The Christian Encounter with Afro-Messianic Movements:
The Possessio-Syncretism Axis illustrated from South Africa

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THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The task of this chapter is to give the third of the three regional illustrations of the possessio-syncretism axis, the missiological implications of which have been pinpointed so ably by the introductory chapter of Dr. Tippett. My illustration is taken from South Africa. Against this background the two key terms give a very peculiar ring. It is difficult to speak of "possessio" in South Africa and not to think of the historic intrusion of the white man which led to the fact that 85% of the land became his possession. And it is equally difficult to speak of syncretism in South Africa without thinking at once of the 3000 new religious movements, often called "African Independent Churches," of which so many render a perfect illustration of a complete blending of Christian concepts with the basic tenets of African Traditional Religion.

I am, of course, aware that I am not yet using the word "possessio" in the missiological sense in which it was coined by J.H. Bavinck' and adopted by Dr. Tippett as the basic term for the adaptation-accommodation-assimilation-transformation complex. But as Bengt Sundkler has pointed out in his *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (1961:33), the Native Land Act of 1913 had a lot to do with the rapid increase of separatist movements of what he called the Ethiopian, the Zionist and the Messianic types. For by that new law it became virtually impossible for Africans to acquire land which had been occupied by the white population. This led to a tremendous repercussion in the religious outlook of the Bantu population: "Once you had the Bible as we had the land. Today we have the Bible and you have the land." To some degree the syncretistic movement in South Africa can he explained sociologically as "reaction to conquest," expressing itself in the revitalization of traditional tribal religion under the stimulus of some concepts of the new western religion. The latter had proved so powerful to its white adherents, but impossible to be appropriated by the African native.

Such a sociological approach to the so-called African Independent Church Movement has its credits. But if it is employed exclusively or one-sidedly, it would not do justice to the very complex nature of our problem. For there are other aspects, taken from the fields of comparative religion, of church history and of missiology, which are equally important to be considered. Only then can we come to a fuller understanding of the emergence of groups like the Afro-messianic movements, which are a most peculiar expression of syncretism within the sulk of the "African Independent Churches."

This reflection determines the procedure of this chapter. In the *first* part I want to describe the phenomenon of the Afro-messianic movements in the categories of anthropology and comparative religion. In the *second* part I want to identify the syncretistic forces working in these movements from the missiological point of view. In the *third* part I want to indicate now an improved missionary communication could counteract syncretism by taking in possession the legitimate questions in it, and thus pave the way for a truly indigenous Christian church in South Africa.

THE AFRO-MESSIANIC PHENOMENON

The messianic movements and groups in Africa are one specific manifestation within the new social formations which are taking place in African Traditional Religion. We also find them in Central Africa (e.g. the early Kimbanguist and Matswa movements [see Anderson 19581), but there is a particular concentration in Southern Africa, i.e. in the Republic of South Africa, in Lesotho and in Rhodesia. They have developed a magnetic attraction and vitality, a fact which in the stationary religious and missionary situation in their South African environment makes them an exciting phenomenon. The rush into the "churches" of Lekganyane in Transvaal and Shembe in Natal is enormous.[2]

(1) The Anthropological Approach

How can we explain the sudden appearance of such post-Christian ethnic religious movements? The first people who found themselves confronted by them were the missionaries and colonial administrators. While missionaries regarded them as a falling away from the new religion, the government officers suspected concealed rebellion and, in some cases, interfered in a violent way. Quite early reports in missionary periodicals stirred up the interest of sociology and anthropology. The sociologists here discovered a chance to study the emergence of completely new social organizations in the realm of the apparently rather static primitive cultures. The parallelism of the cases caused scholars to assume that behind those seemingly spontaneous and incidental movements, quite definite sociological laws were hidden.

Soon they recognized that the reason for the origin of these movements was the so-called "reaction to conquest" (see M. Hunter 1964), i.e. the clash between the colonial expansion and the primitive ethnic society for which the political and economic annexation of their country meant rape and exploitation. Against this total threat the indigenous society defends itself by recalling its traditions and by the desire to expel the white man and his culture. In view of what Dr. Tippett calls "the capacity of cohesive cultural complexes for survival," such reaction must necessarily always be religious and social at the same time. This characterizes these movements as *nativistic,* a term which was defined by the American anthropologist R. Linton (1943:230) as "any conscious and organized attempt by the members of a society to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of their culture." The hope which is expressed by these attempts is, according to some ethnologists, predominantly of a socio-economic nature. Primitive messianism, according to Barber (1941), is the reaction of a people being deprived of their possessions and rights.

A profound socio-psychological approach is offered by the important essay of Anthony Wallace on "Revitalization Movements" (1956). According to Wallace, such revitalization movements are "any intentional organized and conscious attempts by the members of a society to construct a more satisfactory culture." Wallace describes the psychological stages which follow each other when the communal consciousness of a primitive society sees itself threatened by inevitable disintegration in consequence of the cultural clash. Under this stress the primal community reacts with an urgent desire either to reconstruct their old culture or to substitute for it a new superior culture. Such revitalization movements can bear rather different characters depending on the respective culture and situation. They can appear as *revival movements* which try to give a new validity to values of the old culture which seem to have been lost: a typical case is the Mau Mau Movement in Kenya. Revitalization movements can also appear as *cargo cults* or *chiliastic movements.* Another important type, finally, is the *messianic movement.* Here the decisive feature is the part played by an apotheosized savior who is expected to bring about the cultural revolution. In these movements the person of the founder, who impresses his adherents by his prophetic appearance, gains central significance. According to his sensitive nature, the conflict of his community is condensed in him. He receives in dreams, visions and auditions a vocation experience which transforms his personality and designates him to be the savior of his people.

The anthropological approach has contributed substantially to explaining the character of the messianic movements in their nativistic aspect as "reaction to conquest." The economic, social and psychological factors which are pointed out here must be taken very seriously. This approach explains convincingly why messianic and other nativistic movements appear in such a multitude, especially in South Africa. For here the cultural clash has been especially extensive and intensive. A nativistic reaction is, as B. Malinowski (1949:47) has pointed out, very frequently the result of an "integral rejection" of members of an inferior culture by the members of a technically and economically superior civilization. The enticement to join the European society in the enjoyment of a more "saturated" standard of living is not fulfilled as soon as expected, or is not fulfilled at all. Thus the disappointed members of the deprived society react either in a militant or an escapist way. Amongst the nativistic movements, however, a major attraction is developed only by those movements which not only arouse utopian hopes but also offer social protection to their adherents and effective help in mastering the new problems in the midst of rapid social change. This can he confirmed especially in the messianic communities of Lekganyane in North Transvaal and Limba (see Mqotsi and Mkele 1946) in Port Elizabeth. Both have established small settlements where some of their adherents can make a living. The question, however, is whether such sub-cultures which put themselves beside modern civilization can be of

long duration.

(2) The Approach of Comparative Religion

The approach of the anthropologist has to be complemented by that of the scientist of religion. Here special interest is taken in all those features which show common ground between the nativistic movements and the animistic mother religions: the roles of the cultic key persons like divine chiefs, shamans and healers, the tabu, the concepts of witchcraft, the magical means, rituals. They all relate to Dr. Tippett's three categories: mythical thinking, therapeutic system and the living dead."

It can easily he discovered that in their decisive presuppositions the adherents of the Afro-messianic movements have remained faithful to the old animistic worldview. Among them as well as among the pagan Africans, the key concept for explaining the world is the idea of the mystico-magic life force which fills the universe and which gives to each part its own quality and ability. African religion is the desire, in contact with the ancestors and mediated through the familiar or communal ritual, to channel the life force both to the individual member of the clan and to the whole community iii order to strengthen them against the threats of enemies. Originally all African rituals had their ideological frame of reference in ancient mythology. Today those mythological notions have fallen into oblivion; the ritual practices, however, persist.

Highly important is the demand for a therapeutic system. According to Bantu conviction any misfortune, any illness, any death is the result of the diminishing of one's vital force caused *by* the interference of the superior force of somebody else. There are, besides ritual pollution, three major reasons for illness:

(a) Minor diseases like catching a cold or measles can be ascribed to *natural causes.* All other illnesses and misfortunes, however, are believed to be caused by witchcraft or interference by the ancestral spirits.

(b) The *sorcerer* or the *witch* is an evil person who by technical or biochemical manipulations and spiritist contacts gains power over his fellow man and thus prevents his psychological or bodily organs from functioning normally.

(c) But also the *ancestors* can interfere disastrously in the life of their posterity if they feel neglected. To avoid such misfortune the wrath of the ancestors has to be appeased by ritual sacrifices. The Bantu spend much time and attention to reveal the causes of disasters. This constitutes the power and authority of the witch doctor. He is first of all a witch finder and secondly a destroyer of witchcraft. For the Zulus, these two functions are separated into two professions, *isangoma* and *inyanga.*

Any study of the messianic movements in Africa will show how central to them are the concepts of magical forces, magical harm and magical restitution of life. This explains, first of all, the position of the head of the community. For he unites in himself the powers of divination and of healing in the highest potency. In a lower degree also the minor prophets, installed by him, participate in this ability. They are to be understood more in analogy to the traditional diviners and healers than to the biblical prophets. Such judgment would, of course, be sharply resented by the official representatives of the movements. They try to find a biblical cover for every phenomenon of their cult, however striking the actual parallels in traditional tribal religion might be. In some cases a process of transculturation has led to modern substitutes for the ancient means, and this usually goes together with the ostentatious renunciation of the "heathen practices" of the tribal environment.

It is interesting to note that several founders of messianic movements acted in their earlier life as diviners or mediums, or came from families of witch doctors. Usually they recruit their "prophets" from the range of pagan diviners and magical practitioners. This former contact with ancestral spirits (Zulu: *idlozi)* from which they received their clairvoyance forms an obvious counterpart to their present claim as nativistic prophets to have contact with "angels" or to be filled with the "Holy Spirit," which gives them the power of divination. This transcendental relationship constitutes the religious or magical authority of the Bantu messiahs. It leads their adherents to blind submission and makes them immune to missionary influences.

Lastly I want to refer to the parallelism between the institution of *divine chieftainship* and the office of the head of the messianic movement (Oosthuizen 1966:94-96; 1968:91). Traditional African Religion was a religion of the tribe and, therefore, had to carry out its main function in the frame of the community of blood and soil. The objects of religious invocation in prayer and sacrificial ritual were the ancestors of the clan, and especially of the family of the chief. The chiefs were the high priests who mediated between the tribal community and their own forefathers, who were the real national gods. In view of the dispersion of the tribal fellowship and the emergence of new social entities in urban areas, the only religion which proves its

efficiency and reality is that which can transcend the former African particularism in its worship and its sense of fellowship. The Afro-messianic movements do this by substituting new religious authorities and forms for the traditional ones and by making large concessions to the traditional worldview. The cultic relationship between John Galilei Shembe, the present leader, and his deified father Isaiah Shembe, the founder of the Shembe community, forms a striking parallel to the royal ancestral ritual of Zulu chiefs. To this extent Afro-messianism is the most comprehensive attempt of a traditional African religion threatened by dissolution to save itself and to enter into the modern age by means of certain terminological and ritualistic transformations.

THE MOTIVES OF THE SYNCRETISTIC PROCESS

There are central aspects of the messianic movements which cannot properly be explained in the categories of religious phenomenology either. How could it happen that in the office of the chief-prophet-healer the traditional sacred king was transformed into an eschatological figure? The early adherents of Kimbangu expected that in connection with a marvelous event he would suddenly return from captivity on a great ship on the Congo river as a national liberator, heading all the old kings of the Congo Empire and the resurrected ancestors (Andersson 1958:2280. Shembe and John Masove are believed to stand at the Last Day at the gate of the coming Jerusalem granting entrance only to their adherents. For these roles there is no place in the cyclical worldview of the Bantu. East African languages, e.g., do not even have an equivalent for the word "future", as Dr. John Mbiti has shown (1969b:15-28; 1971:24-31).

The Afro-messianic movements, therefore, cannot he fully understood if we overlook the fact that these communities, even in their nativistic determination, remain oriented towards the Christian church, from which they took their point of departure. Secretly they also remain oriented towards the person of Jesus Christ, although they do so in a relativistic sense (see Damman 1965). The answer to the cultural clash remains a pseudo-Christian religious one: church and Messiah. Never has a nativistic messianic movement wholly become a nationalistic party. Rather the Afro-messianic movements claim to be the real manifestation of the Christian church among their people, possibly even for the whole world.[3] Thus we can say that the Christian church, both in its form and in its teaching, became not only the impulse but also the stumbling block for the messianic movements in Africa.

This is exactly the moment when missiology comes into its own and has to prove its character as a theological discipline. Missiology is concerned with the communication of the gospel to non-Christian people. Therefore, it has to trace the causes of the tragic breaking apart of mission church and Afro-messianic movement. In the first step we have to make ourselves advocates of the Afro-messianic movements and to put some searching questions to our western missions. In a second step we will use spiritual discernment to unveil how far the wrong answers of the Afro-messianic movements originate not merely in an inevitable misunderstanding, but also in an existential contradiction to the message proclaimed.

(1) Western Christianity Cross-Examined

There are many questions which, in view of the emergence of messianic and other nativistic movements, must he directed to western missions and "their" churches. Let us select five central ones:

(a) The Congolese people who had been healed by Simon Kimbangu returned to their home with the exclamation: "We have found the God of the black people!" Sprinkler reports a sermon of John Galilei Shembe, in which he described the significance of his father in the following words: "You, my people, were once told of a God, who has neither arms nor legs, who cannot see, who has neither love nor pity. But Isaiah Shembe showed you a God who walks on feet and heals with his hands and can be known by man, a God who loves and who has compassion" (Sundkler 1961:278). These two examples make it quite clear that the preaching of the missionaries at one decisive point did not reach its aim. It could not convince many Africans that in Jesus Christ the Immanuel, the "God with us," has really appeared. John V. Taylor (1963:l2lff) has tried to elucidate this tragic failure of the missionary's message and of the church established by him. He claims that the most important experience of the African listeners was the encounter with the personality, nearness and holiness of the transcendent God. This nearness, however, can only be tolerated if, at the same time, the merciful love of this God as revealed in Jesus Christ, the second Adam, is not only preached, but also testified to by the life of the Christians for each other. Otherwise God will return into the indefinite distance of the *dens otiosus* which characterizes the African belief in a supreme God.

(b) The Afro-messianic movements present themselves as eschatological communities of salvation. They either urgently expect salvation to happen with the immediate *parousia* of the Messiah, or they do already enjoy the *shalom* of a realized eschatology (Martin 1964:123; Oosthuizen 1968:83-84). Christian hope has been perverted here. But the idea of an eschatological expectation as such had been introduced by the preaching of the missionaries. The question directed to the missions, therefore, is this: What has been the object of their own hope to which they testified to the people of Africa? Into what relationship did the missionaries set the futuristic and the present aspects of the New Testament hope? Was it the psychological state of inner peace and harmony — which must have appeared rather strange to animistic listeners? Or did the missionaries not bother at all about the realization of the final aim of Christian hope because they were only concerned with the planting of the indigenous church? Or did they represent that apocalyptic type of mission in which everything is acclaimed as total but imminent future? Or did they secularize the Christian hope resolutely in the sense of a social gospel? I am afraid that the history of modern missionary preaching cannot offer any additional reply to this question. But none of all these eschatological concepts is really fully representative of the eschatological message of the New Testament. This is all the more painful since in Protestant missions the essential motive has always been the eschatological one.

(c) In all missiological writings about the messianic movements we find agreement that their prophesying, speaking in tongues and ecstatic dancing reveal a hunger for genuine religious life. Sundkler and Martin call it a "hunger for a revelation here and now" (Sundkler 1961:30; Martin 1964:167ff). Christian Baëta speaks of the "desire to probe the reality of spiritual things" (1962:5). African religiosity puts the emphasis not so much on the intellectual or ethical sides, but rather on the emotional aspect of the relation with God. Members of Afro-messianic movements often talk about the coldness which has driven them away from the main-line churches. Without overlooking the opposite danger of being raptured by an unhealthy enthusiasm, we may ask: does this not indicate that the charismatic life of the early church has been impoverished and that we have failed to develop a relevant pneumatology in general?

(d) In the present debate about the shortcomings of western missions in the light of the religious expectations of the Africans, it is sometimes stated sweepingly that missions have been too spiritualistic. In their attempts to save the souls, it is said, they have forgotten the human body. The pioneering enterprises of medical missions give the lie to such accusations. But there is art element of truth hidden in this self-accusation. It is that missions treated the body and the soul of man in different departments, the soul in the church and the body in the clinic. Such a tearing apart is impossible in view of the concept of wholeness which we find in primal thought, especially as it is manifested in the magical diagnosis and therapy. The black messiah as a healer and prophet stands in the tradition of the Bantu philosophy (Tempels 1959:27-46) of wholeness. But does he not also stand nearer to the biblical view about the psychosomatic unity of man and of his salvation, at least structurally?

(e) As our ethno-sociological analysis has shown, - Afro-messianism is the outcry of a community which has broken down in the cultural clash. The place of the traditional unity of life in the tribe will be taken by the modern pluralistic society. Even the church today has already accepted its place in the pluralistic society as one segment which is competent for the cultic claim of man. The uprooted African looks back to his community, in which he had his protecting home in all respects, social, economic and cultic. The Afro-messianic movement is a last, though utopian, attempt to restore the lost unity under the present sociological conditions. Is it thus not at the same time an accusation against the western church which has not been able as *koinonia* in the *diaspora* to penetrate the totality of our pluralistic life and to claim it for the *basileia tou Christou?*

Our five questions which we as missiologists have directed to the western missionary movement have clarified two points:

(a) Not all differences between the messianic movements and the main-line churches are a conscious rejection of the Christian faith. Many phenomenological and psychological peculiarities of the messianic movements can be explained simply by the African's inability to overcome the difficulties of the cultural clash.

(b) Neither can we plainly identify the historic manifestation of the church (i.e. in our case the mission

church in Africa), with the e*kklesia* of the New Testament. Some features of the messianic movements show a greater phenomenological similarity with those e.g. of the congregation in Corinth, than the mission churches can present. Probably the messianic movements from their primal background sensed intuitively that the God of creation originally put together certain things which the God of redemption wants to join anew. But they did not realize that this junction has to pass through the crisis of the Cross and that the units have to be renewed by the power of the *Creator Spiritus* who is to be received by faith.

(2) *Afro-Messianism Under the Crisis of the Cross*

Having listened humbly to the questions of the messianic communities, or to questions which anthropologists and theologians might ask on their behalf, the missiologist is now entitled in return to put some questions to the Afro-messianic movements. We want to formulate them rather cautiously:

(a) Could it be that many responsible members in the messianic movements did indeed hear the call of the Crucified to believe in him, but stumbled over this call because they preferred a new national hero?

(b) Could it be that some of these later Bantu messiahs, in their original choice to use their genuine Christian charisma in an obedient way, could not resist the temptation to yield to the sudden desire of their adherents to treat them as God?

(c) Could it be that the people, who in the cultural clash discovered the fantastic new possibilities of civilization but at the same time also heard the message about the coming kingdom of peace, did not tolerate the eschatological tension between the "already" and the "not yet" any more, and preferred to take a secularist short-cut?

(d) To summarize it briefly: Is not in the deepest analysis Afro-messianism just another new expression of the old offense which natural religious man finds with the *theologia crucis?* A Zulu pastor once stated in a lecture: "The syncretistic sects in our country are the way of the African to by-pass the Cross." If he is right. Afro-messianism reveals itself as a new post-Christian religion which, as Freytag[4] has shown, necessarily must turn anti-Christian.

RESPONDING TO THE AFRO- MESSIANIC CHALLENGE

How should the apostolic agents of the Christian church in South Africa react to those searching questions put to us by the emergence of Afro-messianic movements? They will have to reconsider all expressions of church life, *kerygma, leiturgia* and *koinonia* in constant confrontation with the challenge of their Christopagan counterpart and to work for a reformation.

(1) Preaching and Teaching in Africa

Mission means translation. The fact that the doctrinal terminology of the church is syncretized by the Afro-messianic movements constitutes a double challenge to our theology, an *apologetic* and a *kerygmatic* one.

Our *apologetic responsibility* forces us to discover what those familiar words, whose content is determined for us by the history of Christian interpretation, mean if they are received without this guidance into an African frame of reference. "The Gospel heard is different from the Gospel preaching," said Walter Freytag. This could be illustrated by a careful analysis of the understanding of any Christian key term by "unenlightened" African listeners. Let us take as an example the concept of the Holy Spirit.' He is the real principle of life for all African sects and nativistic movements. He is identified with the life force of the African Traditional Religion, but sometimes also with the spiritistic forces that take possession of diviners. He is the principle of continuous revelation. He is the power of healing and of biological and professional strengthening. He is the protecting force for all critical aspects of life. As such he can be tapped and be magically mediated by portions. He is the metaphysical power which is sensed as really present in the worship ritual and which transports its participants into an euphoric mood. But we find little of the Pauline and Johannine description of the Holy Spirit as the personal Lord, who through the living Word guides his Church and by his indwelling transforms the Christian into the image of Christ.

This means that in our missionary communication, even of such a central topic as the concept of the Holy Spirit, something has gone fatally wrong. The church in Africa is still facing art elementary hermeneutical task. How should it be approached? I would suggest three steps:

The *first* step is to make a number of theological analyses of how the Christian key terms like God, spirit, sin, grace and redemption are understood in nativistic communities. Equally crucial is the significance attributed

to the institutions of the church, the sacraments or the ministry. This could be done systematically by studying the hymns and by evaluating a great number of sermons, prayers and spontaneous witnesses which are recorded during the worship rituals.[6]

The *second* step would be to give all Christian instruction, both on the catechetical and the theological ~level, in constant confrontation between the authentic biblical meaning and their nativistic re-interpretation. This is very important, because the. members and workers of main-line churches in Africa have also been influenced by such Christopagan concepts (Beyerhaus 1964; Häselbarth 1972:95-107).

A *third* step, finally, might be the formulation of a *Confessio Africana.* It would affirm the historic Christian faith in an African terminology. And it would simultaneously denounce the current Christopagan distortions of this faith just as e.g. the Nicene Creed affirmed the divine Sonship of Christ in refutation of the Arian heresy: *"Genitus, non factus est .."* . .

Equally important with the authenticity of our message is its *pointedness.* This is our *kerygmatic responsibility.* Evangelism in Africa should hit the existential questions, needs and anxieties which have led to the Afro-messianic misinterpretation of the Christian message. I do not mean that African Traditional Religion and biblical revelation can be harmoniously correlated in terms of hope and fulfillment. But I maintain that only such Christians can approach the members of other religious communities as preachers, teachers, doctors or counselors who have tried to identify themselves with the needs, fears and desires out of which the Afro-messianic movements have been born. And if such questions are directed to the biblical revelation, it is quite feasible that they might touch on aspects which have not fully come into the focus of our western churches yet. The decisive question which is put to our missions by the concept of a black messiah is this: Have we really proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth to the Africans in the same joyfully convincing tone as the angel did to the shepherds, "For *to you* is born this day a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord!"? If this is to be done, four important aspects of New Testament Christology (Häselbarth 1972:210-230) have to be emphasized:

Firstly, we should proclaim Christ the *conqueror,* as he is depicted in the Gospels and in the Epistle to the Colossians: the One who by the finger of God casts out evil spirits (Luke 11:20); He who "disarmed the principalities and powers, and made a public example of them, triumphing over them" (Col. 2:15). He is the answer to the African who is haunted by the fear of ghosts and witchcraft.

But *secondly,* in order to avoid making Christ the symbol of hero worship, we have to preach him as the *crucified* one. Not the magical threat of the human enemy is our real danger, but the righteous wrath of God. Only at the Cross could this wrath be overcome, and only in accepting our own cross we will find peace in the fellowship of Christ.

Here we find him, *thirdly,* as the *present* One. He does not need to be represented by a Bantu messiah. For as the Resurrected One (see Mbiti 1971:161-164) Christ is really in our midst. Such a proclamation of Christ, the invisibly present One, needs, however, to be verified by the existential witness of an African congregation, which itself has become free from the traditional fear of witchcraft and ancestral indignation.

To be free from anxiety does not imply freedom from suffering. As the African worldview does not know of a future ontologically different from the present, Africans crave for complete salvation here and now. I agree with Dr. Tippett that Christianity must "provide a vital eschatology." Such a vital eschatology can only he centered, *fourthly,* in Christ as the r*eturning* One. The utopic fancies of Afro-messianism are both judged and convincingly replaced by the proclamation of the coming Kingdom. Through the means of grace it appears already now and transforms Christian lives. And this Kingdom will become visible in its completion when Christ returns with great power and glory (Mt. 24:30). If this vision is proclaimed in its radiance, it will generate in the congregation the power of Christian endurance. The ability to "rejoice in our sufferings" Rm. *5:3)* has always been a most persuasive factor in the spontaneous expansion of the church.

(2) *Reshaping the Liturgy*

If the African church experiences a fresh encounter with the 'Christ for you," she will also develop new liturgical forms to give expression to this meeting. Here the church could, indeed, earn much from the nativistic movements (Oosthuizen 1968:238-243; Berglund 1966). According to my observation, there are four elements which make the rituals of these groups so attractive to their participants:

(a) The spontaneous involvement of all members, which satisfies the African craving for rhythm and

movement.
(b) The impressive symbolism of the cult in its dramatic procedure and its colorful vestments.
(c) The concrete relatedness to the individual needs. Any trouble and any subsequent relief are told to the group and shared by all members in compassion or joy.
(d) The originality of the religious songs. Their melodies, rhythmics and harmonies derive mostly from traditional Bantu music, but they are quite open for a gradual acculturation with western styles and instruments.
On account of these factors there is no meritorious boredom in these cultic meetings. Rather they are festivals of joy where nobody counts the passing hours. When in the sixties our Lutheran Church in Transvaal celebrated a number of Jubilees, these gained a tremendous popularity among the Christians. My African students told me that this was the direct reaction of Lutheran Christians to the festival of the Zion Christian Church. African Christians wanted visibly to manifest their wider community and joyfully to break the routine of the normal congregational life.
Most main-line churches are still too inhibited to introduce a radical innovation or Africanization of their liturgies. The reason is partly that they do not want to imitate the sects. But more important is that in the minds of first-generation Christians traditional melodies and dancing cannot be dissociated from paganism. Therefore, enforcing "cultural identity" on African churches is as detrimental as keeping them captive in imported western forms. It will have to be left to the spontaneity of the living faith of African Christians themselves to find those liturgical forms which give a genuine expression for their encounter with the triune God. Here the Christian youth with their new songs are already paving the way for the church of the future.
(3) *Mediating Social Integration*
There is still a third field where main-line churches in South Africa should heed the challenge of the Afro-messianic communities. It is their capability to establish themselves as factors of social integration. Welbourn, in his study of East African independent churches (Welbourn and Ogot 1966; Welbourn 1961:201-213), has called them "a place to feel at home." This could be stated with equal appropriateness of the messianic movements in South Africa. They do, indeed, serve as new tribes in a time of socio-political disintegration.
The misery of Southern Africa is that the principle of ethnic separation has torn to pieces a population which through history is destined to become a multi-ethnic and supra-racial society. The Afro-messianic movements have not stemmed the process of ethnic separation. On the contrary, they have wholeheartedly subscribed to it. They have become crystallizing centers of social integration in ethnic ghettos. In a way the Group Area Act and other Apartheid laws do not leave much room for an alternative option to the main-line churches either. There is, however, still plenty of room for them to begin to further fellowship in daily life among their own members. The African has an innate feeling of human solidarity. It is much closer than our western individualism to the synoptic concept of our responsibility to our neighbor or to Paul's teaching about the corporate personality of Christ's body. Here the African churches will become more African inasmuch as they become true churches *in* the New Testament sense. I have found tendencies within urban church choirs to bring their members into closer community and to provide even social protection for them. The special pastoral charisma of the African ministry will he to discover and to develop the *koinonia* function of the church (Beyerhaus 1964; Häselbarth 1972:95-102).
Still, a true church in South Africa can never recede into an ethnic ghetto and acquiesce with the status quo. Christ, as the Church confesses him, is no Bantu messiah, but the head of an universal body. In him there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither free man nor slave (Gal. 3:28). Therefore, the churches in South Africa are called to make manifest that Christians belong together because of a new bond of loyalty (Beyerhaus 1972:89-102). Neither the color bar nor ethnic divisions can suspend their mutual solidarity. Churches in South Africa not only have the responsibility, but they should also have the spiritual power to quench the spirit of racism. That they have not always acted accordingly is one of the main reasons why Africans asked for a native God and a black messiah. True enough, the churches are the largest social organizations in South Africa which — in different degrees — have constantly opposed the injustices of the racist legislation. But they have failed to manifest by their own *koinonia* that fellowship, which could serve as a convincing model and sign of hope for a future integrated society.

We do not know whether the chance has already passed, where all national groups involved could be convinced to agree on a political solution for South Africa's social problems. Still, even where secular agents and secular hopes fail, the churches cannot stop proclaiming the justice of God and serving as agents of reconciliation. For this is their *raison d'être*. They will be judged, not by their success, but according to their faithfulness. For it is their Judge who will make all things new (Rev. 21:4).

Notes

1. "'Accommodation' connotes something of a denial, of a mutilation. We would, therefore, prefer to use the term *possessio,* to take into possession." (I.H. Bavinck 1964:178).
2. About the Lekganyane movement, see Schlosser (1958:lBlff) and Haselbarth (1966); about Shembe, see Sundkler (1961 *passim).*
3. The adherents of Lekganyane sing "The churches of the world will finally be reigned from Morija" (Haselbarth 1966:71).
4. (W. Freytag 1961:580 This interpretation is most consistently unfolded in Oosthuizen's book *Post -Christianity in Africa* (1968).
5. See Oosthuizen (1968 Chapter 4): "Misunderstanding of the Biblical Meaning of the Holy' Spirit in the Independent Movements."
6. A good example is given by CC. Oosthuizen (1967). Here he constructs the theology of Shembe's Nazareth Baptist Church from its official hymnbook.

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