describes the incursion of the Free State administration; the European take-over of trade; the disappearance of chiefs, who had been "the managers and beneficiaries of the economy of prestige goods"; the disappearance of local cults of simbi spirits of the land. "The people of Mbanza Manteke interpreted their new situation in religious terms and in 1896 they began to convert to Protestant Christianity"; there was "a crisis of conversion" along the trade routes. Yet "the Pentecost was nevertheless a conversion not just a political maneuver." The change in the political situation was accompanied by a change in missionary style. By 1886 the Baptist missionary, Richards, could speak fluent Kikongo, and he began to make dramatic contact with the Kongo religious imagination (MacGaffey, 1983: 29):
At first I went to work the wrong way [wrote Richards]. My first idea was to teach the heathen the folly of idolatry.... At the end of six years I had not a convert. Then in bitterness of spirit I prayed and searched the Scriptures, and noted what the apostles did, and began to follow their example.... They preached Christ and Him crucified. They kept to the one point.... They were to proclaim repentance and remission of sins through Him. Not a hundred things. One thing--Christ and Him crucified. When I preached *that* day by day week by week, then speedily I saw a glorious change! Then I felt clothed with power.... The results were marvelous...soon the converts were numbered by hundreds.

MacGaffey remarks (1983: 30) that "since indigenous cults were all based on the idea of successful visits to the land of the dead, the new message may indeed have been more acceptable than the old." He also remarks that (MacGaffey, 1983: 3):

My informants in Manteke emphasized, in speaking of Richards, a cluster of traits appropriate to what was later called a prophet (*ngunza*), and some of them explicitly and spontaneously so labeled him. He was known from the first as a healer.... People believed that he could control the weather.

And MacGaffey pulls together the religious and socio-political dimensions of the Pentecost (1983: 31-32):

The clearest fact about the Pentecost is that it expressed popular acceptance of a new social order which promised forever to defend the people against witchcraft. They burned all their fetishes.... Mass capitulations of the Pentecostal type occurred at other Protestant stations at about the same time, and continued into the 1930s as new areas came under mission influence.

In short, as others have done with independent sects, MacGaffey demonstrates that to penetrate the real political significance of the early missionary movement one has to understand its behavioral as well as its verbal message.

In many parts of Africa, then, there were periods of rapid grass-roots Christian growth during which the whole atmosphere was that of an African religious movement. Thereafter, the structures and institutions of the mission churches hardened, though even then a vigorous popular Christianity often bubbled beneath the surface. Many scholars have argued that African independent churches arose in reaction against the institutional rigidities of mission Christianity. What has been much less noticed is that movements of independency almost nowhere swept the mission churches away. There was a rallying by African mission Christians. In many places independency was countered by movements of revival from within the mission churches, led by African Christians and expressive of the dynamic values of popular Christianity. Often these mission revivals were as enthusiastic as any prophetic movement, sweeping across wide areas like wild-fire and giving the colonial authorities the same anxieties as the Zionist and Apostolic movements.  

John Iliffe (1979) has set the context for such movements in colonial Tanganyika. The setting for them was "the crisis of colonial society" which was initiated by the Depression (Iliffe, 1979: 356, 358, 359, 360):
As colonialism lost momentum, so the colonisers' vision of the future lost its credibility to themselves and their subjects.... Disillusionment was expressed most clearly in Christianity.... The [churches] had been created through conflict with African societies, generally by appealing to the underprivileged, especially the young. By the 1930s this relationship with society was changing and the mission churches were becoming increasingly integrated with colonial society. They were experiencing the problems of large organisations--authoritarianism, bureaucracy, impersonality.... The church itself was aging as the young rebels who had been early catechists became entrenched as Fathers.... Mission churches were no longer the vanguards of progress....

As the European vision of the future faded, so African Christians sought one for themselves. They chose three approaches: independency, revival, and eclecticism.

Iliffe briefly discusses (1979: 361-63) Tanganyika's five independent churches. But "far more important than independency to Tanganyika's history was Revival." Iliffe describes (1979: 364-65) how Revival was brought from Rwanda by evangelists and traders and how it came to influence almost every Protestant church. He brings out (1979: 364) the atmosphere of this African religious movement:

In Bukoba the movement took a classical revivalist form. Itinerant preachers demanded public confession of sins. Those "saved" formed local cells which remained within the mission churches but met separately for prayer and fellowship.... Revival was a "reaction against the factors of disengagement in the Church."

Against worldliness and institutionalisation balokole set the anarchy of personal experience. The movement spread chiefly by being fetched from village to village, much as villagers fetched maji or a witchcraft eradicator's medicine.

Iliffe emphasizes that Revival was "a designedly egalitarian movement," critical both of white missionaries and "the early converts who controlled the church."

Ian Linden's treatment of the Revival in Rwanda also stresses both its egalitarianism and its dialectic of interaction with, and opposition to, traditional African religious movements (1977: 203-6):

The center of the movement was on the Rwanda-Uganda border, among the Kiga and in Nدورwa, in the very region that had for decades produced Nyabingi prophetesses. From the first, response...fell within the tradition of the shamans. As hundreds of Kiga flocked to church, some believing that the Second Coming was imminent, the revival became increasingly independent of mission control.... The revival movement, which spread through eastern Rwanda to Burundi from 1937 to 1942 was a translation of the CMS teaching on the radical sinfulness of man...into the idiom of witch-calling and Nyabingi shamanism.... Groups with a core of CMS members toured the hills, holding prayer meetings and seeking confessions....

The feeling of being imbued with a malign force, the account of guilt given by Abaka (Revivalists) and sought from others, was partly anxiety caused by contemporary social and political upheavals and partly a product of the
Catholic monopoly of chiefly office. Catholic chiefs used the whip freely on the peasantry.... A consciousness of being the oppressed outsiders of Catholic Rwanda was heightened by their acceptance of the CMS view that Catholicism was a nominal and superficial form of Christianity.... The movement appeared as a dialectical resolution of their experience of a basic conflict between righteousness and wickedness.... This enlargement of scale was unacceptable to the CMS missionaries; they had only meant evil to be treated in its private, individual, familial context.

It is plain that both the original grass-roots diffusion of Christianity and the subsequent Revival movements had dramatic cultural and political importance. Less dramatic but also important have been other sorts of movement within the mission churches. Fathers Mertens and Singleton, carrying out a survey of the Catholic Church in Western Nigeria in the early 1970s (Mertens and Singleton, 1974), were struck by the existence within it of "an equivalent to basic communities: the voluntary associations amongst Catholic lay people. We are not speaking of the classical forms of Catholic Action--the Legion of Mary, St. Vincent de Paul Societies, and so on--but of the myriads of small groups of Catholic associations with which the priest is only related peripherally." In these "wildcat associations" they saw the best hope for a combination of cultural, social, and political action. Better known than these Catholic lay associations have been various Protestant lay movements, and in particular women's guilds. These uniformed regiments of women, with their enthusiastic idioms of expression, of public confession, of inspiration by the Holy Spirit, of all night prayer, have articulated in their argument of images a good deal of the history of rural women's consciousness and a good deal of the history of rural domestic politics (Brandel-Syre, 1962; Gaitskell, 1982; Steady, 1978; Stuart, n.d.a). More recently still have been charismatic movements within some of the mainline churches, such as the movement of healing exorcism which swept through the Anglican church in Tanzania in the 1970s at a time when the movement into large consolidated ujamaa villages had greatly intensified individual, family and communal tensions.

The fact that these various movements within the mission churches have received so much less attention than movements of Christian independency is merely one aspect of the imbalance which affects the literature. Prophetic and independent church movements have seemed more authentically African, more rebellious, more exotic than churches of mission origin--even though, as we have seen in the cases of Kamwana and of Tshidi Zionism, many independent church movements were themselves inspired by Euro-American sectarian Protestantism. As we have seen also in the case of the Revival, many mission churches could generate enthusiasms which resonated profoundly with the consciousness of rural Africans. A stimulating protest against this kind of imbalance has been made by Norman Etherington (1983: 122, 125):

While the study of religion in Africa flourished as never before in the 1970s and Christianity went from triumph to triumph, few scholars showed much interest in writing the history of missions.... As an object of historical study...the bewildering array of independent churches that have arisen during the last hundred years...interest more than the black theologians and missionaries who have recently accorded them an unprecedented respect.
They also fascinate secular scholars as examples of "African initiative" and articulators of ideologies of resistance.

By contrast, no single book "offers all of what modern scholars might ask of a comprehensive mission history."

Etherington lays down the minimal conditions for such a comprehensive history (1983: 128):

We look for a sensitive understanding of the traditional religions encountered by European missionaries and hope that this will be balanced by an equally informed account of missionary theology.... We want to know as much as possible about the social origins of both evangelists and converts. We wish for as much information about the political economy as about the politics of the society in question. And we anticipate that the relationship between church and state will be traced through all its vicissitudes from the first encounter with precolonial black authority to the readjustment required by decolonization.

Etherington finds only one book that has met all these conditions to date--Ian Linden's *Church and Revolution in Rwanda* (1977).

It is indeed a strength of Linden's book that he is able to deal not only with the diffused politics of movements but also, and centrally, with the politics of church and state. The book's subject (Linden, 1977: 2) is "the Catholic Church and Rwanda's changing political system"; the ways in which:

the stratification of Rwandan society accentuated the inherent contradictions in Catholicism, between the egalitarian ideology of Christian brotherhood and the centrality to salvation of a hierarchically organised institution through which Grace flowed from the top downwards.

Linden's strength is not so much with the popular argument of images as with the relationship of Catholic theology and social thought to Rwandan politics. He deals not so much with culture in Karen Fields' sense as with the political uses of Catholic culture history (1977: 4-5):

The successful conversion of the Tutsi in the 1930s meant that myths of Christian brotherhood temporarily gave way before the triumphalism of a Tutsi-dominated church.... Segregation was explained largely in Thomist terms as a necessary and natural difference of function in an organic society.... Yet the Tutsi no longer owned the means of coercion. They had to rely on manipulation of the political and judicial system.... It is perhaps in this context that the cultural renaissance of the 1940s and the historiography of colonial Rwanda should be seen: not so much the discovery of a national heritage as the quest of a weakened ruling class for new sources of solidarity and unity. It was the Roman Catholic church, Rwanda's First Estate, which wiped away the nobles' tears and eased them into their new role as Rwanda's guardians.

Linden writes of Catholic "Hamitic" histories which presented Rwanda's pre-colonial history "as the type of an African Old Testament."
Linden's most striking effects arise from this sense of the political consequences of religious ideas. The White Fathers professed a doctrine of separation of church and state and repudiated any political motives. But they were operating in a society where such distinctions made no sense and in which they were themselves tempted by visions of an earlier age of European church history (Linden, 1977: 59):

By leaving nineteenth century Europe, where the distinction existed in practice, imposed on a reluctant Church by secular states, the Fathers were able to see the past century of European history as an aberration.... The spiritual gold rush in which they staked the first claims had as its dreams the Golden Age of Church history. In the dream [King] Musinga appeared in the role of Charlemagne.

Hence "the question was not whether the Fathers would become politically involved but how they would become involved." Inevitably they were drawn into networks of patronage and inequality (Linden, 1977: 61):

Sacramentality, the way God was in the world with men, could not be divorced from the essential hierarchy of the Church, the subordination of its different orders. The conscious goal of the missionaries, therefore, remained the planting of a precise social institution through which Grace could trickle and then pour down on their African converts.

By contrast Protestantism seemed like a subversive movement, threatening institutional solidarities (Linden, 1977: 156):

Protestant education...ignores the special character of our primitive races [wrote a Catholic colonial administrator] and hands out a spiritual food which revolutionises their way of thinking, creates anarchy...and gives rise to extreme individualism, which tends of necessity to destroy the precious gregarious spirit of our blacks that alone can realise and maintain that latent voluntary and collective submission which is indispensable to all civilising work.

All this is the politics of religious culture at the center rather than at the periphery, of structure rather than of movement. The point of Linden's book, however, is the dialectic between center and periphery, structure and movement. It is precisely this characterization of establishment Catholicism which gives Linden's analysis of the Revival its force.

If I were to nominate, like Etherington, a work on a mission church which best seemed to me to come close to the full range of political possibilities in a mission context, I would choose Richard Stuart's unfortunately unpublished account of the Anglican church in Malawi (Stuart, 1974). In one of his papers Stuart (1985) explores the macro-politics of the eastern shore of lake Nyassa, where Anglican missionaries operated in Portuguese colonial territory; like the White Fathers in Rwanda, the Anglicans repudiated any political intent--"We are here to teach Xtianity not politics"--but nevertheless acted as allies of the African population against the excesses of Portuguese rule, and produced a popular Anglican Christianity in the same sort of conscious opposition to the Portuguese colonial regime as CMS
Christians on the eastern borders of Rwanda were to Catholic Tutsi feudalism. It was no accident that African Anglicans were later to give such active support to FRELIMO.

In other papers Stuart explores the micro-politics of the Anglican impact on the matrilineal societies of Central Malawi, where the spread of Christianity often assumed the dimensions of a popular movement (Stuart, 1979: 56-57):

> It was a result of an African response to the sudden collapse of the old order, with many turning to the missions in a religious and political attempt to come to grips with the rapid developments of the previous decades.

But for the matrilineal Chewa, hitherto isolated, "such a macrocosmic response was impossible." Here the politics of Anglican conversion, with its advocacy of patrilineal monogamy led to a dramatic undermining of the authority of male matrilineal lineage guardians, and to an intense moral/political conflict (Stuart, 1979: 61):

> The aggressive and powerful mission pushed the ankhoswe [lineage guardians] into an impossible position. Soon the first catechumens were selected. Large crowds attended the Sunday preaching, permanent churches were consecrated and networks of outstations begun.... The teachers exposed nyau [male secret societies] and cinamwali [female initiation ceremonies] to the ridicule of their young students, which threatened both the situation of the headman and the transmission of Chewa culture. Such threats to the village structure of Chewa society from Phiri and Ngoni centralisers had been countered in the past by village headmen who "controlled" the nyau societies. In theory, the dancers were not human beings, but virombo, or wild beasts...not responsible for their actions.... Nyau attacked mission adherents, poisoned wells and even stole an altar cloth from a church to demonstrate hostility and to frighten off the mission teachers.

As Stuart (n.d.a.) shows, similar confrontations--cultural, symbolic, political--arose over conflicting concepts of evil and redemption as well as over conflicting concepts of family and marriage:

> The Anglican missionaries saw their duty as the freeing of Africans from the bonds of superstition and mutual suspicion, and so they set out to destroy the complex of Chewa sorcery beliefs without realising its importance in the structure of Chewa society.

This led to clashes with chiefs and headmen whose authority rested partly on their control of ordeals and of divination. Stuart also shows, however, that the Anglican teaching on liberation from sin and guilt was very attractive to many; its appeal was an element in the grass-roots Christian movement in Nyasaland; and subsequent disillusionment with Anglicanism and a turning to witchcraft eradication movements like Mchape represented not only doubts about the Anglican doctrine of evil but also resentment at the growing social stratification of the Christian community. Prosperous Christian farmers and businessmen seemed to have learned how to be witches: neither they nor anyone else was giving protection against witchcraft to ordinary Christians.
Finally, Stuart shows (n.d.a) that the politics of Anglicanism in Malawi was not only a matter of tensions between the church and the Portuguese or the ankhoswe, nor only a matter of the aspirations and then the disillusionment of the Christian movement. Some Africans could take advantage of the associational potentialities within the church to recover their morale and improve their political position. He illustrates this with an account of the women's movement, the Mpingo wa Amai, the Mothers' Union, which (Stuart, n.d.a: 36):

was particularly effective in the restoration of the status of Christian women, and the adaption of female initiation rites to changed conditions, transforming both from a limited, lineage-centered to a Christian context.

Work of this kind is beginning to make mission Christianity as interesting to historians of rural politics and consciousness as independency has been.

RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS FROM WITHIN AFRICAN 'TRADITIONAL' RELIGION

African traditional religion also has not often been thought of in terms of movements. Rather, as in Jean Comaroff's treatment of the Tshidi, African religious ideas and institutions have been seen--with all their variations and apparent contradictions--as constitutive of an overall "authoritative model of the society as a whole." In one sense African religion is treated as profoundly political since it underlies those centralized institutions that underpin the division of labor and legitimates indigenous leadership (Jean Comaroff, 1985). In such a perspective, however, it is not really until the colonial incursion, when new ideologies of leadership and new divisions of labor are established, that African religions can be seen to shift from the center and thus become available to inspire religious movements. In this sense, the literature on movements of traditional religious inspiration ties them even more closely to the colonial epoch and to anti-colonialism than the literature on Christian independency. Jean Comaroff's letter of rejoinder to an earlier draft of this review certainly makes a valid point:

My difficulty lies in the assumption that institutions and processes can be neatly divided in terms of the static dominance of an establishment and of dynamic quests for change... I believe that at that point of Tshidi history [the immediate pre-colonial period] the predominant project of established power was to impose as stable a definition as possible upon a somewhat fluid reality, and to this end 'religious' ideology came into play. But such periods of reproduction, here and elsewhere, are themselves the outcome of a dynamic process.... I suppose I regard all religious practice as dynamic in this sense, whether or not its aims and/or consequences involve radical change.... So the question of what is and is not a 'movement' is often complicated, and the real underlying issue seems to be the interrelation of 'religious' symbols and practices and the exercise of power--power in both its established and more peripheral forms.
The point is taken. Still, although an over-simplifying concept in itself, the search for movements in pre-colonial Africa may be useful precisely because it helps to establish the dynamic nature of "all religious practice." Take, for instance, Iris Berger's account of *Religion and Resistance* (1981) in pre-colonial East African kingdoms. Berger begins by challenging static concepts of establishment traditional religion (1981: 1):

Until recently, accepted disciplinary boundaries left studies of precolonial African religion to missionaries and anthropologists. Historians...tended to concentrate on reconstructing political events and patterns. Thus most aspects of culture, including religion, remained beyond the scope of historical investigation, and numerous problems concerning the relationships between politics, ideology and religious beliefs remained unresolved. Studies of the early colonial period, for example, showed the active role of religious-based organizations and ideologies in mobilizing people to rebel against foreign rule; but they told little about the previous history of similar resistance movements. This academic division of labour probably reflected a hesitancy to seek patterns of change in institutions whose label of "traditional" indicated an archaic, time honored and hence stable quality.

She focuses on the protest role of *mbandwa* and *nyabingi* spirit possession cults over several centuries. But she ends (Berger, 1981: 90):

The polarities of protest vs establishment do not fully describe lacustrine religious history. For *kubandwa*, as a complex system of religious beliefs, ceremonies, and symbols, operated in diverse ways on different social levels, allowing local religious patterns to retain a certain independence from national developments. Locally, *kubandwa* remained a democratic, predominantly female organization...it formed the female counterpart of male worship of immediate lineage ancestors, and embodied a sense of women's opposition to male-dominated social systems. On a regional and national level, however, its officials worked together with political authorities and formed part of the organizational apparatus of the state. Finally, on an ideological level, as expressed both in myth and symbol, traditions retained a strong sense of ambivalence about the relationship between deities and dynasties. Although on the surface most national legends supported dynastic claims, symbolically and thematically they usually retained the memory of religious opposition to state systems.

The richness and longevity of *kubandwa* probably derives from its embodiment of many contradictory elements. While in certain ways it was local, popular, creative and opposed to state authority, it was in other respects, formalized and nationally oriented. In times of relative stability the contradictions co-existed; but the continuing strength of small scale, localized religious organizations and perpetuation of myths that expressed a tradition of opposition to dynastic authority, meant that in periods of more intensive transformation and disorder, particularly those involving efforts to impose new centralized authorities, the elements of resistance and innovation could easily become dominant.6
In a similar way T.C. McCaskie (1981, 1983a, 1983b, 1983c) has reacted both to the consensus view of Ashanti religion enunciated by most anthropologists and to the counter stress on secular rationality by historians such as Ivor Wilks (1975). McCaskie himself has sought to correct this sterile opposition which prevents a genuine social history of Asante. As he writes (McCaskie, 1983c: 4-6, 10-11):

To the social anthropologists Asante religion was construed as an intellectual extension of the idea of consensus.... As concept the social anthropologists' interpretation of religion is the Asante elite's view of the imposition of cultural hegemony.... The main thrust of historical endeavour over the past twenty years has been devoted to the analysis of the "rationality" of the Asante political elite.... What historians would not touch, and for the most part still will not, were the muddy issues of cognition, belief, unknowing, confusion and apparent "irrationality". And when historians did touch on belief and religion it was with a dead hand every bit as mechanistic as that deployed by the social anthropologists.... Behind every cult and sect lay a rational programme of social protest; behind every prophet or syncretist lay a well thought out, radical, often millenarian, critique of the existing social order--and if colonialism could be thrown in the mix so much the better....

Asante religious belief is more complex than we have allowed.... McCaskie argues that the priest Anokye, supposed creator of the Golden Stool, "is a purely ideological construct, a metaphor of elite power." Yet in his very expression as ideology, "Anokye has ordained vital oppositional constructs." The Asante state was too powerful to allow for revolts or riots, but "this political hegemony did not prevent individuals from taking on the state at the level of religio-cultural ideology."

Similar insights are available also for Central Africa. There are for example a series of studies by Matthew Schoffeleers (1968, 1972, 1974, 1975, 1977a, 1978a, 1978b, 1980, 1985) of the Mbona cult of Southern Malawi--a cult which functions most of the time as an institution but which gives rise on occasion to movements. Schoffeleers suggests a three-fold model for the historical operation of the cult, in which the operative parties are the chiefs, the priests of the cult and the people. In its normal operation the cult is run by the priests as agents of the chiefs, with mediums of Mbona's spirit kept firmly under bureaucratic control. In periods of weak chiefs but little public discontent the priests advance their own authority, retaining tribute and building up hereditary claims. Within the martyr-myth of the cult, however, is contained the potentiality of protest. In periods of public unease and of criticism of chiefs pressure arises from below, demanding that one or more of the Mbona mediums assume the role of prophet and inaugurate a movement of purification which is at once religious and political. Within the overall dynamics of the cult, therefore, there is a regular oscillation from established religious institution to protest movement, and back again, as legitimacy is restored and proper chiefly rule resumes. Such movements arose in pre-colonial times in periods of unusual chiefly autocracy or social disruption; they have arisen in the twentieth century as protests against chiefs too zealous in their commitment to colonial improvements or against wealthy cattle-owners whose random grazing of their beasts has prejudiced the rights of cultivators.
Again, there is the varied work of John Janzen--author of the most penetrating study of the history of an African movement, the Lemba cult of equatorial West Africa (Janzen, 1979b, 1982). In various books and articles, Janzen (1974, 1977, 1979a) has discussed the phenomenon of renewal in Bakongo religion. Janzen (1977: 69) rejects the idea of a sharp break in Kongo culture history at the time of the Belgian colonial occupation, before which one can deal with "pure tradition" and after which one has to deal either with "the colonial degradation itself, or with the reaction to the colonial impact." In too much of the literature, he remarks (1977: 76), African religious movements are depicted as a product only of this second period:

Colonialism enters the picture and upsets the balance; a new balance is attempted which includes the messianic or nativistic movements which are reactions to the colonial presence and lead to a synthesis which we then see in such movements as Kimbanguism.

Janzen prefers to set Kimbanguism and other twentieth century religious movements in a centuries-old Kongo tradition of renewal. This revolves around the contrast between the corporate chief and the diviner or the prophet (1977: 106):

The contrast between the clan notion of governance and the appeal outside to [prophetic] corrective authority presents a structural interpretation of renewal of Kongo society.

Janzen (1977: 111-12) sees this as a "religious quest for transcendent justice and order.... Religious renewal in Kongo...broadly consists in finding the right alternative form to redeem the situation." There is much in this formulation to remind us of Adrian Hastings' distinction between the work of the prophet and the work of the politician. Still, the quest for justice and order, however transcendent, is a political quest as well as a religious one.

Work of this kind allows us to establish a protest dimension in pre-colonial religious movements. But perhaps some of it still presents too much the picture of a single religious system, which operated by means of a reproductive cycle of protest and renewed legitimation.7

It is significant, therefore, that other scholars have begun to seek to break down such a model and to stress the way in which traditional religious movements could respond to and create counter-presentations for social fields other than those of the community or the state. This can be argued in various ways.

In a recent paper, for example, van Binsbergen casts the argument in the language of relations of production. Writing of "socio-ritual structures" among the Manjak of Guinea-Bissau, he asserts (van Binsbergen, 1985: 1-4):

In the Marxist approach to religious phenomena...religion is seen as the ideological project, into the celestial and the unreal, of processes of control, appropriation and exploitation that constitute man's social life. By reflecting existing relations of production, and by endowing the phantasms (ancestors, spirits of the wild, etc) that constitute these relations with a unique, exalted sense of reality and power, the relations of production are underpinned and carried over to new generations.... Here the Marxist approach differs only in idiom from classic structural-functionalist approaches as developed in main-stream anthropology of religion.
However, relationships of production...are usually complex and internally differentiated. They tend not to pertain to one unique mode of production, but to a limited number of different modes each with its own specific internal logic.... In this complex situation...religion has many options besides simply reflecting, in some one-to-one correspondence, the relations of production that make up the constituting modes. Various articulated modes can be reflected within one religious system, which then becomes as heterogenous (in terms of socio-ritual organisation, conceptualisation and history) as the relations of production that are involved.... Beside such "multiple correspondence," the religious sphere may contain elements which question, protest against or negate, rather than reflect, relations of production in any of the constituting modes....

To the extent that the religious sphere is not a simple ideological reflection of relations of production, but often assumes a great deal of autonomy vis-a-vis such relations, religion can be more than ideological reproduction. It takes on an impetus of its own.... Religious innovation represents forms of experimentation and free variation which are inherent in the very nature of symbols and the religious order, and not to be explained away by reference to whatever broad groups, classes, and historical processes to which the individuals involved may belong.

Examining Manjak divinations and seances, van Binsbergen finds (1985: 5), "to the distress of anthropologists looking for structure, room for immense free variation and lack of continuity--creativity, in other words." He contrasts two forms of ritual, that carried out by elders in the Sacred Grove and that effected by the napenes, diviner priests. The first he sees as indeed an ideological reproduction of social inequalities. Yet the napenes, though once part of a hereditary guild subservient to the Manjak king, and in the present often exploiting their clients as throughly as do the elders, nevertheless command a symbolic repertoire that can produce quite other results (van Binsbergen, 1985: 32):

As a client, even more than as a researcher, I have seen certain napenes creatively manipulate the symbolic and dramaturgical material that is present in the Manjak religious system today, with such virtuosity and profound human concern that, rather than confirming their clients in some form of exploitation (by elders, napenes, distant capitalists, or some articulated combination of them all), they bring about genuine revelation and liberation. A Marxist approach ultimately aimed at the liberation of consciousness, should be prepared to acknowledge such similar potential in other, authentically African, forms of ideological production.

Very differently stated is Richard Werbner's attempt to get at the way that traditional and religious movements responded to and created counter-presentations to social fields other than those of the community or state. Werbner rejects the idea that religion essentially gives an under-pinning or legitimation to society as a whole so that religion gets captured by the closed society and there is no room for appreciating how religious movements and movements of people across societies go hand in hand. To overcome this, he draws attention to strangerhood and the changing
predicament of strangers. In his "Totemism in History: the Ritual Passage of West African Strangers" (1974), he re-interprets some of the classic studies of West African traditional religion.

Meyer Fortes' analysis of Tallensi religion interpreted it in terms of correspondence with a closed zone, or society, without paying much attention to long distance pilgrimage across Ghana. In contrast, Werbner seeks to show how the logic and pattern of pilgrimage-flows changes in relation to other kinds of cross-societal movements of ideas, services and people, as slaves or later migrant workers. His argument pays attention both to the cultural and to the political aspects of host/stranger relations. Werbner does not draw on the language of Marxist relations of production analysis. Instead he (Werbner, 1979: 664) states:

My approach to cultural transformation builds on an analogy to Language.... Munn puts the analogy simply...in her concept of "the cultural code"; i.e., a "lexicon of socio-cultural concepts or categories" organized in various ways for communication. But like many who use the linguistic analogy, Munn uses it with a link missing, for she fails to allow explicitly for the systematics of translation or the use of alternative languages. Her model is too parochially closed in "the cultural code." No room is left for switching back and forth, either between codes or from source codes to pidgin or creole. Yet people often do use several cultural codes. One they may regard as indigenous, traditionally theirs; a second may be held to be exotic, imported from strangers; and a third may be considered a more universal code, both theirs and ours....

If understanding other cultures is the anthropologists' business, par excellence, that is because it is also the native's. It is, perhaps, obvious that the translation of cultures becomes a greater concern for the people themselves the more culturally diverse a cult's membership becomes. But rather less obvious is how a cult develops in accord with its relative capacity to focus relations while a systematic translation is being made.

Thus van Binsbergen modifies a simple equivalence picture by stressing the freedom of symbolic innovation, and Werbner by stressing the constant flows and interaction of peoples and ideas.

All this work on pre-colonial religious movements in its totality offers us an invaluable context in which to situate traditional African religious movements in the twentieth century. Iris Berger stresses that in inter-lacustrine East Africa possession cults of affliction are certainly not a phenomenon of colonialism but have existed and operated for centuries. Janzen argues for a continuance into colonial times of a long-standing Bakongo tradition of renewal. Sheila Walker (1974: 14) emphasizes that ambivalent Christian movements, like that of Harris, also emerge out of a sequence of non-Christian movements:

Harris was not the first person who had come to the lagoons area preaching about a new god who was more effective than the old gods in assuring health and prosperity and protecting people from evil. Others had preceded him who taught local people to serve gods whose influence sometimes spread over large areas as they gave proof of their effectiveness. Harris was understood as fitting into the pattern established by these predecessors.
Religious Movements and Politics

There is no doubt that movements have become more frequent and have spread out over wider areas during the twentieth century. Nevertheless, they clearly have not been merely a reaction to colonialism. They have drawn on idioms developed before colonialism; many of them have been concerned with internal cultural/political tensions which existed before colonialism (and exist after it); in so far as they have been responses to colonialism or to the post-colonial state they have been developing a symbolic language already available.

Even the most famous anti-colonial movements have to be re-interpreted in this light. Take, for example, the notorious case of the Xhosa cattle-killing in the 1850s. This movement is a particularly interesting case because it seems not only to be so clearly a response to colonial pressures but also so clearly an example of false consciousness, of a disastrously inappropriate response. It has hitherto been understood largely in terms of big generalizations about millenarianism and with little attempt to understand how its argument of images was rooted in Xhosa culture and creativity. Recently, however, Jeff Peires (1985a: 3, 4) has set out "to explain the logic which underlay their actions," to show how "beliefs and practices which seem bizarre and irrational to us appeared natural and logical to the Xhosa of the 1850s." Peires argues that the cattle-killing movement was much more concerned to restructure Xhosa society itself than to resist the whites (1985a: 23-24):

There was little room in the cattle-killing movement for whites and other peoples who lacked a place in the Xhosa cosmology. The movement owed part of its momentum to hatred of the Colonial intruders and the expectations raised by rumors of the Crimean war, but it is unlikely that the initial talk of whites and Mfengu swept into the sea was anything more than a convenient way of disposing of an anomalous element who had no place in the indigenous Xhosa scheme of things.... After the first failure of the prophecies, the believers seem to have reached the conclusion that they had erred in excluding the whites and Christians. Orders went out that the whites should also kill their cattle, and the believers initiated dialogues with the mission converts in an attempt to persuade them that Nongqawuse's message was the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy.... The new offensive was short-lived and half-hearted [but] significant inasmuch as it demonstrates that the main concern of the believers was not the expulsion of the settlers but the advent of a "happy state of things to all."

Together with the work of Robert Edgar (1976, 1982) on twentieth century Xhosa millenial movements, Peires' studies link up with the work of Bundy and Beinart (1986), promising a much more satisfactory sequential understanding of religious movements of all kinds in the Transkei.

It would be dangerous, however, to deduce from the Xhosa case that traditionalist prophets could only produce movements of atavism and that it required a prophet like Ntsikana to inaugurate a Christian movement and so prepare for the future. It is clear from Peires' account that the cattle-killing ideology was no mere restatement of long-standing ideas and symbols. Rather, it brought together hitherto disparate elements of Xhosa religion and added to them ideas borrowed from the Khoi and from the whites. And for other parts of Africa, even those who argue most strongly that twentieth century traditional religious movements have to be seen as
part of a single continuum with precolonial ones, do not argue for mere repetition of pre-colonial forms as an archaic response to modern conditions. In so far as it is possible to separate out traditional responses from Christian ones, it is clear that there has been considerable innovation of ideas and forms within traditional religious movements in the twentieth century, one example being the prophetic movements discussed by van Binsbergen (1981).

Matthew Schoffeleers, meanwhile, in the most recent of his papers of the religious history of southern Malawi, has shown how over-simple it would be to suppose that popular religious responses to colonial inequalities merely continued to express themselves through the long-standing prophetic/crisis idioms of the Mbona cult. Indeed, by the end of the 1970s the Mbona cult had virtually collapsed in the face of different kinds of popular religious movement (Schoffeleers, 1984: 40):

The religious history of Nsanje shows that the notion of "folk religion," which has gained wide acceptance amongst Africanist historians and anthropologists to describe situations of religious plurality in rural communities, has its limits and should be handled with care.... Cults which appear to integrate a community at one stage may act as agents of division at another.... Thus, to the un-informed outsider, the Mbona cult prior to World War II might have appeared as a textbook example of religious integration. Yet it was already then a religious organisation in which the young had no place and from which the women had more recently absconded. With the benefit of hindsight we are now able to understand why later movements reacted to it the way they did: possessed women avoiding it, founders and leaders of spirit churches condemning it, and the Ancestors adherents trying in vain to restore it. Collectively, these various movements brought into the open tensions that heretofore had been acute, but that had remained hidden.

The collapse of the Mbona cult and the splintering of popular movements was an effect of "the most recent in a long series of attempts to redefine and rearrange relationships between old and young, men and women, and between the different economic strata of the district." Schoffeleers (1984: 33-34) writes:

Looking back on the religious history of Nsanje in the twentieth century, one can perceive a series of shifts and changes, which in a broad and general way appear to coincide with those that occur in the economic sector. During the cotton period, which signalled the effective incorporation of the local economy into a metropolitan trading system, we witness the introduction of the missions, the dissemination of Christian symbolism through large sections of the population, and the emergence of what looks like folk religion combining significant elements of the Christian and ancestral tradition....

With the collapse of cotton on the eve of World War II and the growing importance of labour migration, there is a steep rise in possession cults which remain a dominant feature till the early 1970s.... It is more than likely that there was a causal connection between the deteriorating situation of many women in the district and the unusually high frequency of possession rituals in this period....
Finally, the decline of long-distance labour migration, the growth of the cattle industry and the development of small-scale entrepreneurship coincide on the one hand with the emergence of a new type of Christianity, which to all intents and purposes absorbs the possession cults; and on the other with a massive neo-traditionalist movement. One of the characteristics of this emerging complex is that it shows a certain degree of statistical correlation between religion and social classes. Thus we find the wealthier and better educated particularly in the mission churches, the emergent lower middle class in the Spirit churches, and those lowest on the social and economic scale in the neo-traditionalist movement.

This is southern Malawi moving into the ideological world of Bundy and Beinart's Transkei.

Now, the point here is not that eventually even the longest-lasting African traditional cult will collapse under the pressure of modern times, it is that the customary dichotomy of pre-colonial/colonial/post-colonial distorts conceptions of religious change. It is not merely that the collapse of the Mbona cult actually happened in post-colonial Malawi. The point is much more that through all these periods African religious movements were flexible and responsive, reflecting a great variety of aspirations and interests, and engaged both in micro and macro politics.

Similarly, Wyatt MacGaffey's discussion of Kimbanguism as a religious movement takes up and expands Janzen's idea of a tradition of renewal. Taking issue with Sinda's (1972) nationalist interpretation of Kimbangu, MacGaffey confronts the issue of false consciousness. Sinda holds that Kimbanguism was flawed nationalism, regarding "religion in general as a form of irrationality unfavourable to modernization and effective politics." By contrast, MacGaffey argues for the continuing influence and innovative capacity of Congoleser religious discourse (1983: 247)--"Kimbanguism in 1921 drew primarily on the indigenous cosmology to interpret both the Bible and the contemporary situation." But in so doing, Kimbangu was not merely acting out a long-established tradition of renewal, nor operating within the ancient confines of Central African religion. As MacGaffey writes (1983: 247):

The plural structures of colonial society governed social action in 1921, pluralism itself being an organic condition and not, as some would have it, a mere juxtaposition of old and new. Congoleser were assigned roles in both sectors of this plural society.... As distinct though inter-dependent societies, the European and African sectors of the Belgian Congo institutionalized different cosmologies and epistemologies as prerequisites of social action. This discrepancy imposed strains on the Congoleser in addition to those of economic and political repression.

In this way, MacGaffey shows how the tradition of renewal could respond to a changed society and itself produce fundamental change.8

It is clear from both these examples that although this review has discussed independent churches, mission Christianity, and traditional religious movements in isolation from each other, it is artificial and distorting to do so. It may be interesting, then, to end this section by reference back to one of the initial case-studies, the Watchtower movement. In a fascinating paper, Sholto Cross (1972) sets
Watchtower in the context of a much wider ferment of religious innovation. Drawing on Comhaire (1955) and Douglas (1963) Cross sees traditional witchcraft eradication movements neither as a mere continuation of an ancient mode, nor as movements of anti-colonial protest. He sees them as social movements, similar in many ways to Watchtower itself. He remarks, indeed, that both witchcraft eradication movements and secret societies in Zaire and Zambia formed part of the same development of consciousness as characterized at least rural Watchtower (Cross, 1972: 9-10):

Witchcraft eradicating movements...have predominated in the colonial period, and in recent historical time they have increased in scale to something approaching the social movement.... The mcapi movement of the mid-1930s occurred on a significant scale both geographically and organisationally, and at such an ideological level, to suggest that this was a mass response, predominantly among rural people, to the effects of the depression; arguably this may be taken as the first stirrings of populism.

By considering mcapi as a form of primitive populism I wish to do more than emphasise its grass roots appeal. Mcapi operated at the village level, cutting across local cultures, yet building on a common set of rituals and beliefs; it contained a quality of protest implicit in the generalising of individual suffering to a broader societal scale, [which] included a certain amount of anti-colonialism; and it included the idea of rehabilitating and reinforcing with new sanctions traditional norms such that these could cope with changing times.... Mcapi operated in many ways as a parallel movement to Watchtower.

As for secret societies, Cross notes that (1972: 15):

[academic] emphasis has largely been on the role of secret societies as opposition movements to the extension of colonial rule.... This concentration on the anti-colonial features of secret societies forms part of the endeavour to see them as a key link to the unbroken chain overarching pristine tribal Africa and the rise of modern nationalism.

Cross' own emphasis (1972: 17) is that under colonialism "secret societies in the rural areas underwent changes which suggest that these were operating as social movements in embryo...coming to the fore in times of crisis as remedial movements against plague, hardship and witchcraft fears, which frequently led them to appear as protest movements." He emphasizes that such cults paved the way for Watchtower, the "physical movement" of which "followed a well beaten path."

CONCLUSION

Like Marc Augé (1982: vii), "I have chosen to speak of research in progress, of new and tentative approaches and of realignments that in some cases have hardly assumed a definite shape at all." This has accounted, as it did for him, for my drawing the greater part of my examples from work on the area I know best, East, Central, and Southern Africa. I am not sure, though, that I can claim as he does, that the work I have surveyed "is at present assembling the basic elements for a novel
reflection on the necessary conditions for, and a meaning of, a synthetic science, both anthropological and historical" of African religious movements and politics. It will have been evident from the citations that I have aggregated as part of one, complex movement of interpretation a large number of scholars whose methods, models, and interpretations by no means harmonize totally with each other. Nor have I been able to find one work which synthesizes perfectly the major tendencies in the study of African religion. Nevertheless, I have been seeking to illustrate what is perhaps easier to experience than to articulate, a growing conjunction of approaches to the political significance of African religious movements. Some of its shared propositions can be spelled out. The first is that to place all significant twentieth century religious movements into a proto-nationalist/nationalist sequence is to commit a number of errors: the error of supposing that everything that happened under colonialism was in some way a result of it; the error of privileging nationalism above other kinds of political perceptions and aspirations; the error of not taking the religious, or the symbolic and imaginative, nature of such movements sufficiently seriously. Connected with this is a second proposition--namely that the establishment of colonialism did not represent a decisive break with the past and that African religious idioms were neither discredited by the colonial conquest nor rendered merely peripheral and disfunctional by the loss of power of many African corporate institutions. On the other hand, once we take into account the full range of religious responses and the full range of problems facing the men and women who responded, we can begin to construct a much more complex pattern of religious politics. This was sometimes anti-colonial, and sometimes allied to movements of nationalism, but so far from taking these connections for granted we need to treat them as problematic, as needing explanation, just as all other kinds of social and political implications of religious movements need explanation.

Moreover, while making due allowance for false starts and dead ends, we can see that in so far as they were social and political in their implications, African religious movements made sense--sense as the most effective riposte to colonial legitimating ideology, or sense as the most effective expression of a particular consciousness. At the same time, it is clear that we cannot imaginatively fathom African religious movements merely by spelling out in the kind of sense they make in secular, academic terminology--merely by translating an argument of images into imageless discourse. Religious movements were the most effective responses because they were religious; that is, because they could draw on all the ambiguous power of myth and symbol and ritual; because they could mean many things at once and contain many potentialities.

It thus becomes important not only for scholars to approach these movements with humility but also for African politicians, animators, political educators, and liberators to do so. No one would say that such movements--or other manifestations of rural consciousness--made total sense, or enough sense, or the kind of sense that may be needed to transform rural production and alleviate rural poverty. If developers and educators are necessary, however, so also is a comprehension of how profoundly rural people have penetrated and formulated the nature of their own situation. In this light, the study of the political implications of African religious movements seems one of the least esoteric and irrelevant of human intellectual activities.
Practically speaking, this means that more imaginative effort needs to be put into the study of African religious movements and into the communication of the results of that study. One splendid example of both is available as I write--a long and vivid article by David Lan, anthropologist and playwright, presenting in a mixture of story-telling and analysis the findings of his brilliant book on the role of the spirit mediums in Zimbabwe's guerrilla war, to the readers of the British radical weekly, *The New Statesman* (18 October, 1985). But few of us possess Lan's combination of skills. It may be that the moment has come for collective research, bringing together a field anthropologist, sensitive to the discourse of images; a social historian, competent to reconstruct the embracing political economy; a historian of religion with Ian Linden's sensitivity to the social implications of high theology.

In fact, the one school of writers on African religion whom I hardly quoted in this review are African theologians. Much of the early writing by Africanist theologians has seemed to me to lump too many distinct religious tendencies together and to treat them all too passively. Thus the sort of material I have summarized in this review offers an enormously more satisfactory picture of diversity and activity. I am bound to take notice, however, of a more recent type of liberation theology which has emerged so to speak on the other side of the position which I share. These new African theologians certainly do not ignore movements, or have a sentimental preference for static and stable closed systems of thought. They want movements, and activity and grassroots challenge. But when they look at all the material I have been summarizing in this review, they are unimpressed. By Latin American standards at least all too little seems to be going on in Africa.

Take, for example, the *Pro Mundi Viita* bulletin on "People's Movements and Christian Discernment", which makes this contrast between Latin America and Africa (1984: 1):

As for the African people's movements, overinfluenced by a colonial past which is still too recent, and deprived of a real African ideology, they give the impression of being too passive.


People's movements in Africa have always lacked their own, i.e. African ideology...[and they] have generally taken the form of passive resistance, frequently lacked aggressive power. At present, Africa is home to a great many people's movements. Very many Africans want change: change in culturally oppressive systems, change in economically unjust situations, and change in politically divisive structures. From that perspective it may well be that nowhere is there more talk about change than in Africa. Yet, within Africa, few can really trigger change. Herein lies the great agony of Africa's popular sentiments.... To describe people's movements in Africa it is necessary to recognize their under-lying attitude, which is one of active waiting and active hope.... To outlive the repression, in its various forms, is to gain victory.

Again, last year Bishop Patrick Kalilombe addressed the second general assembly of the Ecumenical Association of African Theologians (Kalilombe, 1984). From his perspective, nothing of what I have been discussing--rural religious
movements, popular Christianity, nationalism, liberation movements--seemed to have helped to bring about rural emancipation (Kalilombe, 1984):

In this concrete situation of contemporary Africa we are asking what the possibilities are for the powerless and impoverished masses to participate in the kind of [liberation] theology we described... People at the grassroots react in face of a growing sense of powerlessness and exploitation. The preponderant reaction is that of people everywhere who...become convinced that indeed they are...powerless, ignorant, or out of touch with the mainstream of history. They develop reflexes of inferiority.... They try to insulate themselves in a little world of their own.... [They] are likely to develop strategies of survival that in the long run prove self-defeating. Sometimes they take refuge in...some type of religious cults, or other distracting hobbies.... People get used to living in a dream world. It becomes difficult for them to analyse events and realities soberly.... And yet it is the people at the grassroots that have the potential for meaningful change.

Kalilombe remarks that "history has demonstrated time and again that peasants' potential for bringing about meaningful and lasting change is rarely activated from within themselves alone.... As a rule the decisive factor comes from outside." But from whom? Not from local African prophets, living in their dream world; not from leaders of mass nationalism, "who themselves belong to the powerful classes" and who now oppress the people in their turn; not even from leaders of armed revolution who have all too often used "the masses to further their own selfish aims [which] has led the people to become suspicious of any revolutionary firebrands claiming to join with them for liberation." What is needed is true religious liberation (Kalilombe, 1984):

Grassroots theologising is a project of empowerment...potentially a revolutionary and explosive enterprise, capable of unleashing a power among those who have hitherto been powerless.... People begin to think for themselves in a critical way.... Change is likely to be revolutionary because the reflection is done in the light of God's Word which is a fearful double-edged sword that judges the desires and thoughts of people's hearts....

When those who understand a liberating theology go out to the people, choose "the option of the poor," then the people will see "that things are the way they are not simply because this is the ineluctable destiny prescribed by God.... They discover that they themselves, in God's plan, are entitled to be co-responsible agents of their own history."

Thus Kalilombe outflanks us all--academics and activists alike--while at the same time preaching the most integral connection between politics and religious movements, namely that only a movement of truly emancipatory religion can effect significant political change. It is marvelous stuff but it remains to be seen whether the African liberation theologians are the last in a long series of imageless analysts, undervaluing as their predecessors did the idioms of rural understanding and creativity, or whether once they get to the people we shall see a combined movement of religion and politics which will make everything this paper has been describing seem too passive indeed.
APPENDIX
PUTTING ALL THIS TO USE: REWRITING
THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF MODERN ZIMBABWE

The original draft of this review ended with a demonstration of the difference which the insights of the work surveyed in it has made to my own understanding of African religious movements, and in particular Zimbabwean religious movements of the twentieth century. I thought that I could not end on the rather preachy tone of my conclusion without showing that I had begun to take the sermon to heart myself. In redrafting, this section seemed to get in the way of moving to a conclusion as well as giving the unintended impression that everybody else's work was moving up to the grand climax of my own! Various readers of the draft, however, found it interesting as a confession rather than as a boast. So I append it here as a voluntary rather than compulsory exercise for the reader.

Fifteen or twenty years ago, when I first began to write on religious movements in Zimbabwe, I advanced the following three views.

The first was that traditional religion had made a last throw in its creation of a resistance ideology in 1896 and that thereafter it was discredited and archaic (Ranger, 1970: 2, 194, 195):

During the 1896 risings there had been such a wholesale commitment of the prestige of the Shona secular and religious authorities and such an effective appeal to the Shona past that few institutions and persons and memories in the area of the revolt had survived the collapse unscathed.... The religious authorities...seemed to have been crushingly defeated in what had increasingly come to seem like a war between two religious systems.... By 1923 the mood of the Shona peoples was characterised by passivity, fatalistic acceptance and despair.

Secondly, I argued that movements of independent Christianity, such as Watchtower in northern Mashonaland in the 1920s, were essentially proto-nationalist (Ranger, 1970: 206, 214):

Watchtower in Lomagundi was partly an expression of resentment at what was seen as a conspiracy between the missionaries and other whites, partly an expression of a desire to overthrow white control.... The Shona people were turning to a new millenarianism.... In this there was remote promise for the emergence of a mass nationalist movement, secular in intent, but with millenarian implications.

Finally I was also prepared to write of the Zionist and Apostolic churches that they represented a further link with secular nationalism (Ranger, 1970: 222):

The Zionist and Vapostori movements obviously expressed many of the same emotions that were present in the Watchtower flare up.... They were in the same way an articulation of the feelings of thousands of rural Shona. Their achievement was to institutionalise themselves; to make their more subdued millenarian message a source of long-term hope; to combine
millenarianism with attempts at improvement. They represented one step further than Watchtower along the road from the risings of 1896 to the emergence of modern mass nationalism.

It will be plain from this review that I would not subscribe to any of these propositions now. What does happen, however, to my interpretation of Zimbawean religious movements if I take into account books and articles written since 1970, and especially if I take into account the questions and perspectives reviewed here (Daneel, 1971, 1976; Tsomondo, 1976, 1979; Mashingaidze, 1976, Fry, 1976; Werbner, 1977; Dillon-Malone, 1978; Bucher, 1980; Bhebe, 1979, Jules-Rosette, 1975)?

To begin with, as I come across new data I see it freshly. For example, during the course of writing the successive drafts of this review, I read the Annual Report of the Native Commissioner, Melsetter, for 1932 (File S 235/510, National Archives, Harare), which to the best of my knowledge has not been previously cited. Reading it, I was at once transported into the world of Karen Fields:

There has been of late [wrote the Native Commissioner] a feeling in the air.... It is a feeling never openly expressed but often obliquely voiced in the course of prayers and local preachings by way of metaphor and parable.... The discontented natives tend to look heavenwards for the change they desire from their earthly conditions.... At first, therefore, we hear only whisperings and prayers, later we may see open defiance and attempts at direct hostility.

The Native Commissioner went on to describe the prophet Jeremiah and his Zion Apostolic City in terms which show an instinctive feeling for the importance of language and symbol:

The most impressive part of the prophetic make-up whereby Jeremiah has so far contrived to impose upon his fellows is undoubtedly his ready display of the gift of speaking in tongues which, as he tells them in the words of St Paul, is a sign not to them that believe but to them that believe not.

When the Native Commissioner confronted the prophet, Jeremiah spoke:

in a tongue like nothing on earth...loud mouthings full of sound and fury signifying nothing to any rational mind but obviously signifying something awful and supernatural to many of the men and most of the women that were present.

The Native Commissioner found this encounter frustrating because, after all, "I have so far had no evidence of any utterance directly or openly subversive of the temporal order." Nevertheless, Jeremiah was reported as preaching that all the unbaptized bore "the mark of the beast on their foreheads...their lot is with the ungodly"; this "in the simple minds of their audiences might well tend to lessen the proper respect for the administrative officers of the Government who stand to these people as the Government itself." Moreover:

Beyond it all is the role of Saint with its implication of oppression suffered from the powers that be which Jeremiah has assumed quite successfully. He
is tall and gaunt, and wears always a long robe. His eyes are unnaturally large and bright and he has a small beard like those in Sunday-school pictures of the Saviour...a general air of "unworldliness" and a priest-like manner of speech.

Feeling that glossalalia and the visual symbols of sanctity posed a real threat to his own legitimacy, the Native Commissioner countered with his own use of words and symbols:

At this meeting I began by handing to Jeremiah a half-crown piece with the request that he should read aloud and translate its superscription, and when he confessed himself unable to do this, I asked one of the Native Messengers who had received previous instruction, to say in English and Chindau what was written on the coin. I thereupon explained carefully to the meeting that the King acknowledged himself King by the Grace of God, and it was the King's ordinance that the Native people should be permitted to follow the religious practices of their ancestors if they so wished, but that if they began to set up any new teaching then the teachers, black and white alike, would be compelled to ask the Government for permission to teach the new ways.

It was a significant encounter, in which the Native Commissioner appealed to the tangible symbol of the coin to validate imperial authority, traditional religion and the permitted missionaries. Jeremiah for his part repudiated the use of money, promising prosperity without the need to work, not even to herd, since "cattle, according to him were not intended to work any more than men."

In addition to finding these arguments of images starting up from the archival page, I have also worked towards a series of eight propositions about religion in Zimbabwe much more consonant with the recent insights of work on religion in Africa. I have done this particularly through research on one district--Makoni, in eastern Zimbabwe--which has allowed a narrowing of focus comparable to that achieved by Bundy and Beinart (1986). My eight new propositions are:

First, that Shona traditional religion has continued to play a significant role in twentieth century religious movements; that the spirit mediums in particular were able to adapt themselves to the experience of small peasant producers and to act as an expression of small peasant consciousness; that this continued relevance to rural experience allowed the spirit mediums to play a crucial role in mediating between peasants and guerrillas in the war of the 1970s so as to produce a composite ideology of resistance and socio-cultural transformation (Ranger, 1982, 1983b, 1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1986a). In these beliefs I have been confirmed by the remarkable work of David Lan (1982, 1985), whose book on the interactions of peasants and guerrillas and spirit mediums in the Dande area north-east of Zimbabwe is a masterly decoding of the argument of images in a situation of war and crisis, and who has proved that the skills of the field anthropologist and the skilled analyst of myth and symbol can dazzlingly illuminate contemporary rural revolutions.

Second, that mission Christianity in eastern Zimbabwe had the character of a movement during the first two decades of the twentieth century and that centers of popular Christianity emerged in particular peasant communites. I argue in recent and
forthcoming papers that this popular Christianity was imaginatively founded by symbolically sensitive missionaries, who set out to institute pilgrimages and to create Christian holy places, and also by their first teacher/evangelists, who set up villages of their own, made rain and adopted the plow (Ranger, 1981, 1986c, 1987a). I also argue in another forthcoming paper that missionaries and converts alike created a Christian language by reducing the eastern Shona dialects into written Chimanyika, and that this had a profound effect on what could be imagined and innovated (Ranger, 1987b). In short, as I argued above, I have tried to show that African mission Christianity was as creative and interesting and lends itself as well to analysis of symbolic innovation as African independency.

Third, that—as with Bundy and Beinart, or with Jean Comaroff, or with Schoffeleers—one can make some sort of equation between types of popular religion and socio-economic groupings in the eastern Zimbabwean countryside. In Makoni district three main mission movements spread and contested with each other for influence. They obtained footholds all over the place and won converts of many different sorts, but the areas in which they established their core followings were those in which the teaching and liturgy of a particular mission resonated especially with the aspirations and economic opportunities of the people. Thus, folk American Methodism grew up around Gandanzara in eastern Makoni, where a group of entrepreneurial Methodist elders had ready access to urban markets, adopted the plow and thrived on American Methodism's mixture of intense religious emotion under strict discipline. Folk Anglicanism grew up in areas of middling peasant production, spread across a wide area of out-schools, each under its trusted teacher/evangelist; folk Catholicism grew up in areas of subsistence production and labor migration, where Catholic pilgrimage to the local holy places brought men back from the towns and where a largely feminine popular religion of Marian devotion developed (Ranger, 1981, 1984, 1985a, 1986c).

Fourth, that, as with Sholto Cross, social movements developed in eastern Zimbabwe during the depression of the 1930s. In Makoni district, as in the case analyzed by Cross, these social movements took the form both of Christian independency and of traditional witchcraft eradication. Mchape made a significant impact; Watchtower entered the district for the first time; the two great eastern Zimbabwean churches of Johana Maranke and Johana Masowe established themselves firmly in the district. Johana Masowe, himself born in the entrepreneurial area of Gandanzara, was the articular of what Bundy and Beinart term a separatist ideology, calling for withdrawal from both wage labor and peasant production for the European market, and calling instead for collective agriculture to maintain the church and for independent artisan production. These Vapostori churches, though suspected and persecuted by the authorities, were in no sense proto-nationalist and later refused to ally themselves with the mass nationalist movement of the 1950s and early 1960s. As in Northern Rhodesia, however, they undercut both missionaries and chiefs, and hence much of the legitimacy of the administration in the rural areas, so that it was thought necessary to mount a co-ordinated offensive against them (Ranger, 1981).

Fifth, that as with Jean Comaroff, these Vapostori churches, though springing from the direct prophetic commission of their founders, were nevertheless much influenced by counter-establishment Protestant sects, which were by the 1930s well
established in the Rhodesian rural areas, and also drew on enthusiastic and revivalist traditions in the mission churches themselves. The Holy Spirit descended fairly impartially in Southern Rhodesia in the 1930s (Ranger, 1986c).

Sixth, that these churches expressed the consciousness of those who felt impotent and peripheral in the crisis of world capitalism; that they especially appealed to the young, and to women and to small-scale peasants; and that they especially attacked the entrepreneurial ethic (Ranger, 1981 and 1986c).

Seventh, that despite the gravity of the challenge posed by these movements, the mission churches recovered much of the lost ground by the 1940s. So far as Anglicanism and American Methodism were concerned this was largely the doing of revival movements directed against the Vapostori as well as against the faint-hearted among mission adherents. In these revival meetings women were especially prominent and in particular virtually captured the tradition of Pentecostal inspiration for themselves, using the annual Camp Meeting as a stage for the display of the new power of this movement of female Christian energy (Ranger, 1986c).

Eighth, hence all these religious movements interacted with politics inside Makoni district. None of them was enthusiastic about joining up with mass nationalism in the late 1950s. Most of them--traditional religion as expressed through the spirit mediums and the idioms of witchcraft eradication; folk Catholicism; folk Anglicanism; even the younger members of the Vapostori--nonetheless joined with the guerrillas in the 1970s. This reflected the much greater degree to which the liberation war was fought in alliance with most sections of the peasantry and embodied many of their aspirations. Hence it was not only spirit mediums who offered symbolic and ritual power to guerrillas in the 1970s; guerrillas also worked with the holy men of folk Catholicism and folk Anglicanism, respecting their ceremonials and holy places. Only the entrepreneurial traditions of American Methodism, at first aloof from politics during the mass nationalist period, and later under Muzorewa's leadership the main supporters of mixed-economy nationalism, stood out as the targets of the guerrillas (Ranger, 1983b, 1984, 1985a).

I make no claim for the finality or adequacy of these propositions. I merely think that they are a considerable improvement on my propositions of fifteen years ago. They represent the point that I have reached along the road laid down by van Binsbergen and Schoffeleers, toward the coming together of fruitful approaches to the study of African religion, towards showing the sense of rural religion and the creativity of rural Africans. I now know much better than I did when I wrote The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia in 1970 how many and how heavy were the oppressions borne by rural Zimbabweans under colonialism. Yet I now feel astonished when I read what I wrote in 1970, with its frequent references to passivity, despair, and so on. It certainly seems to me now that the story of Eastern Zimbabwean religious change, as outlined in my eight propositions, is one of constant activity and of wary hope.
NOTES

This review owes much to the comments of William Beinart, Jean and John Comaroff, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Carl Hallencreutz, Allen Isaacman, John Peel, Richard Werbner and the members of the Africa committee of the SSRC.

2. For an extended treatment, which amply demonstrates the virtues of her treatment of rural history, see Coquery-Vidrovitch (1985).
3. Ellis does not enter into debate about whether late nineteenth century religious movements in Madagascar were proto-nationalist because he shows that in the Imerina case one can already speak of fully developed nationalist sentiments. Some Imerina nationalist positions were expressed through the symbols and structures of traditional religion, others through Protestantism (Ellis, 1985).
4. For the relations of other churches in the Watchtower tradition with the governments of the independent Central African states see Hodges (1976) and Cross (1978).
5. This citation is my own translation from the original French.
6. There has been much interesting work about the possession cults of the interlacustrine states (Berger, 1976, 1981; de Heusch, 1966; des Forges, 1986; Freedman, 1974, 1984). Freedman's Nyabingi. The Social History of an African Divinity (1984) is the most successful attempt yet to apply French Marxist anthropology, with its emphasis on West Africa, to the religious history of East Africa. The shades of Bonte, Meillassoux, Godelier, Rey and Terray stalk through Freedman's footnotes rather like the spirit of Nyabingi herself, with dual powers of creativity and destruction.
7. This is particularly true of de Craemer, Vansina, and Fox's "Religious Movements in Central Africa: A Theoretical Study" (1976) which documents innumerable precolonial movements but which sees them as an integral part of a remarkably stable Central African common religion which has persisted for millenia.
8. For a marvelous set of relevant documents which allow the reader to trace for himself the argument of verbal images see Janzen and MacGaffey (1974).

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