THE TAMING OF THE PROPHET HARRIS

BY

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'The explanation of the seeming miracle is more like fiction than simple fact,' reported Lancashire missionary Rev. William J. Platt to a special correspondent of the Daily Chronicle in June 1925. He was speaking of his March 1924 discovery in French colonial Ivory Coast of 'a vast community of black Christians who had never seen a white preacher, but were converted ten years ago by a native “prophet” who “heard voices.”' It was one of the most extraordinary challenges faced by 20th century Western missionaries.

The 32-year old chairman of the French West African Mission District of the Wesleyan Methodist Church had returned to Britain to tell the story of this most amazing missionary opportunity. Among people in dozens of churches in traditional, illiterate villages, Platt had been 'received by them with great rejoicing, the “Black Elijah” having told them that he was but a forerunner. . . . Led by their “Black Elijah,” as he is called, they have built 150 churches, procured Bibles (which they cannot read) and hold services every Sunday, singing hymns of which they do not know the meaning.'

This report in the Christian Herald and Signs of our Times of June 25, 1925 continued: 'No white man can claim the credit for the conversion of these people. It was the work of one of Africa's greatest evangelists variously described as “Prophet Harris,” “The Black Modern John the Baptist,” and “The Black Elijah.”' Platt described the man briefly: 'He was a Kruman, who went to Lagos first as a laborer for the Elder Dempster Company. He there came under the influence of Christian teaching, and on his return to Liberia felt himself called upon to denounce the superstition and idolatry of his own race and of the kindred races of the Ivory Coast. Like Joan of Arc, he saw visions and heard voices. In an incredibly short time, as Mr. Platt says, he established an amazing influence among the natives. At his command the fetishes, idols, charms and ju-jus worshipped by these people and their
ancestors for thousands of years were thrown down and abandoned. Wherever his voice was heard, wherever his fierce denunciation of superstition, witchcraft and cannibalism—which still exists it is said in out-of-the-way places—was heard, the heathen were converted. He established a new and better era in West Africa. ... With tenacity and patience well-nigh miraculous they have struggled on alone, believing always that others would come, as "Prophet Harris" told them, to carry on the work where he left off. ... For ten years they had prayed and yearned for the promised teacher, and stood true till he came.'

'Personally,' said Mr. Platt, 'I have never had the pleasure of meeting him, but his present whereabouts are known and I hope to meet him soon after I return to West Africa in the autumn.' For during those fifteen months since the discovery, without contacting Harris himself, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society under Platt's leadership had openly assumed responsibility for his converts—more than 32,000 people in over 160 congregations found in a dozen ethnic groups. It was indeed a 'religious movement, unique in the history of the African mission.' So wrote Platt's young missionary associate Pierre Benoît on September 23, 1926, the day he arrived at neighboring Cape Palmas in order to 'find again, if possible, William Wadé Harris, and to get in touch with him.'

*Origin of the 'Benoît Notes'*

For as it turned out, Platt's hope of meeting Harris had not been realized. But that next year, he did send one of his French missionaries to eastern Liberia as his official representative to find and officially meet with Harris. During a half-dozen contacts with the prophet between Thursday and Monday, September 23-27, young Benoît recorded information, conversation and interviews in several notebooks. 'They were only travel notes,' he later wrote of them. 'In taking them, I especially concentrated on describing exactly what I saw and heard.'

Of course, the notes themselves were only marginal to the main purpose of the contacts: '... to find again the prophet and ask him for some counsel addressed to the intractable chiefs. ... They had built up a Christianity in their own fashion, by which it was lawful to marry many wives and replace heathen superstitions by Christian prayers. They did not want the Wesleyan mission. ... It was a matter of getting explicit letters from him bidding the great churches such as that of Lahou which had remained Harris up till now to return to the fold of the Wesleyan mission, and telling them all to become acquainted with the Bible to enlighten their path.'
But in a Friday morning interview with Mrs. Grace Neal, before meeting Harris himself, the young Benoît heard Harris's oldest living child confirm the prophet's own polygamous relationship to his singing women, which issued in a 9- or 10-year-old son by one of them.

Nevertheless Benoît's contacts with the ageing prophet went remarkably well. In his second interview with Harris on Friday evening at the home of his daughter, Benoît copied in one notebook a brief paper dictated by the prophet, indicating 'that all the Christians there should be Wesleyans.' After the interview, Benoît noted his intention of translating the message into French, and 'improving it and correcting it.' This work he did on Saturday morning, as he wrote later that day. However that brief paper with Harris's text was itself not saved, and what Benoît copied was later torn from the notebook, so that Harris's original personal message to the churches is not known. But Benoît prepared two identical copies of his reconstructed document in a French translation, and it was signed by Harris, Benoît and witnesses. Taken back to the Ivory Coast, it became a major source of contention and was later confiscated by the local colonial administrator, and ended up in his archives. This precise message from Harris was the reason for the visit which Platt had hoped to make, and the mission which his representative had accomplished in his place. A photocopy of that French message is appended to this article.

On Benoît's return to Ivory Coast, he entrusted the notebooks to Platt, who sent them to London where some were translated by a Miss Thompson, and edited as a single report (BR) apparently by missions publicist Frank Deaville Walker. Since 1926, Platt retained three of those notebooks in his home in Africa and in Britain, and only after fifty years in 1976 did he turn them over to the archives of the Methodist Missionary Society. During those years, he clearly guarded them carefully, and no one else had access to them, 'not even Mr. G.M. Haliburton who corresponded with me and whose book you will be familiar with,' Platt wrote me in early 1977, after I was given access to them.

One can only conjecture why this primary documentary source—minus the copied original message dictated by Harris—was kept carefully inaccessible during all this time. In fact, it is absolutely essential for understanding the transaction which took place with Benoît's having reworked that text and Harris's having signed it. But beyond that it is perhaps the most important single resource for understanding the Prophet Harris on his own terms. It was while working through these notes along with other related sources that it became clear to me that they provided vital in-depth insight into the prophet, not theretofore understood. Professor Andrew Walls, then Head of the Department of
Religious Studies at the University of Aberdeen, readily acknowledged its crucial significance as a historical source and encouraged me to work through its implications.

The careful exegesis of those ‘Benoît Notes’ (BN) eventually led to a more comprehensive messianic, apocalyptic, and eschatological understanding of the Prophet Harris and his thought. It describes Harris as a product of Western missions, influenced by early literature from the Jehovah’s Witnesses. He violently rejected the Liberian regime and Western Christianity, but through a transforming angelic visitation became the promised Elijah of Malachi 4. As the last prophet of the last times, he saw himself heading a messianic breakthrough into the imminent advent of the peaceful and prosperous reign of Christ, in which he—Harris—was to exercise authority over West Africa. Western missionaries could be his helpers in a subsidiary role of teaching in view of a universal and non-denominational ‘Christ Church’ which was to merge into the Kingdom with the coming of Christ. He so charged the Methodist mission, thinking that it fully understood and accepted his own understandings. But he was ultimately disappointed with what he learned about their use of membership cards with money, and their strict monogamous discipline. In 1928, just five months before his death, he charged an Ebrié chorister, John Ahui, to again take up his African mission, which authorized polygamy. This is, of course, considerably different from the dominant Methodist missionary understanding.

The latter was deeply rooted in Platt’s earliest experiences with the churches which emerged from Harris’s ministry, as in the report above in 1925. But it was also reflected in Benoît’s French synthesis of his first scrawled notes, and in F.D. Walker’s editing of those notes in the BR. More significant, because it shaped the image of Harris rather definitively, was Walker’s very selective use of BR in publishing in early 1927 what he referred to as the ‘full accounts of M. Benoît’s finding of Harris, and his conversations with him.’ Edgar Thompson, the Methodist Society’s Secretary for West Africa wrote to Platt of Walker’s upcoming text. Even with the editing, he felt that ‘the first impression produced on the mind of a lot of folk will be disappointment, dismay, and disillusionment. They have never realized how exceedingly crude and elementary was the religion of this man. . . .’ Benoît’s reconstructed ‘testament’ and F.D. Walker’s carefully tailored ‘full accounts’ have indeed created the ‘tamed’ Prophet Harris of history.

William J. Platt confirmed that with his own picture in An African Prophet. The Ivory Coast Movement and What Became of it (London: SCM, 1934). Here he also used the Benoît notes, but again filtered out those
elements which could have suggested that because of age or perceptions, Harris was not fully responsible. Also kept under silence was Harris’s understanding and practice of polygamy, as well as his attitude toward the French colonial authorities. And Platt continued the colony’s fictional cover-up of Harris’s ‘peaceful’ exit from the Ivory Coast, as noted below. This was despite Harris’s testimony concerning his team’s arrest, beatings and brutal expulsion, confirmed by the moving account by Mrs. Hanna Johnson of singer Helen Valentine’s death several weeks after her return, as a result of the mistreatment.

Thus that picture has also largely shaped the scholarship related to Harris, as reflected both in Haliburton’s excellent retracing of Harris’s mission, and in Sheila Walker’s historico-anthropological work on the Harrist Church. This is true too of the most recent analysis of Ivorian prophetism by Jean-Pierre Dozon, who interprets Harris’s finality as modernity. Nor is the eschatological urgency apparent in James Krabill’s highly detailed study of the Dida Harrists, which inevitably reflected only what Harris had communicated, and not his own self-perception and dynamic. A similar result is offered by Harrist Paul Ahui in a recent study which avoids however the too simplistic Harris of missionary Methodism, yet attributes to him more sophistication than he had in fact acquired. This is also the case for Ernest Amos Djoro’s 1994 Sorbonne doctoral thesis which carefully portrays the Methodist missionary picture. Happily, it also reproduced and edited some of the French text of the missing fourth notebook, which was given to him in 1955 by Pierre Benoît, then a practicing physician in France.

*The Methodist Missionaries’ Harris*

The tamed Harris, even with corrections due to the Benoît visit, is much as follows: Harris was a simple native Grebo, influenced by Methodist schooling, and converted at 21 under an African minister’s preaching. He had loaded and unloaded ships as a ‘kruboy,’ and later worked a number of years for the Episcopal Mission in Liberia as a native teacher. Involved in three Grebo rebellions against the Liberian regime, he was each time imprisoned. The third time in 1910, after raising the Union Jack in favor of a British protectorate, his imprisonment by Liberian authorities concluded with a vision of the angel Gabriel, and a commission from Christ to preach the gospel. With unusual zeal, he preached to traditional peoples a rudimentary message as best he knew: burn your fetishes, believe in God and be baptized, and await the white man with the Bible. Tens of thousands did
so in a movement which seemed to threaten the Ivory Coast colony, and Harris meekly submitted to French colonial authorities who officially escorted him to the Liberian border.\textsuperscript{14} In his old age through Benoît’s visit, Harris turned all of his work in the Ivory Coast over to Rev. William Platt of the Wesleyan Mission, which had taken up the work among the churches he was forced to abandon. The Wesleyan Mission’s succession and subsequent ministry was the fulfillment of the prophet’s hopes.

It is the Benoît Notes themselves which offer much of the corrective to that image. But before some of them are examined in detail, one should be more informed about the two main persons involved in the contacts: Pierre Benoît, and William Wadé Harris.

\textit{The Men Behind the Notes}

The first was a 26-year-old, French, Protestant missionary who had been a candidate for New Caledonia, when the Wesleyan Mission appealed to the French Protestant Mission de Paris for French-speaking workers ready to help reap the harvest in the Ivory Coast.\textsuperscript{15} He shifted his orientation away from New Caledonia and arrived in the Ivory Coast in late 1925, only a year and a half after Platt’s uncommon discovery of this great missionary challenge. Having just completed a year of study in the United States at Union Theological Seminary, he had acquired competency in English. During that year he had also served as French tutor for the children of John D. Rockefeller, the U.S. financier. Prior to that, he had studied at the Sorbonne under Professor Raoul Allier who had specialized in the nature of religious conversion among traditional peoples.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed Platt may have chosen to send Benoît precisely because of this specialized study.

Soon after his arrival in Ivory Coast, Benoît had been given responsibility for the Grand Lahou district of the mission. From Platt’s earliest contact at Lahou in April of 1924, he reported a Methodist congregation of 500 with their own catechist, and a large ‘Harris church’—full of ignorance, in the town. We hope we have paved the way for a union of the two churches.’ Further west in the same region at Bohico, he had seen ‘healthy churches, though the majority of the people here belong to Harris churches which are not anxious to come to us. We doubt not that once we, as a Mission, show them that we mean business, they will prefer the enlightenment of that state to the illiteracy which now prevails.’\textsuperscript{17} As we have seen, this union with these ‘great churches’ was now a major preoccupation of Benoît. For in the mean-
while he had visited and assumed responsibility in the outlying areas of his district at Fresco, Lauzoua, Bohico, and into the interior at Yocoboué and up to Divo, where he had discovered the extent of the Harris churches and the post-Harris ministry of a ‘half-prophet’ reportedly called ‘Makin.’

But in addition to this concern to bring the Harris churches into the Methodist sphere of influence and discipline, there was another more immediate, pressing Methodist concern. Faced with a threat of denominational and theological competition, Platt needed to better establish and secure his legitimate authority over pre-existent churches which he had integrated into Methodist structures since 1924. When he sent the Benoît notes to Director Thompson in London, Platt wrote that he had sent Benoît to find Harris ‘in view of the possible arrival of Mark Hayford and a dispute arising concerning the succession of Prophet Harris.’

In 1919, long before Platt’s discovery, Rev. Dr. Mark Hayford, from an independent Gold Coast Baptist church, had contacted and reclaimed more than a dozen of the Harris-inspired congregations between Fresco and Petit Bassam, where the Methodists were now becoming established. Hayford had been refused re-entry to the Ivory Coast in 1921, but in Britain, the United States and France, he had sought foreign funding for a ministry among those churches. And in August of 1926 Platt learned from Paris that French ‘Baptist fundamentalists’ were cooperating with Hayford and planning to send out French missionary Richards to work with Hayford’s churches. Platt was certain that this return of Hayford ‘could cause us grave trouble, property trouble in the Harris churches we have assimilated . . . which find our religion and its discipline difficult . . . certainly we would lose many people to Hayford.’

Hence, a driving preoccupation behind the visit of Benoît was the hope for legitimation of that assimilation, and its furtherance among Harrists, whose recalcitrance was often due to the Methodist rejection of polygamy. And just below the surface was the permanent preoccupation for maintaining the British mission’s good standing with the French colonial regime. For the French civilizing policy had worked particularly hard to keep British influence out of the colony, after having deliberately chosen French Roman Catholicism as its exclusive, religious, civilizing force. Already in 1892, when the French had annexed by force Liberia’s territory east of the Cavalla River, they had forced the closure of 35 English-speaking preaching stations of the American Episcopal mission. Coming from Liberia, Harris discovered that his own use of the English language and English-speaking ‘clerks’ had
also counted against his ministry in the Ivory Coast.

Platt’s youthful French representative presented himself for the contacts with Harris, dressed in a very proper white suit over a long-sleeved white shirt and dark bow-tie, with polished black shoes, reflecting the very correct dress of French colonial and missionary society. He was accompanied by Victor Tanoh, an illiterate Ivorian catechist from Grand Lahou—an important link with Harris, since Tanoh had served as one of the prophet’s interpreters during the mission of 1913-1914.

As for Harris, since his arrest, detention, brutal treatment and expulsion from the Ivory Coast in early 1915 in the midst of the mass-movement, his very deep concern had pushed him on eight occasions to try to return to look after the churches. But he was always refused entry and turned back. Very active however in Liberia, he was as recently as 1925 near the Nana Kru Methodist Episcopal Mission when he suffered a severe paralytic stroke which also rendered him speechless. The American mission saw it as God’s judgment for his ‘living himself in polygamy, preaching polygamy, and baptizing polygamists.’ He was nursed back to partial health by the very preachers of the mission whose monogamous discipline he had so vigorously opposed as ‘white man’s mouth.’ Aro-American missionary Walter Williams reported that he was still suffering when he left the mission, ‘dragging his paralysed leg and able only to utter a word here and there that was intelligible. . . . Since that day, he has visited here and has partly regained the use of his limbs and tongue, but he tells us: “I can’t preach anymore.”’

Harris was now in his late sixties. And it is clear that young Benoît attributed his condition uniquely to his age, for he had no clue about his post-stroke paralytic condition.

He stammers words of welcome while his eyes become wet and he half fell over to one side, he was so tired. . . . He is slowly falling back into childhood . . . he had been wounded the week before in the left side. . . . He has no gift of words, nothing but great conviction. (BR)

This must be understood in the light of what Irish Father Peter Harrington reported when Harris had visited his mission ten years earlier in 1916 at Grand Cess, Liberia.21

He spoke in perfect English, a very remarkable acquisition for a Kruman, whose English, pigeon English, is usually unintelligible to the uninitiated . . . his personality, phraseology and profuse gestures impressed me very favorably . . . his conversation did not betray any lack of intelligence.

So, despite the handicaps of a paralytic stroke, Harris was still travelling ‘a great deal, preaching and baptizing everywhere he is received.’ And here it must be recalled that his conversations during such min-
istries—if in English—would have been almost exclusively in ‘pidgin’ English, except when in conversation with Westerners. But with no Western missions acknowledging his work or his baptism, largely because of his stance on polygamy, Harris would probably be distrustful towards any European. This Benoît had learned upon his arrival at Harper from Dr. F.A. Price, the Afro-American superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church. So he could not have anticipated an enthusiastic reception by Harris. But Harris knew all about Platt and the British Methodist presence in the Ivory Coast since 1924. For several months he had been carrying the very issue of *The Christian Herald and Signs of the Times* cited above, which had come to him from an American friend through a local Methodist Episcopal woman. His photo and that of the young clergyman Platt were both with the report. There the ‘Black Elijah’ and his work were described by Platt in very highly favorable terms, as ‘the forerunner of a new era in West Africa.’ Everything in it suggested the British Wesleyan Mission’s admiration and full recognition of Harris according to his own self-perception, and an enthusiastic acceptance of him and his work. This apparent stance was in very sharp contrast to other missions in the Gold Coast, the Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and the American missions in his native Liberia.  

There can be no doubt about the British newspaper having played an important part in misrepresenting to Harris the full implications of the transaction that he was to sign under Benoît’s guidance.

The Prophet was deeply troubled that the people of the Ivory Coast still worshiped fetishes, and he was deeply concerned about the fate of the churches from which he been abruptly separated. He intensely desired to go to them at once; the previous week God had made him know that he must soon return to the Ivory Coast. Indeed, he was expecting visitors from a distance, and had ‘hastened with all his ornaments and his baptismal cross . . . [having] clothed himself in all his accoutrements.’ Such were the two men and their preoccupations when Benoît began rapidly scrawling his notes in four typical French school notebooks.

*The Documents Themselves*

Ideally, a whole volume could be given to the study of the relationship between the scrawled notes (*BN*), the 60-page final report (*BR*), and that which was made public in early 1927 in Walker’s ‘full accounts.’ Here space permits comparisons of several texts to get a feel for the way in which Harris was tamed by the Wesleyan mission.
In the first of the accessible notebooks, the contents of the first couple of pages of notes were taken during the visit with Mrs. Neal Friday morning, September 24, before having met the prophet. Benoît’s very rapid note-taking in French had its own short-hand and generally lacked accents or punctuation. And he often wrote English words he heard following the diction of his native French. It was scrawled only for Benoît’s own eyes and usage, to be later sorted-out, filled-out and synthesized in French.

I. For these first notes, some of the French synthesis is available from the fourth missing notebook, since part of it is now edited and commented on by Amos Djoro in his 1994 thesis. But from Miss Thompson’s English translation of the synthesis in BR, we can largely deduce it, as well as generally observe how Benoît used his notes.

The scrawled notes for the text relative to Harris’s family situation read as follows, with Mrs. Neal speaking in English while Benoît was often transcribing in French. My commentary is in brackets [thus].

BN I,1.

Vu Mme. Niel fille de Harris  donne ces renseignements—
Predication itinerante 1910
Avant sa predication maître à l’école de
la Mission.  Protestante Episcopale à
Graway 3 miles [added] près de Cap Palmas Liberia
En 1909  affaire pr son drapeau
En prison  il a une vision
Dieu lui ordonne de quitter ses
vetements, il est oint a Crafton.
Sa femme lui porte un pagne
un trou pr  passer la tête —
3 filles;  3 fils de la
même  mère
la fille aînée est morte et laisse 2 filles, 10 – 3 an

BN I,2.

Harris a été marié par un pasteur
de l’Eglise Protestante  Episcopale en
1885 – 86 – Mme Niel [corrected to Neal] 1e 2e enfant
né en 1889 –
En juin 1910 sa femme le croyant
fou mourut de chagrin –
A partir de ce moment il emmène
avec lui 3 femmes pour l'
aider ds sa predication — mais
‘Dieu dit-il lui a ordonné de ne
pas se marier —’ [i.e. a Christian marriage]

**BN I,3.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louisa Harris Mirriam</td>
<td>1 filles Emmanuel</td>
<td>14 ans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Grace Harris Neal</td>
<td>1 fille Louisa</td>
<td>12 ans aujourd'hui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td></td>
<td>Robert</td>
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<td>Thomas</td>
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<td>Rose</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Elisabeth</td>
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<td>Edward Harris</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>bijoutier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elisa</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>a Secondi [= Sekondi, Gold Coast]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louisa</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Natanael 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>John Harris 30 farmer-carpenter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grace 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Willy Harris</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>shoemaker a Secondi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella Harris</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Baby 3 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

John married Miss Esther Killing

Une des trois femmes — Marie __

Kru
de Harris

A un fils James Harris 9 ans environ.

R.A. Brewer [This name was written in a handwriting which was not that of Benoît, and is the name of a third witness who signed the 'Message to the churches.' Amos Djoro was told in 1971 that Brewer was the mayor of Cape Palmas at that time].

The Thompson translation which follows is a heretofore unpublished text, none of which was to find its way into the F.D. Walker ‘full accounts’ of 1927. In {} are found with underlining, that which did not get into the text from the notes. Where the original seems lost in the translation, I have included it underlined <ainsi>. Parentheses are in the original text.

This is what I learnt from her: her father was an educated negro, he was born a Methodist. Harris himself affirmed this again later on. He was brought up by a missionary. [His mentor was ‘uncle’
Rev. John C. Lowrie, a Grebo recaptive slave, freed at Freetown where he was educated, converted, and trained as a Methodist minister, and returned to Cape Palmas among his people ca. 1860.]

About 1885-6 he was married officially by this missionary [by another Grebo, Episcopalian Rev. O.E.H. Shannon] in the Protestant Episcopal church: he has had by his only wife six children, of whom five are still living.

The eldest, Louise, died some years ago, leaving two children herself, now 12 and 14 years old.

The second, Grace, is Mrs. Neal who gives me this information; she has had five children herself: she was born in 1889—a date of which she is sure (the only accurate date in this chronology).

The others, Edward, John, Welly [sic], Ella use their father’s name as a family name. They are now from 35-20 years of age. The youngest, Ella, 20 to 22 years old, has just come into the room and confirmed these statements.

Here is a table of the Harris family.

William Wade Harris and his wife Rose Bodock Farr [daughter of the Episcopalian catechist and school master at Spring Hill, Half Graway, Harris’s home].

Born about 1865 Married 1885-86  
Louise Merriam b. about 1887 Married about 1904, has had  
2 children 1 son Emmanuel, 14 years  
1 daughter Louisa, 12 years {today} both living  
Grace Neal b. 1889* (*a date of which she is sure – the only accurate date in this chronology.)

married 1907, has had five children  
1909 Annie Robert Thomas Rose Elizabeth all living  
Edward Harris b. about 1892 \{35 jeweler Sekondi\}  
John Harris b. about 1895 \{30 carpenter\}  
married 1914 to Miss Esther Killan  
1915 Chea  
1918 Louisa  
1920 Nathaniel  
1922 Grace  
Welly Harris b. about 1898 \{24 shoemaker Sekondi\}  
Ella Harris b. about 1902 unmarried  
1 baby three months old

In 1910, after the affair of his banner <drapeau, for flag> Harris was imprisoned by the Liberian government, in prison he had the vision which decided his missionary career.
According to Mrs. Neal he saw the Lord in a great wave of light, and was, he said, anointed by Him {à Crafton}. He felt the water pour on his head. God told him to burn the fetiches, beginning with his own, and to preach everywhere Christian baptism: he must by Divine command, leave off all the European clothing he was then wearing & his patent leather shoes, to reclothe himself in a kind of togo [sic for ‘toga’] made of a single piece of stuff <étouffe, cloth> with a hole <passage> for his head. It was no later than the next day that he had this dress made by his wife.

He seemed so exalted and talked so incoherently that all the world thought him mad.

Released some time after, he began in 1910 his ministry and baptisms.

His wife, believing him really mad, died of grief the same year, his daughter told me.

He began from that time to take on his rounds of preaching three women who sang the hymns {instead of l’aider dans sa prédication}. These three women have made an effective charge of polygamy against him [this is edited out of the Amos Djoro use of the text]. From that time he does not seem to have respected the vows of Christian marriage. God, said he, had shown him a better way of living {instead of l’a ordonné de ne pas se marier}. The question is greatly discussed. On the Ivory Coast those persons who knew him best affirm that he never slept in the same hut as the three women, others have accused him openly and in person of living with them.

Mrs. Neal confirms this point. There is, she told me, a child living now that one of those women {Marie [Pinya], a Krù} had by Harris. This boy must be about {9-}10 years old, he lives at [Half] Graway with Harris’s family.

Of the three women, two are dead. The third, the best voice they say, has left the country. It is known that she still lives at the other end of Liberia.

II. From a part of Benoît’s first meeting and interview with Harris, we have again only the Thompson translation (BR I,13-24), this time compared with F.D. Walker’s published ‘full accounts.’ It illustrates how he edited out significant dimensions of Harris’s person. What he expurgated is here underlined. What he added is with bold letters in brackets, thus { | }. My editorial comments will be in brackets, thus [], with occasional original French words in brackets <ainsi> from the text reported in footnote 3 above.

I look at him now with more attention, he is {again} seated more
firmly \{by the roadside\}. Tano kneels before him, pressing his hands with effusion \{sic in French\} \{affection\}. I sit down by their side and explain to him whence we come, and what we bring him, the greetings of his followers and of our churches [it is highly doubtful that Harris really caught the distinction here] on the French side \{Ivory Coast\}.

Again he affirms that he had foreseen it, God, he says, made him come to know the week before that he must soon return to the Ivory Coast.

He talks very quickly, with vehemence—his chin points forward while his big eyes glitter and roll in their sockets. What age shall we give him—between 50 \{sixty\} and 80 \{70\} he certainly represents an exceptional case of longevity for his race—few are the blacks \{Africans\} pass 60 or 65 to 75 years of age. He \{still\} covers the ground <il arpente encore le pays> like a young man \{still\}, and the walk which he had just completed \{quite\} cheerfully \{alléurement\} although he had been wounded the week before in the left side, \{has\} tired me greatly. ‘This man’ De [= Dr.] Price had said to me, ‘believes in hard \{intensif\} work;[\'] another trait by which he distinguishes himself from all other Africans. One sees in him a strong and well preserved body, his broad shoulders carrying a head proud and expressive, although now a bit childish. His muscular arms and strong legs \{cuisse\} are those of an athlete — without being corpulent he must weight \{sic\} about 85 Kg.

He always speaks vehemently, and in an incoherent manner \{de façon hachée\}. He has no gift of words, nothing but a great conviction. He knows, he says, that the people of the Ivory Coast still worship fetishes, someone must speak to them all. The time is short; it is short as one sees from the Bible; \{and he shows me the verse \{to convince me!\}\} [the citation may be I Corinthians 7,29]. God will send fire from heaven upon all rebels \{va faire tomber son feu sur tous les révoltés\}; yes, his fire; and the prophesies \{the prophet himself will send fire on Abidjan (?) and Bingerville because the \{French government\} \{on y\} serves the devil and not the true God. Jesus Christ is coming again. He will soon be here. He will bring \{mettra\} fire everywhere where He is not known \{on ne le sert pas\}—that they \{the people\} may serve the true God only’’ [was he inspired by II Thessalonians 1,7f.\].

He continues thus for some minutes: I calm him, I show him our wishes that he will go back \{strive to persuade him to come\} quietly \{with me\} to his daughter’s house. \{I tell him\} I have a great deal of news for him from the Ivory Coast. He thanks me \{and tells me\}; what joy it
is for him to hear somebody talk to him of the men he has bap-
tised. But, says he again, the time is short for them to carry every
where the message of Jesus Christ. While {Then} he goes on talk-
ing with Tano {about the days of ceaseless evangelism; so I
leave them together while tired and very hungry after the
fatigue and excitement of the day, I go in search of some-
ting to eat} I take the road again and return to dine a little deceived
<heureux, d'après lui-même> by this first interview and very tired <lassé>.
Friday 24th September. In the evening at Mrs. Neal's. It was in the dining
room of the Neal house that our interview with Harris took place. Mme. {Mrs.}
Neal is a handsome {nice-looking} woman fairly well educated, speak-
ing comparatively good English. She has a thick roll of hair carefully {smoothly
combed and} plaited, a pretty white dress trimmed with embroi-
dery [sic] {flowers} and lace. Her {youngest} sister Ella, 22 years
old, the last legitimate child of Harris, had also come. Briefly, we find
ourselves in a native family already fairly prosperous: one of Harris'
{the prophet's} sons is a jeweller, another a joiner, another a
farmer and bootmaker. The children are well kept and attend the
mission schools. {But M. Benoît was pained to notice that} In
the midst of all these assembled people the old grandfather seemed
<parait> {almost} a stranger. He alone wears native <indigène>
clothing, and what clothing! A kind of ______ <gondourea> made 'as God
had shown him' of a single piece of stuff <étoffe>, with a hole for his head.
The little children laught at [sic] <s'amusent de> him, the grown-ups
watch him as though to prevent him from doing something foolish
<un faux pas>. He sees nothing. He walks about the rooms, talking
eagerly <avec vivacité>. His bare feet still carry him well, he waves his
staff—a cross, as though to beat the evil spirits of which he is speaking, his
beard sticks out in front and is always shaking {with his emotion}.
He rolls his big eyes, once so piercing, <petillant> and now grown inge-
nuous and childish {have become open and artless} but yet still
_______ <malicieux> {full of eagerness} in spite of time and decay
<décrituipite>.

It is {M. Benoît found it} difficult for us to hold a connected
conversation with Harris {this venerable apostle of the Ivory
Coast}. I made him sit down at my side, but he changes his seat
several times and from time to time walks across the room. He is
always full of his inspiration. First {again} he says that he knew
several days ago that we were coming. The Spirit had announced it to
him. This very morning he had set out to come to meet us know-
ing that something was waiting for him at Cape Palmas. He wishes
someone to tell the people of the bush <de l'intérieur> to burn their fetiches, that they may be baptised and worship the only true God. All those who refuse will be severely punished. Fire from heaven will descend on them. He, Harris, will make it fall with a single {de ses} gesture <gestes>.

May missionaries and messengers be sent everywhere, he says. He has earnestly <beaucoup> prayed that the writer <les Blancs> will send missionaries. {Then he earnestly beseeches me to send missionaries.}

'Time is short’ he says, many <plusieurs> times. Then he searched for the verse in his English Bible, which he is ever turning over and which he <paraît connaître> knows through and through. To convince me he makes me read for myself {the words} ‘time is short’ let men hasten: and immediately comes the other part of his discourse: if no-one preaches and if the people harden their hearts, fire from heaven and death will come <sont> on them.

This man caught again <paraît retrouver> at this time the accents of the great prophets: their convictions, their intransigence, their divine inspiration, are found again in him.

<On a l'impression> Something troubles <tracasse> him; the fate of the churches which he has left on the Ivory Coast. He would like to go there at once and speak to them. He has gone to Tabou, he says, more than 8 times since 1915. He has always been prevented {à la frontière} from entering French territory.

He wishes to be taken <se présenter> before the governor at Bingerville. There he will put his case before this man {in the hope that he may be allowed to finish his work}. And if he is not <si on refuse de le laisser> allowed to finish his work, fire from heaven will again avenge him. For <tout> Bingerville and Abidjan will be destroyed by lightning.

Gradually I told him of what could interest him on the Ivory Coast. He soon decided that all the Christians there should be Wesleyans. He dictated to me a paper {message} to this effect; here is a copy of it. (See Page 23 [which is Benoît’s ‘reconstructed’ message]) [Amos Djoro’s text concludes with ‘C’est alors que le prophète lui a dicté le message ci-dessous, à l’intention des Ivoiriens. Then follows Benoît’s reconstructed message. And all the following lines are edited out by Amos Djoro].

Tomorrow I will present him with a translation of this text, after improving and correcting it, and he will sign it. He will also dictate to us letters for the leaders of the ‘Harris’ Churches of Fresco and Grand Lahou. <Troisième et dernière entrevue avec Harris>. [This is Amos Djoro’s editing that places this title at this spot.]
He is now absolutely <complètement> with us. I have made it clear to him that he must no longer count on crossing the frontier, and on the other hand that the mission will really take his place and assume his responsibilities. M. Benoît by quiet talk showed the old man that it is impossible for him to return to the Ivory Coast, because he no longer has the strength, and moreover the French government would not permit it. But he assured him that the Wesleyan Missionary Society has undertaken the responsibility of carrying on the work and shepherding and instructing his converts. Victor Tano also talked much with the prophet—under whom he himself was led to Christ. Harris was much impressed.

Tano has also spoken with him a lot, with the greatest success. Tano is a convert <un convaincu>. He has just come back a few minutes ago and told me some wonderful things about the prophet. He seems at this time to be living over again his best years.... {Leurs convictions réciproques se renforcent mutuellement.}

He has got him to promise to send messages to N'dre, the preacher of the Harris church at Lahou, and to the leaders of this church bidding them to join <enjoindre> themselves again immediately to the Methodist church, and to enter it with all their children. The same message for the old chief Loa. Harris has sent him his cross and his Bible, and I have made him write two or three words in the Bible and sign them. He recommended them in this also to join our Wesleyan <missionnaire> church, to preserve <persévérer dans> the Christian faith and to meditate on {la parole de Dieu} the Bible. The most severe punishments are promised to the disobedient.

Harris knew {par réputation} the Rev. W.J. Platt, Superintendent <Directeur> of the Methodist Mission. A friend from America had sent some months ago to one of the ______ ________ <dames visiteuses> of the Methodist Episcopal church at Cape Palmas a newspaper {Christian Herald} giving a very accurate account of the first visit of Mr. [William] Platt to the Ivory Coast. The lady had sent the paper to Harris and the latter has always <constamment> carried it on him since. Since our arrival the prophet has asked Tano if he knows Mr. Platt. Tano told him that we have come in his name, and this was a great joy to the prophet. Tano, who did not know the affair of the newspaper, was ready to put this knowledge of Mr. Platt down to the supernatural second sight of the prophet. He knows everything, he said. Harris must have read the paper from beginning to end. Unfortunately moreover, for it was concerned with a pamphlet of an adventist sect, as it seemed to me. The old prophet has based on this a whole series of eschatological convictions: it is partly because of this that he is always talking of the return of Christ and the fire of the last day. Pentecost,
pentecost. [Walker summarized this whole section briefly as follows: 
{He already knew something of Mr. Platt, for he had in his 
possession an old copy of the Christian Herald containing 
an article on the Ivory Coast movement, illustrated with 
photographs of Mr. Platt and himself}]. 

He has found the Huguenot cross perfect, for I have explained to him that 
it symbolizes the Spirit.24 [Amos Djoro edited out this line.] 

Tomorrow we will return and I shall have him photographed with his fam-
ily and also at my side. [At this point Amos Djoro concluded with ‘Voilà 
la fin de la mission d’enquête de Pierre Benoit. . . .’ All that follows is not 
included in his ‘compte rendu complet.’] Perhaps also we shall go to his old 
house. He has a beautiful head worthy of tempting an artist. What a pity not 
to have a good outfit <for trousseau? of brushes>]. 

This man is really attractive. What a character he has been! Even today, 
enfeebled as he is, he seems full of energy and power. 

‘This man believes in hard work,’ Dr. Price has said to me—a trait which 
astonishes his fellow countrymen and which among many others, places him far 
above the average African. Over 70 years of age [he was probably ca. 66 
years of age] he still does hundreds of miles on foot from the north to the 
south of the country and along the coast without meeting any great success [com-
monly believed, but belied also in the next lines] but always with the 
same unshakeable faith in his divine mission. His missionary gift holds him and 
drives him on his way. 

The people of Liberia scarcely listen to him now. However, he baptises among 
them and above all in the interior. Sometimes the people come in groups to his 
house to receive baptism from his hands—one of the pastors told me that he 
had baptised more than 500 people in the villages of the interior on his last 
visit. On the coast he is more feared than revered. People recount instances when 
the punishments which he foretold have visited those who laughed at him. Even 
the unbelievers recognise in him some sort of supernatural power. 

His family take no part in his work, nor in his preoccupations. His relatives 
watch him doing it and although in fairly easy circumstances leave him in the 
most complete destitution. 

He would seem again to be lighting fires in the bush of the Ivory Coast [the 
French probably implied intention, rather than fact]. It will be better, 
I think, for the establishment of his past work, that he is not received that [the 
sentence is not completed, but clearly favors his not returning to 
Ivory Coast. Indeed, in addition to the question of his age, his atti-
tude toward the colonial authorities, and Benoit’s learnings about his 
polygamous practice, would have created endless problems for the 
Methodist mission].
We ought to see that he is surrounded by attention and some supervision, partly to prevent him from being monopolized by others [than the Wesleyan Mission], partly to assure him a happy old age: for this aged servant of God may find himself in great misery if some infirmity lays him on a sick bed. Such as he is to-day, he can still have many long years of life, but it is to be feared that his spirit may soon lose all its strength.

Saturday, September 25th.

A part of this morning has been spent in copying in French the message dictated yesterday evening by Harris for the churches on the Ivory Coast. I have made two copies of it. Trembling, the prophet has signed them. ‘I am in trances’ he said for an excuse, but his old age must be his only excuse. At the side of the signature he has affixed the imprint of his two thumbs.

Afterwards the witnesses performed the same operation. 9 have signed [in fact, only three]; Mme. Neal, Harris’s daughter, has signed; and Victor Tano has made his personal mark, for he does not know how to write; a young man has also given his signature as a witness [i.e. R.A. Brewer. With the intended use of the document as official authorization for legitimation, Benoît also had his and the witnesses’ thumbprints affixed with their signatures].

Before signing, we read the message word by word to Harris and translated it to him as literally as possible. He altogether approved of it, and considered it even better than that of the night before. Some additions and deletions have been made to render it more to the point [of Benoît’s solicitations]. The allusions to the Governors and administrators have been omitted. Here is the message exactly as it has been signed.

All of this is missing, because edited out, in the ‘compte rendu complet’ d’Amos Djoro. He wrote in his thesis (321), ‘En raison des doutes manifestés par certains auteurs ainsi que par beaucoup de catholiques et de protestants marginaux (harristes), sur l’authenticité du voyage de Pierre Benoît au Libéria et des documents qu’il en a rapportés, nous jugeons absolument nécessaire d’exposer le compte rendu complet de cette mission tel qu’il a été présenté par BENOIT lui-même dans son journal de voyage.’ When it is seen what has been edited out, the doubts remain. In his own earlier ‘full accounts,’ Walker had summed this all up very briefly in a conclusion which justifies post facto the editing in a manner that would protect that message from any hint of non-validity.

{Harris sends a message to the Churches. The most important result of the finding of the venerable prophet is the message he dictated to his converts on the Ivory Coast:}

‘The Message of the Prophet William Wade Harris to the churches which he founded on the Ivory Coast.’ I, William Wade Harris, who
have called you to the true Gospel and baptism, I have given this
message to the Rev. P. Benoît so that he may bring it to you and
that you may obey it.
All the men, women, and children who have been called and bap-
tised by me must enter the Wesleyan Methodist Church. I myself
am also a Methodist. No one must enter the Roman Catholic church
if he wishes to be faithful to me. Mr. Platt, the director of our
Methodist Church, is appointed by me as my successor to the head
of the churches which I have founded.
All the fetiches, Koubos, and the ju-jus must be destroyed. Burn
them all in the fire. Evil befall him who secretly keeps them in his
house! May the fire from heaven devour him! All must adore the
only true God in Jesus Christ and Him alone must you serve.
Read the Bible; it is the word of God. I am sending one to you
and I have marked the verses to be read. Search out the light in
the Bible. Learn your letters that you may be able to read the Bible;
it will be your guide.
Be faithful in all things, attaching yourselves firmly to the observa-
tion of the ten commandments and to the Word of Jesus Christ, our
only Saviour.
I send you my wishes and my message of joy. May the God of
Grace bless you abundantly.
Cape Palmas 25.9.26
W.W. HARRIS

You will notice the addition of the name of Mr. Platt; as Harris had spoken
about him yesterday evening, I asked him if he did not wish to recommend him
to his churches. The order of the reading of the Bible is Harris's. [Here Benoît
notes the distinction between Harris's order ... and his.] Yesterday
evening, while speaking with Tano, he learned that we make the natives learn
their letters (the alphabet) in order that they may be able to read their Bibles.
He immediately ordered Tano to tell all the flock that he also wished to see
them learn to read. And so this morning we have inserted this command in his
message. The allusion to the ten commandments and to 'Jesus Christ our only
Saviour' also resulted from our conversations.

{In addition to his signature, Harris affixed to this impor-
tant document the imprint of his two thumbs, and nine
witnesses then signed their names or added their marks to
it. The original is written in French, and two copies were
made and signed. Copies will be distributed on the Ivory
Coast and will, we are sure, materially help our work there.
F.D.W.}
One may observe that anything which might suggest that Harris was not fully aware of what was taking place is expunged from the text of the ‘full accounts’ by F.D. Walker. Almost everything which might suggest any acceptance of polygamy, any inadequacy because of the effects of the stroke—interpreted as senility, his [thought to be] susceptibility to assumed recent ‘adventist’ influences, any psychic absence or imbalance, or condemnation of the French colonial regime has disappeared. And, most of all, Benoît’s candid description [translation, improving, correcting, suggesting, adding, deleting] of his reconstruction of Harris’s dictated paper is also expunged from that text.

If one were to remove from Benoît’s reconstructed ‘message from Harris’ those ‘insertions’ which he added (the allusions to Mr. Platt, the command to learn the alphabet and to read the Bible, and the allusion to the ten commandments and the ‘Word of Christ our Saviour’) one finds quite another message. It is essentially that of the third paragraph of the reconstruction. And if one were to add to it Benoît’s ‘deletion,’ it would probably include a serious warning for the French governor and his administrators, something absolutely unacceptable for such a legitimating document.

To what extent indeed was this final ‘message of Harris’ exactly what was required for the well-intentioned purposes of the Wesleyan Mission, and too good to be true? For even though Harris reportedly found the final message even better than his own, one is permitted to question whether with his ‘trances’ or psychic absences, he did indeed fully understand the full implications of all of the nuances. There is certainly a gap between ‘recommending Mr. Platt to his churches’ and his being ‘appointed by me as my successor to the head of the churches which I have founded.’ Is the Wesleyan exclusivity really from Harris, based on echoes from Tano of Catholic persecution, or is it a reflection of the Methodist mission’s intolerance? I have argued the former as a real possibility, while French Africanists could only see the latter, with Benoît exploiting the prophet to the fullest.

Here we are interested only in the process and its results, without in any manner impugning motives. What is established at this point is the reality of a ‘Benoît’s Harris’ and its transmutation to that of F.D. Walker’s ‘tamed prophet.’

III. One can observe that more in detail by comparing the reconstructed message with other heretofore unpublished messages to local churches and French colonial authorities, as dictated by Harris on Saturday morning. Their pattern is surely parallel to his original dictated
paper, which Benoît had requested for all the churches. And we can
follow their minor transmutations, thus permitting a comparison with
the major one just observed.

One recalls the process: Benoît’s scrawled notes on-the-spot on
Saturday—meant only for himself; the filled-out synthesis in French on
Monday reflecting his interpretation; an occasional note from Platt in
Abidjan; Miss Thompson’s translation into English in London; and F.D.
Walker’s use of the notes for his tailored editing of the so-called ‘full
accounts’ for public consumption.

In BN III,1, one finds, in French, Monday’s filled-out synthesis of the
notes taken on Saturday. The fill-in is from his two-day memory of Sat-
urday’s conversations, but necessarily colored by his numerous contacts
and experiences in the meanwhile. These included the following: Mr.
Frey, a French-speaking trader who had talked with Gov. Angoulvant
about Harris; Rev. S. Bonifacio, vice-principal of Cuttington College;
Rev. Killen, Episcopal priest from Graway near Harris’s home; Mr.
S.B.K. Clarck, a teacher-colleague of Harris who had known him well
during the first decade of 1900; Mrs. Hannah Johnson, a Liberian friend
of singer Helen Valentine whom she had visited in prison with Harris
in Abidjan in 1914; and three additional contacts with Harris himself.

The synthesis is introduced as follows:

Cette même matinée il nous dit des messages pour les chefs des églises. Aucune
préparation dans la composition de ces lettres [he had all night to think and pray
about them]. Il n’y a pas de suite dans les idées. [Was Harris’s ‘suite dans les idées
simply different from that of Benoît?]27 Les mêmes ordres se répètent constam-
ment [yet with distinct differences between those for the French authorities, and
those for the different churches whose situations were obviously very similar]. La
prédication de Harris a toujours été d’une simplicité laconique [One recalls Benoît’s
ignorance of the stroke with its interference with his speech].—‘Brulez les fetiches
et soyez baptisés.’ Aujourd’hui il y ajoute cet ordre: ‘Soyez Methodiste’ et en le
donnant il fait bien remarquer que lui-même a commencé par être Methodiste et
que s’il est rentré dans l’Église Protestantise episcopale c’était avant sa vocation de
prophète et poussé par le désir d’obtenir un bon salaire. Qu’on remarque aussi
l’autorité qu’il s’adjudge.

The Thompson translation here is quite straightforward.

This same morning he dictates to us messages for the chiefs of the churches. There
is no preparation in the composition of these letters: nor order [for suite, continuity] in the ideas. The same commands are constantly repeated. Harris’s preaching
has always been laconically simple. ‘Burn the fetiches and be baptised.’ Today he
adds this command ‘Join the [for Søyæz, Be] Methodists,’ and in giving it he spe-
cially observes that he himself began as a Methodist and that he entered the Pro-
testant Episcopal Church, not knowing his vocation as a prophet, and urged by
a desire to earn a good salary. Notice too the authority which he gives himself.

The four heretofore unpublished messages to which he refers, are
presented here first in their scrawled form, then in the filled-out French, and then in the Thompson translation. They were not included in Walker’s ‘full accounts.’ They permit a comparison both with the form and the content of the earlier reconstruction of Harris’s original message to all the churches. They appear to have been written quite rapidly.

1. Message to leaders of Harris people at Grand Lahou, an important 18-19th century coastal trading center.28

The scrawled notes:

*BN* I, 4  You go tell chief in Gd Lahou. I live here  I live in Lahou. This (he show his cross) is my telegraph [a ‘carrier’ of his presence and authority]. The man who spits bad on me he go die – God gives power to kruman boy to flag civilise world [note the high sense of mission to the Western, so-called civilized world]

____________________

Then he asks for liberty in his work: ‘You go tell to Governt in Ivory Coast—let this man work if it is God’s work you cannot stop it.’ [This is clearly an order to Benoît to transmit a message, as Harris’s spokesperson.29 Then the message continues:] You work Sunday. Money religion. Bad God will punish you –

I go work for God and if they kill me that’s all right—I go heaven.

[This expression of sanguine confidence did not survive in the rewrite.]

These last are not seen to be a part of the message to the chief in Lahou. But they are a message to the colonial government via Benoît. Harris’s work of God includes judgment on the Sunday work of the French colonial regime and its ‘money religion.’ The former he had confronted, with its leading ultimately to his arrest, brutal treatment and deportation. The latter is an apparent reaction to the common experience of tarification of rites within the colony’s officially recognized Roman Catholic missions.

*BN* I, 5  *Message pour Loa*

Marabou no good.30 All the people worship Jesus-Christ that is all –

You must use the Wesleyan cross –

*Tell them all fetiches* throw away [the underlining here the Minister will baptised you. appears to be added by All non baptised will be another hand, Platt?] baptism by Mr. Platt and his
minister only — [recognition of exclusive authority?]
Harris will give signs for
the disobedient
Christ is coming—no more
desobedient they go do
BN I,6 the cross the pastor give you
you will wear with Jesus Christ
crown with thorns31

Then the handwritten French synthesis written two days later [BN III, 1]:

Vous allez dire au chef de Grand Lahou que je suis ici et que je
suis en même temps à Lahou. Quand vous parlez pour moi, je suis
là. (Il montre sa grande croix) Voila mon telegraphe. [Benoît interprets
his role as spokesman.]
Si un homme se moque de moi, il mourra surement. ['Spits bad
on me’ is lost in the translation.]
Dieu a donné puissance à un kruboy pour avertir ['flag'] le monde
civilisé. [Note again a high sense of mission to the Western world.]
Que tous les hommes adorent-Jesus Christ et Jesus Christ seules-
ment
Les marabouts sont mauvais—que personne ne les suivent
Vous leur direz: Jetez tous les fetiches et devenez [= ‘become’ for
‘go’] Methodistes
Le pasteur vous baptisera. Tous ceux qui ne sont pas baptisés,
seront baptisés par Mr. Platt ou par le pasteur qu’il enverra.
Harris donnera des signes pour les desobeissants. Jesus Christ
revient [= ‘comes again’ for ‘comes’]—plus de desobissance
Maintenant il vous faut agir.
Portez aussi la croix des protestants et souvenez-vous en la regard-
dant de la couronne d’épines qu’a portée Jésus-Christ.

And finally the Thompson translation, compared with the original notes:
Message for Loa, chief of Grand Lahou.

You are to say to the chief of Grand Lahou that I am here and
that I am at the same time at Lahou: when you speak for me I am
there. (He points to his big cross) This is my telegraph.

If a man laughs at me ['spits . . . etc.’ lost further] he will assuredly
die.

God has given power to a Kru boy to warn the world ['civilised’
lost in translation].

Let all men adore Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone.
The marabouts are evil: let nobody follow them.
You will say to them: throw away all fetiches and become
Methodists. The Pastor will baptise you. All those who have not been baptised will be baptised by Mr. Platt or the pastor whom he sends.

Harris will give signs to the disobedient. Jesus Christ is coming again [the ‘again’ slipped in via Benoît’s translation]. There will be no more disobedience. Now you must work.

Carry [for ‘portez,’ wear] also the Protestant’s Cross, and remember when you look at it the crown of thorns which Jesus wore.

2. Message to Harris people in Fresco.32
The scrawled notes [BN I,7]:
My people in Fresco

All must do according to
the message or they will see
Tings — Join all the Methodist
Church —
All the fetiches throw them
away —
Worship the only true God—
I give them Bible—all
go Methodist——No more
desobedience —
Then the filled-out synthesis:
Messages pour mes gens à Fresco:
Tous vous devez agir suivant le message que j’ai envoyé
ou bien vous verrez des signes.
Joignez l’église Methodiste.
Jetez tous les fetiches.
Adorez le seul vrai Dieu [omission of reference to the Bible, and going Methodist]
Croyez à Jésus-Christ [added, with omission of ‘no more disobedience’]

And the Thompson translation:
Message for my people at Tresco [sic]
You must live according to the message which I have sent, or you will see signs.
Join the Methodist Church.
Throw away all your fetiches.
Worship the only true God.
Believe in Jesus Christ.
3. Message to Harris people in Tiegba, on the west end of the Ebrié lagoon, and Yocoboué, a Dida village, hinge to the interior.\textsuperscript{33}

The scrawled notes [BN I,8]:

To my people in

Tiegba and Yocoboué

Jesus Christ reign  Do not
remain disobedient  Join
the Methodist Church –
I am myself a Methodist
I want you to keep apart
Man who disobey will be
punished

All the fetishes throw
them away. Worship the
only true God
Learn the Bible and
believe in Jesus Christ
alone.

And the filled-out French synthesis:

Messages pour mes gens à Tiegba et Yocoboué

Jesus-Christ règne. Ne soyez pas désobeissants.
Je suis moi-même un Methodiste—Joignez l'église
Methodiste [a reversal of the order]

Ceux qui me désobéiront seront punis par les châtiments de
Dieu. [The last five words are added]

Jetez tous les fetiches. Adorez le seul vrai Dieu.
Etudiez la Bible.
Croyez seulement en Jesus-Christ.

And finally the Thompson translation, to compare with the original:

For my people at

Jesus Christ reigns. Do not be disobedient.
I myself am a Methodist, Join the Methodist Church.
I do not want you to remain outside [Methodist church?]
Those who disobey me will be punished by the chastisements
of God.

Throw away all your fetiches: worship the only true God.
Study the Bible. Believe only in Jesus Christ.
4. Message to the Governor of the Ivory Coast.
The scrawled notes [BN I,9]:

Governor
Krumman become prophet
big prophet. You must fear.
fire will fall upon you
No more fetiches. 34
Worship the only true God

Rev. 5/1 Who is worthy? I
a kruboy will come and open it. [This was omitted in the
French synthesis.]

The French filling-out and synthesis [note Platt’s warning]:

Pour le Gouverneur (!!! Not to be used in public! W.J.P.)

Un Krouman est devenu un grand
prophète. C’est un grand signe — Vous
devriez trembler. Le feu va tomber sur vous.
Adorez le seul vrai Dieu. 35

Les français doivent bien faire attention—
sans quoi la guerre et le feu les détruiront—Qu’ils
adorent le seul vrai Dieu. Le temps est court.
Qu’ils se repentent et reviennent à Dieu car
cet avertissement est le dernier.

And the Thompson translation:

Krumman is become a great prophet. It is a great sign.
You should tremble. Fire will fall on you. Worship the only true
God.

The French should pay attention. Know that war and fire will destroy
them unless they worship the true God. Time is short for them to
repent and turn again to God, for this is the last warning.

IV. Finally, the last part of the interview of Saturday morning is in
the form of Questions and answers. The French synthesis of this impor-
tant conversation is an unpublished text which permits us even better
to see how Benoît, in his own initial filling-in, also could leave out
significant materials.

The scrawled notes (BN I,10-13):

My commission

Here is my commission Jesus Christ tell me Matt. 28/19.
I will be Heliha . . . and convert all people.

Frenchman must look up fire and war will destroy them if they
don’t worship the only true God.

This case is the last case [see note (35)].

Angle Gabriel is my teacher when he teach me I am in transe he show me the verses St. Marc 9

Jesus-Christ must reign —

I am his prophet —

Liberia man put me in prison 1908 [it was in 1909]. But in prison Angle Gabriel come and tell me you are not in prison = I was in transes and I saw him spiritually —

Did you see him with your eyes ? =

Not with my eyes but spiritually. I was in transes.

What did he tell you ?

You are not in prison. God will come and annoyed you —

Your case ressemble Sadach Mesach and Abednego. You are like Daniel. At that time God annoyed me. It was like this shie——

3 times — It was like ice on my head and all my skin.

My case is like Rev. 20/4 Now I am going to be Judge.

It is like Hebrews 11/1 You did not see those things but they possess you — like Prophet Mosis —

How you know all the verses you give me?

Angel Gabriel tell me: search so and so — such verses.

The spirit in me is the spirit of pentecost. Corth 12/2 Your questions are a spiritual examination, so you see I am the prophet — ['a' prophet was written, then — significantly — corrected to 'the' prophet].

Women — Isaiah 4/1, that's the case with me and we are in that day — seven women and many more come and ask me — this is the day — the last day — (New ways).

I raise [= rise, stand up] in behalf of Etiopian [biblical language for African; this line was added after the first write-up] —

[It is important to observe that this very significant text disappears in the synthesis]

I am the watchman — Ezechiel/33 tell France to watch — Prepare ye — Jesus Christ is coming repent —

Tell all men White and Negroes to repent. I am the last prophet —

France go call me — Paris — go call me as Pharao called Mosis — You put big prophet in jail — Prophet no man like you — he is in transes — Mosis and Helaja come to visit me.
The voice of God comes through the Bible and tell all that.

The handwritten French filling-out and synthesis follows, with indications where, very exceptionally, the Thompson translation varies.

Les visions de Harris: Questions & Answers: [Harris never spoke of his ‘visions’ but rather of being ‘in transes’ and having visitations.]

D. D’ou vient votre autorité?

R. Voici ma commission: Matt. 28/19. Jesus-Christ m’a dit: Allez et enseignez toutes les nations les baptisant au nom du Pere du Fils et du Saint Esprit et leur enseignant à garder tout ce que je vous ai commandé.

Donc je vais et je baptise – Je serai comme Elie qui a fait bruler tous les prêtres de Baal, [the last half’s phrase is not from the notes; is it from Benoît? or his memory?] Je vais convertir tous les peuples de la terre. [Here the reference to the French is missing as observed above in note 35.]

D. Qui vous parle pour vous enseigner toutes ces choses?

R. L’angle Gabriel est mon maître. Lorsqu’il me parle je suis ‘en transes’ [insistence on the exact quotation; BR translates it as ‘a trance’—singular].

D. Qui vous enseigne les versets? [This question, and the first part of the answer lack in the Thompson translation].

R. L’angle Gabriel me les montre [He omits the Mark 9 reference, important for Harris’s ‘Elijah’ understanding.]

Jesus Christ doit regner—Je suis son prophète Voila pourquoi j’explique tous ces versets.

D. Quand l’angle Gabriel a-t-il commencé à vous parler?

R. Les hommes du Liberia m’avaient mis en prison. C’était en 1910 [Benoît’s correction; Harris was in prison a second time in 1910 when the visitation came]; mais en prison l’angle Gabriel vient et me dit: vous n’êtes pas en prison—you êtes dans le ciel [the last phrase is not in the notes]. [Je cherche alors a savoir ce que signifie pour lui cette expression: ‘l’angle Gabriel’ qu’il a evidemment trouvé dans sa Bible.]

D. Comment reconnaisssez-vous l’angle Gabriel?

R. Je sais que c’est lui.

D. Le voyez-vous avec vos yeux?

R. Non pas avec mes yeux. Je le vois à l’intérieur de moi-même spirituellement [underlined by Benoît].

D. La première fois que vous l’avez vu dans la prison, l’avez-vous
vu avec vos yeux? (Toutes les personnes qui racontent sa vision disent en effet que l'ange lui est apparu dans une grande lumière, que Harris l'a vu et entendu). [This parenthetic note is in the Thompson translation, but not in F.D. Walker's 'full account.' Benoît was apparently exploiting his Sorbonne learning under Prof. Raoul Allier].

R. Non pas avec mes yeux, mais spirituellement—j'étais 'en trances' [Benoît puts the expression in quotation marks for the second time, insisting on Harris's exact language; BR puts it 'in a trance.']

D. Qu'est ce que l'ange vous a dit alors?

R. Vous n'êtes pas en prison. Dieu va venir et vous ouindre. Vous serez prophète. Votre cas ressemble à celui de Sadrach, Mesach, et Abednego. Vous êtes comme Daniel. Jeté en prison pour être éprouvé [to be 'tested' rather than BR's 'to be tried'] puis devenir un grand prophète. [The last phrase was not in the notes.]

(Remarquez la connaissance de la Bible que Harris avait déjà à cette époque. Toutes ces idées flottaient dans son subconscious). On trouve dans les vieilles églises Harris des hommes portant le nom de Sadrach ou d'Abednego—reste d'un enseignement du prophète sur ce point. [The (? ) and the brief commentary lack in Walker's 'full account.']

D. Comment avez-vous senti que Dieu vous oignit?

R. C'est à ce moment que Dieu m'a oint—l'esprit descendait avec un bruit sur ma tête, comme ça . . . (il imite le bruit d'un jet d'eau.) C'était comme de la glace sur ma tête, sur toute ma peau. Il a fait cela trois fois de suite. J'étais 'en trances.' [repeated quotation marks; BR has 'in a trance'] Mon cas ressemble Apo: 20/4. ("Rev.") [not from B.; added by Platt?] Moi aussi j'aurai maintenant un trône et je serai juge. [Thompson translated the last phrase: 'I too will have a throne now, it will be a prize,' and thus weakened Harris's sense of vocation to a ruling judgeship in West Africa, in the coming kingdom of Christ. F.D. Walker simply omitted the whole reference to Revelation 20/4].

D. Comment savez-vous que tout cela est bien vrai?

R. C'est comme Hébreux 11/1. 'La foi est une ferme assurance des choses qu'on espère, une démonstration de celles qu'on ne voit point.' On ne voit pas ces choses-là, mais elles vous possèdent. Comme Moïse le prophète. [F.D.W. omits this last phrase.]

D. Comment connaissez-vous tous les versets que vous me citez?

R. L'ange Gabriel me dit: Cherche ici ou cherche là—tel verset. L'esprit qui est en moi est l'esprit qui est descendu à Pentecôte. C'est l'esprit qui fait parler en langue comme il est dit dans I Cor. 14/2. Moi aussi je parle à Dieu en langues. [The 'full accounts' of F.D.W. edited out this discussion of 'tongues.']—Ce sont les mystères que
les hommes ne comprennent pas. [Here Benoît leaves out Harris’s defense of ‘Ethiopian’ conjugality, significant for understanding his dispensational hermeneutic.]36

D. Quelle mission avez-vous maintenant?
R. Je suis la sentinelle, comme Ezechiel 33/Je crie: Préparez-vous—Préparez-vous—Jesus-Christ est proche—Repentez-vous. Dites à tous les hommes . . . les noirs et les blancs de se repentir et de croire à Jésus-Christ. Je suis le dernier prophète [omitted by F.D.W.]. L’esprit de Dieu nous parle à travers la Bible et nous apprend toutes ces choses. [All the rest of this text is omitted in F.D.W.’s ‘full accounts.’]
La France va m’appeler comme Pharaon appela Moïse. Vous avez jeté un grand prophète de Dieu en prison—le prophète de Dieu en prison! [here Benoît omits ‘Prophet no man like you—he is in transes,’ from BN] Vous devriez trembler [not in the BN here].
C’est Moïse et Elie qui sont venus vous visiter [contrary to BN which report how, in transes, they visit him, in a near parallel to the story of Jesus’ transfiguration. This is repeated in another conversation, which is correctly recorded, however, in BR III,5]. Je suis la sentinelle.

Summary

We have looked at illustrations from a process going from a culture gap in inter-personal contacts, to rapidly scrawled notes—sometimes in a French transcription of heard English, edited in a filled-out synthesis in French, then translated and edited in English, then re-edited and published as a ‘full account.’ At every stage of the process, one may observe mutations, governed no doubt in large part by the major preoccupation of legitimation of the Wesleyan mission, in all good faith. And it produced the dominant interpretation of the Prophet Harris.

The reconstructed message did greatly profit Methodist developments, even though many Harrists could not accept the Wesleyan claim to Harris’s authorization of their mission. More important, the Methodists did not stand up as his spokesperson for ‘Ethiopian’ ways of conjugality; on the contrary, they used his legitimation to sanction a monogamous discipline. An inherent contradiction was present in that a ministry which they could accept but not fully approve, was used to validate their own. But even more, the Wesleyan Mission clearly did not become a spokesperson for Harris’s warnings to the colonial authorities, nor did they wish to seek legitimate authorization for Harris’s return ministry in the French colony.37 The consequences of these differences were to have all kinds of implications for the future relationships
between Methodists and the Harrists, for whom even today the name and reputation of the white ‘Pasteur Benoît’ have become ignominious.

But in the process, important information was also recorded to permit us to enter into a better understanding of the phenomenal prophet on his own terms, and recognizing—in his own language—that ‘God moves in mysterious ways . . . and uses the foolish things in the world to confound the wise.’

NOTES

1. Benoît to Walker; Paris, May 5, 1929. Methodist Missionary Society (MMS) Archives. For easy reference, those three notebooks have been labeled the ‘Benoît Notes’ (BN).


3. A fourth notebook, with a French synthesis of a part of the notes—translated in the first part of BR, is even now not accessible. It is in possession of Dr. Ernest Amos Djoro, a former student of Pierre Benoît in the Wesleyan Bible School at Dabou. In the late 1970s he reported to me that Benoît had entrusted him with a notebook of notes from his visit to the Prophet Harris in 1926. He permitted me to consult his ‘Prophétisme et nationalisme Africain. Les Harristes en Côte d’Ivoire,’ an unpublished text from ca. 1965; in it he apparently quoted directly from the text of the original French synthesis in that fourth notebook. And in his 1994 thesis he does present from that document what he describes as ‘le compte-rendu complet de cette mission tel qu’il a été présenté par BENOIT lui-même dans son journal de voyage, avec quelques commentaires de notre part.’ Unfortunately it is not complete, but edited in ways that give continuity to the image of the ‘tamed’ prophet.

4. It is a reference to Gordon Mackay Haliburton’s The Prophet Harris. A Study of an African Prophet and His Mass-Movement in the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast, 1913-1915 London: Longmans, 1971. It is based on his doctoral thesis, with field research during 1963-64. He did have access to the edited 60-page BR, but forty years after the event, Platt was not yet ready to share the original notes with a Methodist research historian seeking to do a definitive work on Harris.


6. His story, and that of his gathering together the present-day Harrist Church, is told by his son in Paul William Ahui Le Prophète William Wade Harris—son message d’humanité et de progrès Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1988.

7. Frank Deaville Walker, The Prophet Found at Last. The Story of M. Pierre
The Taming of the Prophet Harris


On the basis of *BR*, the 1930 edition finally went so far as to recognize that 'at this period Harris was almost certainly a polygamist. The three women who accompanied him and led the singing seem to have been his wives. He permitted polygamy among his followers, but he sternly denounced adultery, fornication, and other acts of immorality.' (p. 18) The London office of the Wesleyan mission had no doubt come to terms with that reality, but the field staff had not, for it would have undermined their use of Harris's message to validate their strict monogamous stance. French missionary Paul Wood was still defending a monogamous Harris in the French paper *Temps* as late as 19 September 1931. An in his thesis of 1994 (note 12 below) Methodist Amos Djoro 'corrected' F.D. Walker, and continued to defend a monogamous Harris, despite access to the 4th notebook of Benoît.

The quote from Thompson is in Paragraph 186 of January 3, 1927, Thompson to Platt, in French West Africa archives of the Methodist Missionary Society, London.


10. See James R. Krabill *The Hymnody of the Harrist Church Among the Dida of South Central Ivory Coast (1913-1949)* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995. (No. 74, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity.)

11. See footnote 6 above.


13. Harris was in fact a supporter of the Liberian regime in the armed rebellions prior to that of 1909-10. All three of his imprisonments were in connection with that event, for stirring up a revolt, detention during the war, and re-imprisonment after his prophetic preaching created concern with the authorities.

14. This cover-up story was given to F.D. Walker in February 1926 during travel with the French administrator Paoli who purportedly carried it out. The Methodist missionaries in good faith gave it long life, but the *BN* and the *BR*, confirmed by other sources, give a story which severely indisputes the regime. F.D. Walker's 'full account' of 1927 and the corrected 1930 edition of *The Story...* did not expose that cover-up.

Harris told Benoît: 'The soldiers took me near Lahou—they bring me Dabou and Abidjan. In Abidjan they broke my cross and take all my cloths away... they took my cloth of [off] and the cloth of the women—that's a crime—they crucify Christ.' In *BR*, Walker edited: 'At Lahou the terms of his arrest were defined. He was allowed to talk with his followers, but soon he will be taken to Dabou. At Abidjan the Senegalese guards conscientiously maltreated him and the three women. Why—one wastes time in asking.' Yet Benoît had learned from Mrs. Hannah Johnson of the very severe treatment the women also had received, with Helen Valentine dying a few weeks after their
return to Monrovia. One can only conjecture why this precision from the Benoît notes was kept from the public, to the advantage of the French colonial image.

15. This language of missionary opportunity was very specific in Frank Deaville Walker’s Day of Harvest in the White Fields of West Africa (London: Cargate Press, [1925]).

16. That year brought forth Allier’s *La psychologie de la conversion chez les peuples non-civilisés* (Paris: Payot, 1925, 2 vols.) which gives broad documentation for the period, and suggests the kind of study Benoît had done.


18. Platt to Thompson, 26 November 1926, Par. 156. (M.S. archives)


20. The complete text reflects the contrast between the pre- and post-stroke condition of Harris, apparently some months after Benoît’s visit, for it was published in December 1928. It is cited in Haliburton (op. cit. 1971, 192-194) from Walter B. Williams, *God’s Avenging Sword* Kroo Coast, Liberia, December 25, 1928, pp. 5f. This important text is ignored by Amos Djojo who knew Haliburton’s work through the translated abridgement of his excellent study. The photograph of the prophet, taken in 1928 at the time of John Ahui’s visit, shows his left leg very severely swollen—a sequel of the stroke.


22. One must remember that in 1909-10 Harris had revolted violently against American missionary support of the Liberian regime in favor of inviting a British protectorate.

23. It is important to note here that this issue of the newspaper contained absolutely no eschatological motifs in its articles, and it was not from an ‘adventist sect’ as Benoît had erroneously concluded from its name. His ‘unfortunately’ reflected his own understandings, but colored the whole Methodist interpretation of Harris. The assumption that this motif in Harris is episodic, due to an aging and weakened childish mentality is totally in error. We know now that Harris had been strongly influenced by the early ‘Russellite’ movement which provoked a separatist and independent movement around Cape Palmas in 1887 and following. This dimension was an essential part of Harris’s understandings from the beginning of his prophetic ministry, and is indispensable for interpreting him. See Shank, 1994, op. cit., footnote 5 above, pp. 71-76.

24. Benoît grasps the importance of the ‘Spirit’ for Harris, and uses it as a connecting point with the Huguenot cross he wishes Harris to sanction. Harris does accept the symbol but gives it other weight, as a later text shows. The Ivoirian Catholic converts had been given medals to heighten their sense of distinct identity, but the Harris-inspired Protestants had nothing similar. The Wesleyan missionaries which came from France wished to distribute the Huguenot cross of French Protestantism but the missionary societies felt that it was too much of a concession to a superstitious mentality. If Harris were to approve, it would provide considerable weight to the whole project and intensify the identification of the Wesleyan Mission, the Protestant cross and the Prophet Harris. The photo taken of Harris, later used for broad distribution by the Wesleyans, shows him wearing the Huguenot cross.

25. F. Harrington at Grand Cess insisted that ‘he was most helpful to our infant station.’ F. Ogé, head of the Roman Catholic mission in Liberia, insisted that the Fathers recognized Harris’s responsibility for their work ‘going ahead by leaps and bounds.’ (E.M. Hogan *Catholic Missionaries and Liberia* Cork University Press, 1981, p. 203). Dr. F.A. Price reports on the mass movement before 1917 which went from one end of the country to the other. (Liberian Odyssey New York, Pageant Press, 1954, 141-145.) And the Methodist Episcopal *Liberian Conference Blue Book* of 1916 indicates that this mass movement began in 1915—the very year of Harris’s return from the Ivory Coast.


27. I have developed this fragment for another part of his notes—his contact with Commandant Corbière at Grand Lahou (not Grand Bassam as I then wrote). See Shank, *op. cit.* footnote 2 above, 1979, 220-227.

29. By now, the experienced, seasoned, older, authoritative prophet had accepted the youthful, recently-arrived, foreign novice as his spokesperson, giving him clear instructions and orders to be carried out. Clearly Benoît would not take this up with the French authorities. It is questionable that he even understood the significance, underlined later by Harris: ‘You missionaries are for me like Aaron for Moses—you are Aaron.’ [BN II,11]

Later, after hearing Harris speak of a son James by Mary Pioka and a son Samson by Leitia Williams, he asked directly, ‘What shall we teach on polygamy?’ And the instructions to his spokesperson—like Aaron for Moses—were clear: ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery. St. Paul... for the hardness of your heart you shall have one woman, that’s Paul, not God—but God let us have several women if we do not commit adultery.’ [BN II,13ff.] From all we have observed Harris had every reason to believe that the British Wesleyan Mission, and Benoît as his spokesperson, would indeed respect those instructions. But this exchange did not even get into the *BR*. Nor did other texts where Harris explicitly recognized his seven wives at Axim.

30. This very exceptional Harris reference to Islam, with negative evaluation of Muslim diviners, is all the more striking when juxtaposed with his very highly focused christocentrism.

31. This is not the ‘Spirit’ symbolism that Benoît suggested. The eight points—as in a Maltese cross, extending just beyond the inner circle of the Huguenot cross, could indeed give a candid impression of a crown of thorns, to one consciously centered on Christ and his suffering.

32. The scene of the first major collective response, 60 Kms west of Grand Lahou. Eleven years after the event, a Mr. Morgan who was English agent for Woodin and Company was reported to have said about Fresco: ‘Folks... were sunk in debased superstition and fetish-worship, and had been so for years. In three days the prophet-fellow—I heard him preach myself—changed all that. Their fetishes were burnt, and what was an ordinary African coast village, steeped in superstition became nominally a Christian town.’ (cited in W.J. Platt *An African Prophet* London: S.C.M., 1934, p. 34.)


34. Here the appeal is for the French authorities to condemn the use of fetishes by the native population, and not for the French to abandon fetish. The respect shown by the French for the traditional practices is here condemned by the prophet. His own ministry was later not given by the French the same respect that they gave to the traditional religion. This was clearly unacceptable to him.

35. What follows in this message was taken by Benoît from the next section in response to his question to Harris about his commission. He assumes no ‘suite dans les idées’ so he connects the earlier France-oriented text with that to the French governor, according to his own logical sense of suite. Here he seems to not understand what we have already observed, that Harris’s sense of call to the French is a part of his commission to ‘convert all people.’ Does not Benoît, with the whole white community, mistakenly assume that Harris sees himself as sent only for the Africans? Is his response to Benoît a corrective which the latter did not catch?

36. I have analyzed this in Shank, *op. cit.* 1994; Chapter 7, Patterns in Biblical Understanding, pp. 154ff.

37. Harris’s attitude toward the French authorities even appears to be partly occulted by Walker’s editing in *BR III*,5. ‘Does Harris bear any resentment against the French Administration? None. He has forgiven all. He knows, on the one hand, that his misadventures in French territory were caused more by the zeal of subordinates than by the wish of the leaders; on the other hand he does not wish to remember any of it. He remains very dignified in his attitude... .’

Message du Prophète William Wade Harris aux Églises qu'il a fondées en Côte d'Ivoire

Moi, William Wade Harris, qui vous ai appelés à l'Évangile et baptisés, j'ai dit, ce message au Pasteur pour qu'il vous l'apporte et que vous vous y conformiez.

Tous les hommes, les femmes et les enfants qui ont été appelés et baptisés par moi, doivent entrer dans l'Église Méthodiste Westleyenne. Je suis moi-même un méthodiste. Personne ne doit aller à l'église catholique romaine, s'il veut être fidèle à moi. Ceux qui se feront construire sont chez le Calife de Dieu.

Monsieur Plott, le directeur de l'Église Méthodiste, est désigné par moi comme mon successeur à tête des églises que j'ai fondées.


Soyez fidèles en toutes choses en restant fermement attaché à l'observation des Dix Commandements et à la Parole de Jésus Christ, notre seul Sauveur.

Je vous envoie tous mes vœux et mes bons messages. Que le Dieu de Paix vous bénisse abondamment.

Témoin

Fait en doublé à Cape Palmas le 25 sept. 1926.

[Signature de W. W. Harris]
The prophet Harris, at Cape Palmas, September 1926, with daughter Grace Neal and her children Rose and Betty; with Missionary Pierre Benoît and interpreter, Tano.