

OCMS

RELIGION IN AFRICA: a series of three lectures by Terence Ranger

October 4 2005:

Lecture Two: MISSION CHRISTIANITY

(1) My approach to this lecture will be different from the first. There I tried to review all the major approaches to the study of African Religion. Today I am not going to review all the major approaches to the study of mission. The literature is too vast and in any case I have given a series of lectures at OCMS presenting different themes within it:

'Magnetic Missionaries', 27 April 2004

'How Christianity Grew in Eastern Zimbabwe and Who Grew It', 7 September 2004

'Christian Missions, Capitalism and Empire: the State of the Debate', 21 June 2005. (Text available on OCMS web-site)

(2) So today I shall concentrate on only one question arising from the history of mission Christianity in Africa – how did it interact with dynamic African religion. I shall take up from where I left off on August 30 with my first lecture on 'African Religion'.

(3) I noted there several things which are relevant to bear in mind this morning. One was that African religion was dynamically developing and innovating at the time of the missionary arrival. It was varied and full of internal contradictions and tensions. One cannot talk about any single response by 'African religion' or 'African religionists' to the challenge of Christianity.

The other point I made in the first lecture, though, was that missionaries did not understand this, or indeed anything else, about African religion. A lot has been written, most of it critical, about negative and often racist missionary responses. An example is an oddly neglected book - H.A.C.Cairns, *Prelude to Imperialism. British Reactions to Central African Society, 1840-1890*, London, Routledge, 1965. Cairns himself, p.179, writes about 19th century missionaries that:

'The radical nature of the clash between tribal religious values and Christianity was aggravated by an apparent absence of any conscious or explicit attempt to utilise existing religious belief as a basis for the introduction of Christianity'.

Jon Kirby, who is both a Catholic priest and an anthropologist, puts it more strongly:

Throughout its history, Christian missionary work in West Africa has displayed little cultural sensitivity toward African society. Catholic missionaries, like their Protestant brothers, were appallingly ignorant of African institutions and did not care to investigate them. Indeed, they were too busy suppressing traditional rituals and beliefs, thereby preventing an objective, balanced view of African traditional religions. With few exceptions, missionaries saw African traditional religions as a 'morass of bizarre beliefs and practices' ... As a general principle we can say that before 1960 all mission-founded churches insisted that their converts abandon all contact with African Traditional religions and cultures. These churches were poorly prepared theologically and culturally to accept any alternatives to their own way of praying, thinking, believing or behaving. [Jon Kirby, 'Cultural Change and Religious Conversion in West Africa', in T.D.Blakely et al, eds., *Religion in Africa. Experience and Expression*, London, James Currey, 1994, pp.60-61]

(4) If you put these two points together – the dynamism of African religion and the ignorance and indifference of missionaries – they add up to the major proposition with which I want to begin this lecture.

What the Comaroffs in their two volume study of 19th century Protestant missionaries to the Tswana, *Of Revelation and Revolution* [Chicago 1991] call 'the long conversation', by definition needed two

conversationalists, African religionists and the missionaries. Much less has been written about the African side of the conversation. What did Africans think of what they could see and hear of Christian rituals, institutions and teaching? What use could they make of particular Christian ideas and ceremonies? They certainly did not just accept everything exactly as it was offered them and cease all participation in African religion.

A lot has been written about so-called 'adaptation' of African rituals by a second generation of missionaries. [My own chapter, 'Missionary Adaptation of African Religious Institutions: The Masasi Case' in T.O.Ranger and Isaria Kimambo, eds., *The Historical Study of African Religion*, London, Heinemann, 1972, is an example]. But much less has been written about African 'adaptations' of Christianity. [My own 'Introduction: Christianity and Central African Religions' in T.O.Ranger and John Weller, eds., *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa*, London, Heinemann, 1975, is a first attempt to explore this question].

Elizabeth Elbourne in her recent splendid history of the Khoisan interaction with the London Missionary Society, *Blood Ground. Colonialism, Missions and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853* [Montreal, McGill/Queens, 2002] stresses that on the nineteenth century South African frontier Christianity was rapidly out of missionary control. It was becoming what Africans made of it and we have to find out what that was.

(5) It is important to remember that the history of African adaptations of Christianity goes a long way back – to Coptic Christianity in Ethiopia and Catholic missions in Kongo and Angola.

For Ethiopia see Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1994.

For the Kongo see:

Richard Gray, *Black Christians and White Missionaries*, New Haven, Yale, 1990.

John Thornton, *The Kongolese St Antony, 1684-1707*, Cambridge, CUP, 1998.

(6) In this lecture, however, I shall concentrate on African adaptations in the long 19th century, i.e up to 1919. During this period Christian missions arrived, often before colonialism. It was a period of crisis. There were great epidemics of cattle and human disease climaxing with the flu epidemic of 1919. There was intensified violence climaxing with the First World War, which resulted in many more African deaths than any previous conflicts. As African societies suffered there was a rising fear of witchcraft. It was a time ripe for religious innovation and this took place in various forms. There were African religious innovations and there were African adaptations of Christianity.

Thomas Spear writes:

It has become commonplace to think of the Christian churches in Africa as alien institutions [but] such views neglect the manifold ways Africans interpreted and appropriated Christian scriptures, practices and institutions for their own purposes within the context of their own values and needs. Confronted with new epidemic diseases, natural disasters and widespread political and social destruction in the wake of colonial conquest, Africans sought new religious concepts to regain moral control over their lives. [Thomas Spear, 'Towards the History of African Christianity' in Spear and Kimambo, eds., *East African Expressions of Christianity*, Oxford, James Currey, 1999, p.3]

(7) I shall argue that AFRICAN ADAPTATIONS of Christianity took place along several lines. These were:

The prophetic tradition in African religion

The healing tradition in African religion

The tradition of witchcraft eradication in African religion

The idea of holy places in African religion

The idea of possession by the spirit in African religion

Co-incidences between African and mission institutions

In my review of the history of one mission church – the American Methodist Episcopal Church in eastern Zimbabwe – I write about the results of all this African adaptation:

We are beginning to realize that during the missionary period the foundations of a vigorous African Christianity were laid. We are also beginning to realize that these foundations were laid in a concealed and mysterious manner. Very little developed as the missionaries planned or hoped or feared ... The emergence of an African Christianity was a dialectical process, an interaction between missionary and African consciousness ... The result is a constantly shifting and negotiated synthesis. At any one time, and even today, popular Methodism is the result of an interaction between both missionary and convert. [Terence Ranger, 'Protestant Missions in Africa: The Dialectic of Conversion in the AMEC in Eastern Zimbabwe, 1900-1950', in *Religion in Africa*, pp.275 and 309].

(8) There are some very valuable studies of the PROPHETIC tradition in east and central Africa:

Wyatt MacGaffey, 'Cultural Roots of Kongo Prophetism', *History of Religions*, 17,2, 1977; *Modern Kongo Prophets*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1983; *Religion and Society in Central Africa*, Chicago, Chicago UP, 1986.

David Anderson and Douglas Johnson, eds., *Revealing Prophets, Prophecy in East African History*, London, James Currey, 1995.

Douglas Johnson, *Nuer Prophets, A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1994.

What these studies reveal is that prophets in African religion were not only seers, foretelling the future. They were also moral arbiters. They were particularly important in times of crisis when customary institutions were failing and when African societies were threatened from outside. Prophets sometimes led resistance to colonial intrusion; equally often they denounced the failure of African political, religious and medical leaders. The late 19th century crisis, into which many missions were entering, was the heyday of many African prophets. I have written about this in 'Plagues of Beasts and Men: Prophetic Responses to Epidemic in eastern and southern Africa', in Terence Ranger and Paul Slack, eds.,

Epidemics and Ideas. Essays on the historical perception of pestilence, Cambridge, CUP, 1992.

There were many connections between such prophets and African mission Christianity. Ngundeng Bong, the first of the great Nuer prophets in the southern Sudan, was enormously influential in the 1880s and 1890s, 'through his sacrifices to combat infertility, epidemics and illness, and through his prohibitions against fighting. It was in fact the overcoming of death, the gift of life' [Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*, p.113]. Nuer mission Christians emulated him. 'Rural Christian communities have echoed the work of the old prophets in a number of ways, vigorously campaigning against the use of magic and becoming actively involved in ending and preventing'. They also made use of him to claim an indigenous legacy for Christianity. Johnson writes that he was often told by Nuer Christians 'When we heard about Jesus we were surprised, because Ngundeng had said it all before.' Johnson comments that 'Christian Nuer can see their past prophets as modern John the Baptists preparing the way for the word of Christ'. [Johnson, p.316] To this day Ngundeng's pronouncements carry more weight than those of any Old Testament prophet – and certainly much more than those of any missionary founder.

Prophets were influential figures among the nineteenth century Gikuyu and 'were believed to receive their messages directly from Ngai'. The most famous was Mugo Kibiro, who prophesied the coming of the Europeans 'and warned Gikuyu of the implications of their presence'. [Francis Kimani Githieya, 'Prophets and Prophecy', in Spear and Kimambo, p.238-9]. During the 'cultural and religious crises of the late 1920s in central Kenya' some Gikuyu Christians based themselves neither 'on pre-existing Gikuyu beliefs or on the existing structures and beliefs of Western mission churches but on the newly translated Gikuyu version of the Christian scriptures'. The translation was done by the missionaries but literate Gikuyu could appropriate for themselves. Here they found an emphasis on prophecy which was reminiscent of Kibiro. 'Itinerant prophetic figures' arose to spread the message of what was not an African independent church but a movement of adaptation. In a fascinating chapter Francis Githieya discusses the systematic adaptation of the Old Testament to conform to Gikuyu realities but also to produce a new religious culture self-consciously distinct from 'tradition'. [Githieya, 'The Church of the Holy Spirit. Biblical Beliefs and Practices of the Arathi of Kenya, 1926-50' in Spear and Kimambo].

The Arathi developed Christian prophecy separately from any mission denomination. But it was also possible for biblical prophecy to be offered to desperate Africans by missionaries themselves. Elizabeth Elbourne has described how the majority of the enslaved, disease-ridden and brutalised Khoi-khoi in early 19th century South Africa 'responded to missionary Christianity as if it were a prophetic movement and made use of it to redefine and defend their identity'. The Khoi-khoi responded to early London Missionary Society preaching 'in a highly emotional period of conversion'; they accepted the pioneer missionary, Vanderkemp, as 'the latest prophet' and he in turn made rain and healed on request.

Vanderkemp believed that 'the vengeance of God was hovering over South Africa' because of white oppression of black. He preached from Isaiah 9, 1-3:

a text that fits perfectly into the missionary world-view. 'The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light ... the bar across his shoulders, the rod of the oppressor, those you break as on the day of Midian'. It is also a millenarian text, the next verse of which is 'For all the footgear of battle, every cloak rolled in blood, is burned and consumed by fire' ...Many Khoisan took up this language ... there is a tremendously high level of outward emotion described in services, revivals and conversions. Some Khoisan preachers and missionaries turned the language of fallen man and the equality of the reborn against the Afrikaners. [I quote from a 1990 manuscript by Elbourne in my 'Plagues of Beast and Men', pp.262-263]

So the biblical idiom of prophecy allowed many different African adaptations of mission Christianity.

Needless to say, missionaries themselves were very uneasy with African adaptations of prophecy. There were few radicals like Vanderkemp and the LMS in South Africa recoiled when the majority of Khoisan Christians joined in a Xhosa uprising, preaching 'a revolutionary brand of Christianity'. After that the LMS agreed with the missionary consensus that the age of prophecy was over, brought to an end by the incarnation, teaching and resurrection of Christ.

In this way missionaries abandoned a powerful idiom for the Christianising of Africa, leaving prophecy to be taken up wholesale by the African initiated-churches. It was much the same story with African adaptations of the healing idiom.

(9) HEALING IDIOMS

Africans living through the crisis of the long nineteenth century needed healing above all else. Epidemics shook their faith in their own medical regimes. Ordinary African 'doctors' seemed to have failed. People looked for healers with greater power.

Often such new healers overlapped with prophets. Thus Wyatt MacGaffey, who has written so much on the prophetic tradition in the Kongo, also writes about the emergence in nineteenth century Kongo of pre-Christian spirit-filled nganga. Macgaffey describes the 'glossolalia, trembling and divination while in a state of possession ... blessings, potions and ablutions, the use of songs'; the 'ecstatic acolytes were called mintombo from tombula, to raise up spirits'; a main aim of their healing was 'to return the soul of a patient. MacGaffey points out the similarities between these new healers and the later African initiated prophetic churches in the Kongo. But en route from African religion to prophetic churches the desire for spiritual healing passed through the mission churches. [Wyatt MacGaffey, 'Kimbanguism and the Question of Syncretism in Zaire', *Religion in Africa*, pp.252-2.]

Matthew Schoffeleers has examined the general proposition that 'Africans find it difficult to integrate Jesus Christ into their belief system, either because he is automatically associated with the West and the colonial past or because his very being is incompatible with indigenous religious conceptions.' Schoffeleers disagrees. In 'African folk theology', by which he means the beliefs both of African mission Christians and members of African initiated churches, there is an African model for Christ. It is Prophet-Healer, the Nganga. Schoffeleers writes:

In the catechesis and liturgy of African churches, Christ is often referred to as the one true nganga ... an image that the audience intuitively understands and at the same time is seen as rooted in scripture.

He cites the situation in the Anglican diocese of Mukoma, where 'in both the local catechesis and local [Luo] language explaining Jesus Christ's work as "saviour" is very difficult, so he becomes the Chief Medicine Man, who can solve all the sickness and problems of the people'. [Matthew Schoffeleers, 'Christ in African Folk Theology; The Nganga Paradigm', *Religion in Africa*, pp.73,79]

I have myself written extensively on the Anglican diocese of Masasi in south-eastern Tanzania and in particular about Anglican medical work. Anglicans thought this extremely important, especially in an area so much influenced by Islam, because it demonstrated Christian love. But I have been able to show a tension between missionary medicine and African 'folk Anglicanism'. Missionaries insisted on scientific medicine; converts demanded spiritual healing. They were adapting the Anglican scripture translations, sacraments and rituals to this demand. Christ appeared in the New Testament as a spiritual healer; the Anglican Eucharistic service contained the words 'But only say the word and I shall be healed'; the cathedral at Masasi contained the tomb of the beloved founder missionary, Canon Porter. African Anglicans believed that to shake the hand of the Bishop, as Christ's representative, ensured healing; they prayed by night at Porter's tomb; they were certain that the sacramental bread and wine gave physical and well as spiritual wholeness.

But just like prophecy, missionaries were unhappy with the idiom of spiritual healing. In sermons at Masasi they warned against 'superstitious' beliefs in 'magical' healing at the time of Communion. They broke up gatherings at Canon Porter's tomb. The bishop stopped shaking hands. In fact they couldn't keep ideas of spiritual healing out of their churches as easily as they could drive out prophecy. Nevertheless, they left the field wide open to the later African initiated churches. [Terence Ranger, 'Godly Medicine: the ambiguities of medical mission in southeast Tanzania, 1900-1945', *Medical Anthropology*, 158,3, July 1981. The following year I followed this up in my 'Introduction' and 'Medical Science and Pentecost: the dilemma of Anglicanism in Africa', in *The Church and Healing*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1982. In these I drew on material from eastern Zimbabwe as well as on the Masasi data. A recent discussion of Anglican medicine in Nyasaland is Charles.M.Good, *The Steamer Parish. The Rise and Fall of Missionary Medicine on an African Frontier*, Chicago, UCP, 2004]

(10) The idiom of WITCHCRAFT ERADICATION

The nineteenth century crisis produced two new types within African religion – the **prophet** and the **spiritual nganga**. Both were concerned to deal with witches and sorcerors. Ngundeng 'waged a consistent campaign against magicians ... accusing them of so fouling their hands with magic that they were no longer fit to be lifted in prayer' [Johnson, p.97] MacGaffey describes how the pre-colonial spiritual nganga in Kongo 'sniffed out' witches [MacGaffey, p251] But in addition another

development took place within African Religion in the time of crisis – the rise and spread of the witchcraft eradication movement. [The classic account of the ten year cycle of eradication movements is Mary Douglas, *The Lele of the Kasai*, 1963]

Briefly, the pre-colonial eradication movement was an attempt to bring to an end for good the whole business of detecting and punishing witches. It aimed to eradicate witchcraft altogether. People were summoned to surrender all their charms to be burnt; everyone shared in a ritual and took a medicine; thereafter the innocent were safe and the guilty doomed to die if they tried to revert to their evil ways.

It is not surprising that the arrival of Christian mission, with its announcement of a new age, was often taken as the most powerful eradication movement of all. 'Christianity might be seized upon as a new and more effective movement of cleansing and of witchcraft eradication. And this did undoubtedly happen in some places as missionaries came in –in Ufipa where charms were piled for destruction at the feet of Catholic missionaries; in Newala in southern Tanzania where the chief hailed the coming of Christian teaching as marking the doom of witchcraft; in northern Nyasaland where movements of revival in the Scottish missions were marked by hopes of witchcraft eradication; and among the Lala, who nursed expectations of a cleansing millenium'. [Ranger, 'Introduction', *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa*, p.11]

In this way Africans sought to adapt mission Christianity. But one again, as with prophecy and spiritual healing the mission churches failed to respond to African adaptations with adaptations of their own:

As time passed it became plain that the mission churches were not prepared to give an answer to fear of witchcraft in terms of the exercise of spiritual power. The problem was tackled by stressing Christian confidence and by seeking to transform the understanding of causation. The mission churches no longer inhabited the world of spiritual cause and effect; for most the age of miracles and even of exorcism was dead. [Ranger, pp.11-12]

Individual African Christians were left to struggle with the dilemma, sometimes with tragic results. I have myself analysed one such African Christian anti-witchcraft attempt, the 'Mwana Lesa' [Son of God] movement of 1925, during which many witches were killed in Northern Rhodesia and the Katanga. 'Mwana Lesa', Tomo Nyirenda, was arrested, bound, his arms amputated, tried and sentenced to death. He has gone

down in history as a monster. But when I looked at the details of the case I found that Nyirenda 'was the bearer of Christianity', seeing 'himself primarily as a Christian evangelist'. He baptised, established churches, and sought 'to regulate existing villages along Christian lines'. He preached to the Lala on Christ's power to expel demons and stressed his promises to the poor and meek. He claimed Christ's authority to identify and eliminate witches.

There was an Anglican mission among the Lala, at Fiwila. In 1924 the missionaries reported that they were welcomed everywhere and that there was a real turning towards Christianity. As I wrote, 'one has the sense of the Lala pressing in hopefully on the mission'. What the Lala wanted was a Christianity which would help them understand the new colonial world; which would revitalise and transform Lala society; which would offer baptism to everyone; and which could offer 'a spiritual solution to the problem of witchcraft'. In my article I asked why 'a more orthodox, less vulnerable, Christian movement,' springing from the missions themselves, could not have offered these things to the Lala. I found that Anglican baptism was grudgingly and slowly given; Anglican schools were few; and above all Anglicans offered no solutions to witchcraft fear:

The problem of its ineffectiveness in the face of [this] fear was one of the greatest weaknesses of the Universities Mission to Central Africa ... The UMCA constantly opposed these movements and excommunicated Christians who participated in them but it was never able to offer any Christian substitute.

Bishop Alston May, writing in the year before the Mwana Lesa movement, realised that 'what our people are really after is a social and religious order, which on the one hand is superior to tribalism as they know it, and on the other hand African – their very own. All this means for us that we have today a great opportunity'. But the UMCA failed to rise to this opportunity and Tomo Nyirenda rose to it in the wrong way. [Terence Ranger, 'The Mwana Lesa Movement of 1925' in *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa*, pp.45-75]

Thus, as with prophetism and spiritual healing the mission churches failed to respond to the idiom of witchcraft eradication, leaving it too to be taken up by the African initiated churches.

(11) The idea of the HOLY PLACE was much easier for the missions to respond to than idioms of prophecy, healing and witchcraft eradication. The Christianisation of pagan holy places was, after all, a

long Christian tradition in Europe. Missionaries in Africa thought African landscapes were suffused with evil and wanted to redeem them. [Terence Ranger, *Voices From the Rocks*, Oxford, James Currey, 1999]. I have written myself about the Anglican, Catholic and Methodist attempt to Christianise the landscapes of eastern Zimbabwe. [Terence Ranger. 'Taking Hold of the Land. Holy Places and Pilgrimage in Twentieth Century Zimbabwe', *Past and Present*, 117, November 1987] This attempt did successfully incorporate very many Africans. Anglican Christian villages, cemeteries and holy places; Catholic Lourdes shrines; Methodist Revival camp-grounds all became holy places for African Christians as well as, or even more than, for missionaries. But even here there was an opportunity left for African initiated churches. African religion had focussed on mountain tops and caves in the hills as holy places. Generally, mission Christianity aimed to bring its people down from the mountains and out of the caves. It aimed to create holy places in the midst of a cultivated landscape. When African initiated churches arose they aimed for the mountain tops and contested with African religion to control them. [Sandra Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter. A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana*, Bloomington, Indiana, 2002, is a fascinating account of changing holy landscapes. Greene writes: 'Over the last 100 years, the Anlo have invented, retained and forgotten, abridged and amended the many meanings and memories they once associated with a number of sacred sites ... [a process] accelerated enormously with the advent of colonial rule and missionary influence'. p.109]

(12) The idiom of SPIRIT POSSESSION.

One of the key idioms of African religion was the idea that spirits could possess human beings – rain-making spirits, ancestor spirits, animal spirits, spirits of strangers, all with different effect. Mediums of nature spirits or of important ancestors had great influence and were guardians of the moral values of a community. [David Lan, *Guns and Rain*, London, James Currey, 1985] Animal and stranger spirits brought new skills. Some spirits were malevolent and brought danger. [Heike Behrend and Ute Luig, eds., *Spirit Possession. Modernity and Power in Africa*]

In theory the mission churches brought two relevant ideas. One was the rite of exorcism which might be used to drive out evil spirits. One was the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of Pentecost, which could release transforming spiritual power. Silas Nkozana [*The Spirit Dimension in African Christianity. The Tumbuka People of Northern Malawi*, Blantyre, Claim, 2002] has explored the potential of these resources. 'If neglected

by Christianity', he writes, 'spirit possession leaves a religious void: if embraced it makes people feel at home in Christianity'.

But once again the missionary churches were too cool and rational. Exorcism was thought of as medieval and was rarely used. Pentecost was invoked as a possibility but I do not know of any missionaries upon whom the Holy Spirit descended.[Though as Professor Anderson reminded up in his lecture there were Pentecostal missionaries]The result was that the churches had a paradoxical relationship with the idiom of spirit. Heike Behrend has reconstructed the history of spirit possession among the Acholi of northern Uganda. Initially the tutelary jogi spirit of each chiefdom was responsible for the well-being and fertility of the land and the people. Then in the middle of the nineteenth century, with slave-raiding, the ivory trade and epidemic 'a paradigm shift occurred in the discourse of the spirits. A wave of new spirits called free jogi arrived from the outside world'. These were an idiom in which to understand, to suffer and to control the effects of the wider world.

Then missionaries from the CMS and the Catholics arrived:

A process of mutual influence began, a reorganization and reformulation of religious discourses. In the process, the Acholi religion was not only Christianised but the Christian teachings were also Acholicized ... While the Christian God, given the name Jok Rubanga, became the absolute goodness, the other jogi, as lesser spirits, were equated with Satan, then became known as jogi setani and were thought of as evil in themselves. The missionaries thus produced a hegemonic discourse in which a large number of evil spirits lost their ambiguity and were increasingly suspected of being used mainly for witchcraft and sorcery ... Besides demonization and diabolization, these spirits were now subdued under the one Christian God. Comparable to the canonist, bishops and inquisitors in Europe, who substantially molded the dominant ideas of witches, the missionaries in Acholi also produced what they were actually seeking to fight.

The missionaries increased the sphere of evil and witchcraft without, once again, offering any protection against it. The power of the Holy Spirit was the obvious answer but missionaries in Acholi were not pentecostal. It was left to the Balokole revival within the CMS in the 1950s to turn to the Holy Spirit, 'leaving God the Father and Son behind'.

[Heike Behrend, 'Power to Heal. Power to Kill. Spirit Possession and War in Northern Uganda, 1986-1994' in Behrend and Luig, *Spirit Possession*, p.22].

I have myself described how a revival took place in 1918 – that crucial moment in the crisis of the long nineteenth century – right at the heart of the American Methodist Episcopal Church in eastern Zimbabwe. The missionaries had arranged the meeting but that had not bargained for its pentecostal consequences – the Holy Spirit descending in power and with exquisite discrimination on all the black teachers and evangelists and on none of the missionaries. Josiah Chimbadzwa told how:

In 1918 people were gathered at Old Umtali for a revival meeting. As they were on their knees praying, the Holy Spirit came down upon them ... The whole room was in a bright light of which they had never seen before ... people walked on top of people saying Haleluya, Amen ... Many, many people were convinced that the Holy Spirit had come down upon them as it did to the Apostles when they were in the Upper room. No sooner did they come out of church that they found themselves in two going to pray in different places in the mountain nearby ... He saw distant places when he was up this mountain ... and he wished if the people of these places had witnessed what the people of Old Umtali had known.

The teacher-evangelists spread out everywhere carrying the new message. They turned local mountains into holy places from which the commandments came down and the Holy Spirit descended. They made rain. They gave children to infertile women. They dispelled spirits and outfaced witches. And they healed. Suddenly all the idioms of African religion were in Christian play. And a great miracle took place.

Chieftaness Muredzwa, sister of the paramount chief and maker of rain – the woman the missionaries thought a monster of heathen cruelty – had a crippled daughter. She had consulted 25 nganga without success. Now one of the pentecostally inspired evangelists, John Cheke, laid hands on her, commanding her in Jesus' name to walk. The girl rose; was baptised as Dorcas; her mother, the rain queen, also converted. As I wrote: 'Her conversion was not just another instance of the coming of light into pagan darkness. It marked the moment of transition from one African spiritual authority to another'. [Ranger, 'The Dialectic of Methodist Conversion in Zimbabwe', pp.304-305]

This time the Pentecost was kept within the church; the Holy Spirit legitimate the leadership of vital men's and women's organisations. But the white Methodist missionaries found it 'over-emotional' and tried hard to restrain it. As for the neighbouring Anglicans, they were horrified. One Anglican nun, disturbed in a bible class by the noise of glossolalia from a nearby hill, marched her class out, singing 'Onward Christian Soldiers', to confront those possessed by the Holy Spirit. From their hill the young men quoted scripture. 'You may call it Apostolic', said the nun. 'We call it bad manners!'

(13) SUCCESSFUL ADAPTATIONS

I have been emphasising missionary failures to adapt African religious idioms/ But there were instances of more successful mutual adaptation. Kathleen Smythe in her 'The Creation of a Catholic Fipa Society' [*East African Expressions of Christianity*, 1999, chapter 6] argues that 'there was a significant congruence, both cultivated and innate, between the Catholic religion and the role played by its missionaries in Fipa, on the one hand, and Fipa religion and culture on the other. Conversion was inherently dialectical in Ufipa. As the missionaries adapted to local culture, Fipa integrated the missionaries into their own cultural framework'. In Smythe's account the White Fathers were much more creative in their response to the African religious modes than the other missionaries I have been discussing. Famous Fipa prophets had predicted the coming of Christianity. [Roy Willis, 'Changes in mystical concepts and practices among the Fipa', *Ethnology*, 7, 1968; 'Kaswa: oral traditional of a Fipa prophet', *Africa*, XL, 3, 1970] Missionary priests respected the memory of these prophets. Fipa Catholics were allowed to go on believing that baptism was curative and to associate baptismal water with the sacred pools in ancestral caves. They likened ancestor spirits to angels or saints. Thus the African religious modes of prophecy, healing, spirit and holy place were all integrated into Fipa folk Catholicism.

So to begin with was the idiom of witchcraft eradication. In 1895 a missionary letter reported 'excellent news from our brothers in Ufipa. Their journey has been a veritable triumph. In every village, chiefs and people brought them their idols and their magical medicines of all sorts to burn'. [Roy Willis, *A State in the Making*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1981, p.208] Later the priests preached that witchcraft did not exist. Nevertheless the great majority of Fipa became Catholic, though they gave Christianity their own coloration. No African initiated churches have arisen in Ufipa.

Another example of a successful mutual adaptation is offered by T.J.Thompson. ['The Sacramental Conventions of the Ngoni of Northern Malawi: Conscious Interaction or Happy Coincidence?', in *The Interaction Between Christian Religion and African Traditional Religions: Focus on Rites of Passage*, University of Zimbabwe, June 1994]

Thompson write that:

The introduction of large ceremonial congregations involving thousands of people and incorporating both baptism and communion can be seen as having many parallels with the Nguni first fruits feast, the Incwala. The conventions provided a new rite of passage for young Ngoni struggling to make sense of two competing world views and enabled them to enter the new religion without abandoning their deeply-held Ngoni identity.

The missionary Donald Fraser based these annual conventions on his boyhood memories of folk Highland Christianity. The Ngoni meetings, though, were much more open and enthusiastic. Everyone was offered baptism; all were invited to communicate. And all were eager to do so. It reminded the Ngoni of their own Incwala feast during which the King had been ritually washed. Ngoni attending the Convention thought of 'the magic water of baptism' and spoke of communion as 'the medicine of the church'.

(14) CONCLUSION

Fraser's use of folk Presbyterianism was paralleled by missions of very different theological traditions. The churches had found it easier to adapt to nineteenth century European folk religion than they did to African religion. These folk Christianities they then brought with them into Africa. So the Catholics introduced Lourdes grottoes and Fatima shrines; the Anglicans introduced village Christianity; the Methodists introduced Revival camps. 'Enthusiasm' and 'superstition' was acceptable in this context. The result was an African folk Catholicism, and African folk Anglicanism and an African folk Methodism. [I have written about these extensively with reference to eastern Zimbabwe]. Within this folk Christianity there was room for many African adaptations. Nevertheless, the missions had so many failures in adaptation – with prophecy, with healing, with witchcraft, with spirit – that the way was wide open for the African initiated churches which are the subject of my last lecture.