BANTU PROPHETS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Bengt G. M. Sundkler

AFRICAN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

ROUTLEDGE

AFRICAN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES
OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Volume 64

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Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1948 by Lutterworth Press and as a second edition in 1961 by Oxford University Press for the International African Institute.

This edition first published in 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-8153-8713-8 (Set)
ISBN: 978-0-429-48813-9 (Set) (ebk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-59853-9 (Volume 64) (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-48629-6 (Volume 64) (ebk)

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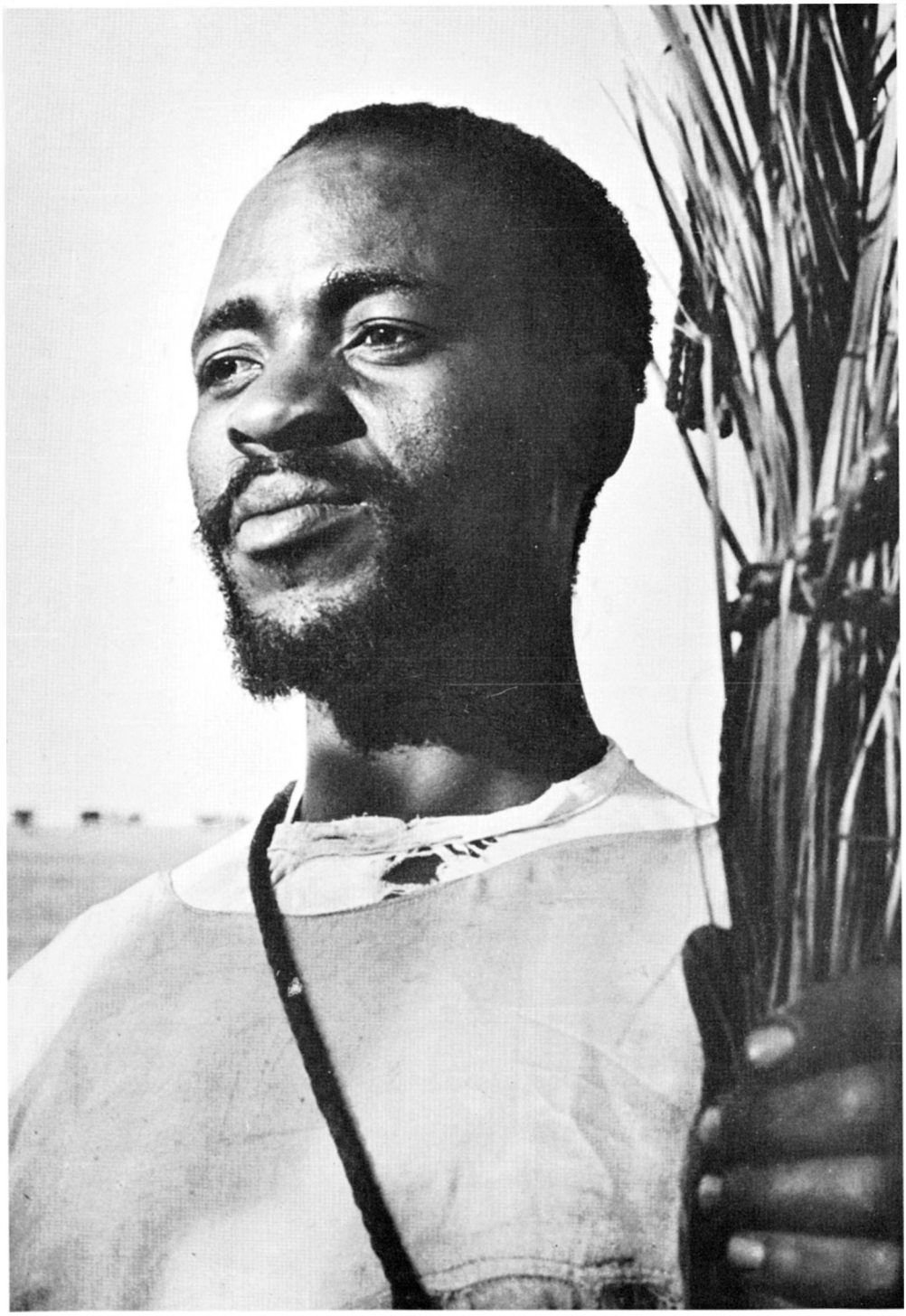

A BANTU JOHN THE BAPTIST.

The white shirt with a green cord have been revealed to the prophet by an "Angel" in his dreams as a means of overcoming and preventing illness. In his hand a staff of palm leaves.

BANTU PROPHETS IN SOUTH AFRICA

by

BENGT G. M. SUNDKLER

Second Edition

Published for
THE INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN INSTITUTE
by the
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO
1961

Oxford University Press, Amen House, London E.C.4

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON
BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI KUALA LUMPUR
CAPETOWN IBADAN NAIROBI ACCRA

First published 1948
(Lutterworth Press)

Second Edition 1961
(Oxford University Press)

This book has been printed in Great Britain by litho-offset at Taylor Garnett Evans & Co. Ltd., Watford, Herts.

PREFACE

Dr. Sundkler has rendered missionary work in South Africa a signal service by his study of the Bantu separatist churches. It is a subject on which much is known in loose terms, but little with any accuracy. Here we have the facts set out before us in a spirit which is critical in the best sense of the term, objective, and full of a kindly understanding such as the subject undoubtedly merits. There are elements in the life of some of the Bantu separatist churches which are not Christian in any normally accepted sense of the word—there are elements of true faith and vision. It is doubtful whether any human being can wholly separate the wheat from the tares in this luxuriant field of religious activity, but Dr. Sundkler has done his best.

It is clear from the study which follows that nationalism plays a great part in Bantu separatist church organization and that the spirit of separatism, in spite of quite sincere attempts at union, is very strong. European Christianity in South Africa must face the fact that it is partly responsible for these phenomena. There has been a strong element of nationalism in certain fields of European Christianity and an emphasis on denominational differences which has done harm. It is probable that the very area which Dr. Sundkler surveys so thoroughly is, if one may coin a word, the most over-denominationalized missionary area in Africa. To-day the spirit of comity and co-operation has gone a long way to remove differences between missions. They still exist, but the unedifying competitiveness which was to be found in some areas in the past has been greatly lessened. Europeans none the less must bear their share of the responsibility for a good deal of the separatist church movement and, even when separation has sprung from worldly motives of hurt pride or ambition, it is to be remembered that European missionary superintendents have not infrequently, through an overbearing manner or through lack of understanding and imagination, contributed to secession.

So far I have spoken of separatist churches, but Dr. Sundkler rightly speaks of "independent Bantu churches", reminding us that not all the denominations which are studied have their origin in secession from established missionary churches. Not only in independent churches, but also in those which in their origin were separatist, there are elements which spring, not

from the faults and defects of European missionary work, but from the desire of the Zulu people to find some synthesis between their own tribal religion and Christianity. Dr. Sundkler's researches into this side of the movement are among the most interesting parts of his book.

I should not, of course, like to commit myself to every opinion or conclusion of the author, but I should like to pay tribute, in closing, to the spirit in which he has written; not merely an unbiased scientific spirit, but a spirit which shows true kindness, a positive attitude and a sympathetic understanding of Zulu ideas and aspirations.

EDGAR H. BROOKES.

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

This book on Bantu Churches in South Africa first appeared in 1948, and South Africa has changed considerably since then. Yet, when looking at South African society from the standpoint of the particular Bantu religious groups analysed in this study, the change in the political field in 1948 does not appear as sudden or as drastic as it does from the account of other observers. Apartheid, or separate development, as a term may have been coined with the advent of the Nationalist Government; but the fact was of course there long before 1948: the fact of a society divided according to colour lines and of a Church similarly divided. The first edition of this book dealt in fact with church apartheid and its results and consequences prior to 1945–48. The important event in that development was the Natives Land Act of 1913: both Separatism as such and the ensuing religious ideology on Bantu lines are an outcome of the deep malaise felt throughout the African masses in the years after 1913.

Thus, when "apartheid" arrived, the Bantu Separatist Church found itself already *apart*. Its problems in the 1950's were of course part of those of the African population as a whole, but these problems could, in the world of the Separatist Churches, be approached from the standpoint of apartheid already arrived at, rather than apartheid enforced. In order to understand the post-1948 development in the great number of Bantu Separatist Churches, this fact must be borne in mind.

On the invitation of the International African Institute and its Director, Professor Daryll Forde, I had the opportunity of revisiting South Africa for eight months in 1958, with a view to preparing a second edition of this book. My research was once again concentrated on the Separatist Church conditions among the Zulus: on the Rand, in Natal, and in Zululand proper. But there was some widening of the scope of our research. Through the help of Dr. J. F. Holleman, Director of the Institute for Social Research of the University of Natal, I was given the chance of visiting Swaziland. I paid attention to Swazi Zionist and Ethiopian Churches in Swaziland and on the Rand. Here was a cultural and religious situation very similar to that of the Zulus—as Northern Nguni they are closely related. Yet there are significant differences in the fundamental factors: land, kingship, political situation.

The brief chapter on "Bantu Christ" in our first edition is now found to be inadequate. Bantu Messianism's increasing significance and its particular, ambivalent relationship to "Zionism" requires us to develop our typology and refine our approach to the problem. This we have attempted to do in the last part of the new additional chapter.

We have retained the "Special Bibliography" as it stood in the 1948 edition; within the rich growth of studies in the last few years we would draw attention to G. Parrinder, *Religion in an African City* (1953), dealing with West Africa; G. Balandier, *Sociologie Actuelle de l'Afrique Noire* (1955); Efr. Andersson, *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo* (1958). Of great importance also for the history of the South African movement is G. Shepperson—T. Price, *Independent African, John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of* 1915 (1958).

The first attempt at a general survey of the Separatist movement in South Africa was Allan Lea's book of 1926, included in our Special Bibliography. His book is now of less interest for what it tells of the Bantu Independent Churches, which is very little, than as source material illustrating the attitude of a whole generation of missionaries to "Native Separatism".

Dr. Katesa Schlosser, of the Kiel Ethnological Museum, in 1958 published a series of personality studies of Bantu Church leaders under the title *Eingeborenenkirchen in Süd- und Südwestafrika. Ihre Geschichte und Sozialstructur*. She has a valuable and interesting chapter on Shembe. The book also includes a study of the great modern Zulu revivalist Nicholas Bhengu;

it should be stressed that Rev. Bhengu and his "Back to God" movement must not be identified with the Churches discussed in this book. Special value must be attached to L. Mqotsi—N. Mkele's study on Bishop Limba's Church: "A Separatist Church", *African Studies* (5), 1946. The two African authors are to be saluted as forerunners in a field where contributions by African sociologists should prove to be of particular importance.

For considerations of space the supplementary chapter in this edition, *Developments* 1945–1960, had to be limited to some 35 pages. They must be regarded as a brief preliminary report, giving an outline to be followed, as soon as circumstances allow, by another volume in which we hope to analyse in some detail our groups and personality cases from 1958, together with relevant texts.

The International African Institute, London, gave a grant towards my travel and field expenses. The National Council of Social and Educational Research, Pretoria, and the Institutes for Social Research, Durban, gave grants to our research in the Union, including African research assistants. I am much indebted to officials of the Native Affairs Department, Pretoria, among whom I mention particularly Dr. N. J. van Warmelo, Chief Ethnologist, and to the officials of the Administration in Swaziland. I am particularly indebted to the Institute for Social Research of the University of Natal, whose Director, Dr. J. F. Holleman, gave me unfailing help.

BENGT SUNDKLER

Uppsala University
June 1960

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have had the privilege of discussing some of the problems and viewpoints of this book with Professor R. Firth, Dr. Hilda Kuper, Dr. A. I. Richards, Professor I. Schapera and Dr. N. J. van Warmelo. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Dr. Richards for helpful advice. I thank Professor C. P. Groves, Selly Oak Colleges, whose unfailing interest in this study has been a constant source of encouragement to me. Dr. A. Wilkie, lately of Lovedale, has read a set of proofs. The Rev. R. Barton, S.P.G., Arogyavaram, South India, and Allen Skipper, Esq., Friends Mission, Tananarivo, Madagascar, have brushed up my English. I should, perhaps, exonerate the International Missionary Council, of which I became Research Secretary in January, 1948, from any responsibility for this book.

The Olaus Petri Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden, gave a grant to the expenses of Zulu assistants for the field research. The S. African Council for Educational, Sociological and Humanistic Research, Pretoria, contributed towards travelling expenses in South Africa, and the Colonial Social Science Research Council, London, gave a grant in connexion with the final stage of the writing of the book. I am also grateful to the Board of the Church of Sweden Mission for their readiness to grant me some time of leave for the period of writing the manuscript. Thanks are due to the Editor of *Libertas* magazine, Mr. T. C. Robertson, Johannesburg, for permission to use some of the photographs which Miss Constance Stuart, Pretoria, took for an article I wrote, in 1945, for *Libertas*. I feel that Miss Stuart's close-ups contribute to a fuller understanding of the personalities of the Bantu Church leaders who are discussed in my book.

Lastly, my wife's help has meant more to this book and to my work in Africa than can be expressed here.

ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

APPROACHING THE PROBLEM

During the last decades leaders have appeared in various parts of Africa, calling to life new religious organizations, formed partly by secessions from White Mission churches, and partly by spontaneous growth. The prophet movement on the lower Congo; the role of the Watch-Tower movement instigating disturbances in Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Belgian Congo; the emergence of Independent Schools in Kenya; Separatist Church movements in an embryonic stage in Tanganyika and Uganda; a fairly rich flora of African sects on the West coast of Africa; and, above all, the hypertrophy of African churches in the Union of South Africa: the whole of this development presents the Protestant missionary undertaking in Africa with one of its most baffling practical problems, and we are hitherto very poorly informed as to the very nature of the movement. The present study is an attempt to analyse the sociological and religious problems within the "Separatist Church" movement in South Africa, on the assumption that the development of the movement in South Africa may have its bearing upon and be relevant to similar movements among other Bantu further north.

There was a time in South Africa when the "Ethiopian Problem" was discussed with interest and almost with anxiety, not only by missionaries, but also by politicians, scholars and others interested in the welfare of the country. This occurred in the years after the Boer War (1899–1902) and in the days of the Zulu Rebellion, 1906. It was then feared that the Ethiopian movement was an African political underground movement aiming at ousting the White man from South Africa, or, at least, that it might establish a pan-African National Church which would cause harm by hampering the evangelization of the Bantu peoples.

If the problem now—after forty years—seems to have lost its primary interest, as far as the general public in South Africa is concerned, this is not due to any decline of the Bantu Independent church movement as such. The movement is now numerically very much stronger than a generation ago. Further, the history of this African movement in recent years, full of

dramatic points and vicissitudes, elucidates more clearly than anything else an important phase in the ascendancy of the Bantu peoples. The fact that all this has remained, and still remains, very much a hidden world to those who otherwise have the cause of the Africans at heart, is significant of the general development in the Union at the present time; the gulf separating the races is much wider now than at the beginning of the century.

This study pertains almost exclusively to conditions within one South African tribe, the Zulus. This limitation has been made for definite methodological reasons. With my experience from ten years of investigation into this subject I would now claim that the research area could advantageously be limited still further. One could have concentrated on one particular Independent Zulu church, or on an area geographically more circumscribed than that of a whole tribe stretching—as the Zulu language area does—from the Natal coast line to Johannesburg.

In planning the study on lines such as those drawn in this book, one is in a position of being able to define clearly the tribal, cultural and religious background of the problem, and to relate the phenomena of Bantu church life to definite social conditions in different communities (reserve, farm and urban areas).

The material on which my conclusions are based consists of my own direct observations in the field, together with local observations over a certain period (1941–45) made by Zulu assistants. I have been privileged in having had full access to rich and instructive material in the official archives in South Africa. My knowledge of the Independent Zulu churches was gained in the course of my missionary activity in South Africa, 1937–42, and during six months of special study of the problem on the Witwatersrand in 1945. As a missionary in Central Natal (farm and coal-mining districts) and in Northern Zululand (a tribal reserve), I had daily opportunities of coming into contact with the leaders and common people of these Independent Zulu churches, meeting them, as I did, wherever I went. In 1942 I went for three years to Tanganyika, and this *trek* to the north helped me, I believe, in letting me see the South African situation more in perspective than would otherwise have been the case.

From time to time I arranged meetings where Independent Church leaders met with pastors, evangelists, and ordinary lay

members of Mission Churches. We had very stimulating talks, sometimes friendly, sometimes arguing rather heatedly, in the end agreeing to differ on fundamental theological and religious questions, such as the interpretation of the Bible, the role of baptism and purification rites, the Black Christ and the Whites' Christ, and scores of other problems. Sometimes our Lutheran Church at Ceza, Northern Zululand, was filled with hundreds of "Zionists" in their colourful vestments. I attended preaching and purification services and other meetings of the Independent Churches whenever my own regular mission work allowed me to do so.

I was greatly helped by the competent and keen co-operation of some ten Zulu assistants. Teaching theology for a short while at a Lutheran college in Natal, I attempted to interest the students in a thorough study of this subject, of which they already had considerable practical knowledge. After some initial training in the art of observation and note-making, they were in two consecutive years, 1940 and 1941, posted in different areas of Natal and Zululand, for a period of some weeks at each place. Detailed life stories of local leaders and ordinary church members were recorded, Church services, dreams and visions related. All their notes were, as in the case of my own fieldwork, written in Zulu. In certain cases, these observations revealed new issues and tasks of field research to which we would turn our concerted action. Three of my helpers—now pastors in Lutheran Mission Churches—proved to be exceptionally good and reliable observers, and I owe them a very real debt of gratitude. For reasons which they have pointed out to me, their names are not published here.

Prior to undertaking this study, I had certain forebodings that in my capacity as a missionary of one particular church I should be handicapped in establishing friendly contacts with Independent church leaders—contacts without which they would not give information about themselves, their work, ambitions and aspirations. But my fear on this point was unnecessary. In an overwhelming number of cases I found that the very fact that I was known as a missionary, genuinely interested in their church life as well as in their personal life-histories and activities was a help when trying to elicit the information I wanted. Almost without exception, my African assistants and I were received as honoured guests at their church services. I was invited to preach in their churches, an

invitation which I hardly ever refused. I count some of these Zulu leaders as good friends. Experience of related problems in the work of one's own mission church opened up new avenues of inquiry and research.

And yet, I am fully conscious that my account does not reach the heart of the matter. I doubt whether any outsider can achieve that. However sympathetic an attitude the White observer may take, he remains—an outsider. The Bantu churches of South Africa have not yet got—as the Negroes of the United States have—their own Richard Wright to record the rhythm of black voices and to feel the heart-beat of the Black Man's longings and aspirations.

I was at a disadvantage sometimes with the Zulu Christians of my own mission church (Church of Sweden Mission, Lutheran), who of course found my intense and sympathetic interest in the ways of "Ethiopian" archbishops and "Zionist" prophets somewhat out of place, although generally speaking, they were forbearing towards this peculiarity of mine.

The reader should be fore-warned that in an investigation of this kind there obviously enters *the problem of bias*. A subjective emphasis is bound to affect any student of these phenomena. This can be gauged by putting the question, what would have been the outcome of this investigation if the observer had been, let us say, a Pentecostal soul-winner, or an African nationalist, or a sociologist who would not necessarily have to be a professing Christian. Obviously the writer's valuations and ideals enter into the investigation—from the collecting of the material itself, which is the fundamental stage, to the final presentation with its balancing of one viewpoint against another. I readily accept the engaging frankness and honesty with which the eminent Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal in his book on the Negro problem declares that "a disinterested social science is pure nonsense. It never existed, and it never will exist."[1] Value premises do enter into our arguments. So they should not be hidden, as tacit assumptions, but explicitly stated. A subjective emphasis is bound to affect the valuations of any missionary dealing with a problem of this nature, implying a definite criticism of his own ideals and life-work. No doubt, I am myself, both as a Protestant missionary and as an investigator, a part of the problem, and I affect its future development by my missionary activity or inactivity.

The value premises on which—as far as I am aware—the argument of this book is based are the following two:

1. As a motto of the book I have chosen a statement by Bishop Gore at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, 1910: "What I mean is that we have got to put into all bodies of Christians the consciousness that continuous life depends upon continuous principles." The significance of that statement is seen by Dr. Gore's grave warning expressed on the same occasion: "On almost all sides I notice in respect of what might be called in the broadest sense, the religion of Protestant Christianity, a tendency to drift. Men are conscious that what they used forcibly to assert was essential to Christianity they no longer are willing to assert."

Hardly anywhere is there, of course, such a cruel example of this tendency to drift as in the Bantu Independent Churches, and I shall attempt to show in this book to what this tendency seems to lead. The material of this investigation is therefore also organized as a contribution to the discussion of the central problem and main dilemma of the Protestant missionary cause: the founding of an "independent", self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating Church. My contention is that there has been altogether too much stress on the "*self*" and much too little emphasis on what the *Church* is. Without those "continuous principles" which have been delivered to the Church, "continuous life" is not to be expected.

2. This investigation is also a study of the impact of racial discrimination upon the life of the Christian Church. In South Africa, there have been two Protestant traditions in this respect: First, the S. African Calvinist "golden rule" claiming "*geen gelijkstelling*" (no equality) between White and Black in Church and State. And secondly, a liberal interpretation of the Bible proclaiming equal opportunity for all men, regardless of race and colour. Neither of these policies, if left unhampered by any conflicting views, would seem to lead to secession. The problem arises when the more repressive view tacitly or openly becomes dominating in churches which, in principle, are equalitarian and liberal, but which by "practical necessity"—consideration for the race-conscious White membership of a particular church—have to conform to a general segregation policy within the church.

The very reason why I first undertook this study was *practical*: my interest in it was based on the assumption that, in these churches, one could be able to see what the African Christian, *when left to himself*, regarded as important and relevant in Christian faith and in the Christian church. By such

a study I hoped to be able to discern tendencies that could be utilized in the practical task of building Christ's Church in Africa.

Instead of the official name, "Native Separatist Churches", which is obviously not a very happy term, I speak of "Bantu Independent Churches". The word "Native" is not liked by the Africans, and to apply the term "Separatist" only to Bantu secessionists as if White secessionists were not "Separatists" in much the same degree, does not seem fair. Although conscious of the fact that "*Independent*" in English usage often stands as a synonym for "Congregational", I shall here use the word "*Bantu Independent*" in a wider sense, as referring to such religious organizations as, in their desire for independence from the Whites, have seceded from mission churches. I also notice that D. Westermann, in his *Africa and Christianity*, refers to these churches as "Independent".

One difficulty which is encountered when describing the activities of certain Bantu church leaders is the necessity of *anonymity*, so as not to offend contemporary individuals and also to avoid legal actions which might otherwise follow. Some North American sociologists have encountered the same problem when publishing their Indian or Negro material (cf. M. Mead, *The Antlers*, and Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern-town*). On the other hand, in the case of the Zulu prophet and Church leader, Isaiah Shembe, for instance, such precautions are not necessary to the same degree, because his ideology is expressed in the official hymn-book of his church. I believe I can honestly say that I have tried to show all appropriate personal consideration—without jeopardizing the analysis of the actual problems.

CHAPTER I

RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE ZULUS

The White man's God and the White man's gold have influenced and changed Zulu belief and behaviour to a very considerable extent. As far as the results of the mission work go, the South African Native Churches Commission of 1925 could state with reason: "The rapidity and ease with which the South African Native has received the teachings of Christianity is one of the most remarkable phases in his acceptance of European civilization." Yet the word "ease" is perhaps not altogether accurate in this connexion. In fact, the African has put up a strong resistance to the mission's attempted conquest. The independent Zulu Churches may well be regarded as a symptom of an inner revolt against the White man's missionary crusade, and in these Churches we shall see many proofs of the vitality of the religious and cultural heritage of the Zulus, which in them is given a more honoured place than in the Mission Church. In order to make clear the influence of this African heritage I shall set out very briefly some of the main points in the system of myth, ritual and magic which makes up traditional Zulu belief.

(1) ZULU BELIEFS

(*a*) *High God*

It is not possible here to enter into a discussion of the controversial problem of the high-gods of the Bantu. The Zulus refer to their high-god by different names: *uNkulunkulu* ("the great, great one", or "the old, old one"), a term which together with the Xhosa name *Thixo* has been taken over by the Christian churches as the name for God; *uMvelingqangi* ("the one who emerged first") and, in an alternative form *uHlanga* (i.e. the "bed of rèeds", from which mankind broke off) are terms used by pagan Zulus referring to this high-god.

But while these names refer to God as a vaguely conceived Creator or First Cause, there is another set of names—or perhaps better, another layer of tradition, possibly another cultural influence altogether—which refers to "Heaven" or the

"Lord of Heaven" (*inkosi yezulu* or *inkosi phezulu*). This has been largely overlooked in the literature on the subject. Callaway, one of the outstanding authorities on pagan Zulu religion, tried to show "how utterly indistinct and undeveloped is their notion respecting a heavenly Lord",[1] but this I cannot wholly accept. I suggest that a study of modern half-Christian prophetic movements in Africa may be a methodologically new approach towards a discernment of what has been vital and important in the old primitive religion.

The *inkosi phezulu* is the sky-god. Naturally, he is particularly connected with thunder and lightning. When it thunders, the Zulus say: "The king is playing". He could strike by lightning anybody who had angered him.[2] In Zulu magic, fat of the so-called lightning-bird and earth from the place where lightning has struck are considered to be particularly powerful materia.[3] The lightning magicians, the "shepherds of heaven" (*a6elusi 6ezulu*)—who in actual fact are, of course, the priests of the sky-god-cult—have to lead lives of strict ritual purity in order to influence weather phenomena. They do not appear to derive their power from the ancestors, but by being magically treated with medicines known to contain "heaven" in a concentrated form.[4]

A lesser deity who should be mentioned even in this brief account is *Inkosazana* or *Nomkhu6ulwana*, a personification of spring, the Zulu Ceres. Gluckman sums up the essential parts of the ceremonies consecrated to Nomkhu6ulwana in the following five points:

(i) the dominance of women and girls in the ritual;

(ii) the soliciting of a good harvest from the Queen of Heaven;

(iii) the festivities, songs and dances in her honour;

(iv) the herding of cattle by the girls who wear men's garments; and

(v) the planting of consecrated fields and the offering of beer in the fields to the goddess.[5]

Nomkhu6ulwana appears dressed in white to the women who are hoeing. She moves with the mist, being on one side similar to a human in form, on another side a river, on a third side overgrown with green grass. When revealing herself to her female followers, she gives them some new law or predicts things which will happen in the future. This cult (*uNomdede*)

is particularly interesting because of the central part played in it by women.

(*b*) *Ancestors*

"The real, vital religion of the Zulus is their ancestor worship."[6] The spirits of the departed (Zulu: *idlozi*, plur. *amadlozi*) become the guardian spirits of their descendants. Vaguely localized at the grave or the kraal or in some subterranean abode ("those who are below", *a6aphansi* or *umhla6a*) the spirit wields great influence over his people. He is believed to look after their well-being in all respects. Illness, misfortune or death in the kraal are sure signs that he regards himself as neglected. The spirit, therefore, must be appeased by various means, especially by sacrifices in order to restore health, happiness and harmony in the kraal and among his kinsmen. The spirits of chiefs and the royal ancestors are naturally more important than ordinary, common spirits. They are "the source of communal well-being and prosperity".[7] A spirit may often choose to reveal himself to his people in the form of a snake, appearing in the cattle kraal or the hut. Another important channel of the self-revelation of the Spirit is in dreams, by which he warns and leads his descendants. The royal ancestors kept in touch with the Zulu tribe largely through the king, one of whose principal functions was to be the priest in various ancestral rites.

Formerly, the king was not only the great medicine man of the tribe, he was also by his specially close relationship with heaven responsible for the growth of vegetation.[8] The king was the greatest rain-maker of the tribe, and he would procure rain by calling upon his ancestors for assistance. The royal spirits were specially cared for on the occasion of the great national festival of the year, the Zulu New Year festival, or the first-fruit ceremonies.[9]

These ceremonies included sacrifice and were accompanied by recitations of praise of the king and his forefathers and, by the use of various magical means, strengthened the king. There was also a ritual bath of the king. Decorated with garlands and fruits, the king went at dawn to a river, accompanied by doctors carrying ashes of a sacrificial bull. When he was in midstream, the doctors poured the ashes into the water just above the king. As they floated by downstream, the king washed himself with ashes and water. His soldiers, who had entered the water further downstream, washed in the water which had passed over the king. Through the ablutions they

were both purified and at the same time filled with the power of the royal ancestors.

The most powerful and spectacular self-revelation of an ancestral spirit takes place in the initiation of the diviner (*isangoma*). While in the later routine activities of the diviner, magic and religion are blended, the actual initiation process is predominantly religious because of the role of the ancestors. During the initiation period (*ukwethwasa*) the novice carefully avoids all things that could ritually defile her.[10] She must go through daily purification rites by vomiting and by ablutions in a river. She adorns her body with white strips (*imiqwamba*) from the skin of a sacrificial goat. White is the diviner's colour. The purification rites and the whiteness of the dress are all part of the same process to "make the initiate see", to give her a clear vision, and to cause her to become totally possessed by the spirit. Together with her instructor, who is an experienced *isangoma*, and other initiates, she gives much time to rhythmical dancing which is an essential feature of the initiation. Each diviner has her special song, with its particular lilt and rhythm. The repeated performance of singing and dancing to this tune is required in order to please and materialize the spirit in whose honour the song is composed.

The urge to be possessed by the spirit and to become a diviner is felt as an irresistible force. Few are those who consciously wish to become possessed, but once the spirit has made known his intention to enter the person concerned, he must have his way. A prayer woman, Saulina, in our Ceza congregation suddenly disappeared from our church services, and it was reported that she was about to *ukwethwasa*. I went to the kraal and tried to persuade her to abandon such an idea, but both she and her pagan husband had definitely resigned themselves to her fate. "Leave me for some years, Mfundisi", she said. "I can do nothing about this possession. It must have its course. My *idlozi* wants me. But after, perhaps, two years, I will be back again". Although in this way the *idlozi*-possession is experienced as an irresistible force which most would prefer not to experience, yet Gluckman is correct in stating that to become diviners is for pagan Zulu women the only socially recognized way of escape from an impossible situation in family life; it is also the only way an outstanding woman can win general social prestige.[11]. In recent times the number of the *izangoma* has been greatly on the increase (Shaka, who resented their influence, had most of them killed).

A modern form of ancestor-possession is the *amandiki* or *amandawe*-possession. The phenomena connected with this have been scientifically described as far as the Vandau, the Venda and the Lovedu are concerned.[12] Quite recently—about 1910—they appeared in Zululand. It is characteristic that the two most serious epidemics in recent times among the Zulus—"influenza" in 1919–20 and malaria in 1933—were among the causes of the rapid spread of this form of possession. Like the *izizwe*-hysteria (see p. 248), the *amandawe*-possession is directed at curing some illness, and initiation into the cult is regarded as a healing agency, for it is believed to be therapeutic. As with *idlozi*-possession, dancing is an important feature of the more modern cult. However, whereas the *isangoma* novice is most often of an hysterical constitution, and the symptoms of the initiation (*ukwethwasa*) are quite violent, the initiates of *amandawe*-possession are relatively quiet. An *amandawe*-doctor is called to heal the patient. This is done by rites and dances designed to cause one of the patient's ancestral spirits to materialize. The initiate goes through many days of an exhausting dance, until at last the spirit enters her. It speaks through the initiate and expresses itself in a reputedly foreign tongue, as, for instance, a so-called "Indian" or "Thonga" language. In actual fact it may only be a series of meaningless sounds, which are thought by the audience to be some foreign language. Sometimes two or even as many as seven different ancestral spirits may take up their abode in the person concerned and speak in different languages.[a]

(c) *Magic*

Medicine, magic and religion are closely connected in Zulu pagan beliefs. We have, for example, just seen that the diviner receives her supernatural powers by being entered into by the spirit of one of her ancestors. In cases of illness and ill-fate, the diviner is called in to make a diagnosis. There are two other orders of doctors besides the diviner (*isangoma*)—namely, the

[a] The Zulus have had no well-known counterpart to the famous Xhosa prophets of the last century. The best known heathen "prophet"-influence among the Xhosa is, of course, the movement instigated by Mhlakaza and Nongquase in 1856. Apocalyptic expectations caused the people to slaughter 200,000 head of cattle and led to economic and social disaster. Willoughby mentions that a "prophet" was known as a *modimo* (god) in Bechuanaland before the Europeans came (*The Soul of the Bantu*, 1928, p. 113), a fact which is of importance for an understanding of the "Black-Christ-theology" in the Zionist churches.

herbalist or the leech (*inyanga*, plur. *izinyanga*) and the lightning magician. While the profession of diviner is not hereditary and most of them are women, that of the herbalist is handed down from father to son.[13] The actual call to follow in the father's footsteps may be extended to a young man through a dream. There is co-operation between diviner and herbalist: when the former has concluded her diagnosis she sends her patient to some herbalist to get treatment by a specialist. An important development in the therapeutic technique of the herbalist has taken place in recent years. Many cases of hysteria which the *inyanga* is required to heal nowadays are being treated with such medicines (*umuthi*, pl. *imithi*) as are supposed to replace or supersede the hysteria with some form of possession, called *indiki*, *indawe*, or *izizwe*. The Zionist prophet movement, as we shall see, violently opposes these practices and claims to be able to heal the *inyanga*-induced possession by a new state of mind, possession by the "Holy Spirit", as they describe it.

We have seen that the diviner-novice has to pass through a lengthy process of initiation by which an ancestral spirit finds its way into her being. As distinguished from this, the lightning-magician, the priest of the sky-god, arrives much sooner and more easily at proficiency in his particular speciality. A narrow escape from being killed by lightning shows him that he is specially favoured by the heavens. An older heaven-doctor will smear him with the required medicines: fat of a heaven-bird (an imaginary bird supposed to be found in the lightning) and so-called *intelezi*-charms. Treated in this fashion, he acquires the power necessary to perform his particularly dangerous work for the benefit of the whole society.

All three categories of doctors are engaged in a struggle against lurking dangers and destruction brought about by *uɓuthakathi* in all its forms of witchcraft and sorcery. "Black" and "white" medicines of the *inyanga* strengthen the patient against being smitten down by these malignant influences, or are supposed to cure him if he has already fallen prey to them. The main task of the diviner is to find out where sorcerers have hidden their destructive and deadly poisons. In a society where a sorcerer is supposed to be able to direct the very lightning against the enemy by magical means, the heaven-doctor is kept busy in placing magically prepared pegs (*izinkhonkwane*) which will attract the powerful impulse of the sky-god and thereby save the lives of men.

The belief in *u6uthakathi* is of fundamental importance to pagan Zulus. We shall see how this belief is taken over by the independent Bantu churches, and later shall discuss the means by which the various aspects of the *u6uthakathi* are blended with the new Christian belief taken over from the Whites.

(2) WHITE MISSIONS, HISTORY AND POLICY

(a) *1835–85: "Bantu-Boer-Briton"—and Boston*

William Shaw, the first Wesleyan missionary in Kaffraria (Cape Province), surveying in 1823 the tremendous expanse of the unknown African continent, said: "There is not a single missionary station between the place of my residence and the northern extremity of the Red Sea." Shaw was probably the first Protestant missionary to plan an "apostolic road" in Africa, a chain of mission stations to stretch from Salem, Shaw's first mission station, to what is now known as Durban (then Port Natal).[14]

This was in 1823. The situation has changed considerably since then. The advance during the first fifty years of missionary activity among the Zulus was slow but steady and definite. This advance must be seen against the general political background. The great expansion of Zulu political power under Shaka (murdered in 1828) was checked under the reign of Dingaan by the Dutch Voortrekkers at Bloedrivier on December 16, 1838. This clash between Bantu and Boer synchronized with the arrival of the first missionaries representing Britain and Boston (the headquarters of the American Board were situated in Boston). Distrust, sullen resistance and even violent opposition met Allen Gardiner, the Anglican missionary, and the American Congregationalists in the beginning of their work. This opposition was partly caused by the fear which the threatening political and military advance of the Europeans inspired among the Zulu leaders. Only in 1846 was the first Zulu, Umbulazi, baptized by Dr. Newton Adams, the physician in the team of the first American Board missionaries.[15]

These missionaries were able to secure a foothold in Southern Natal round Durban and Pietermaritzburg, but Zululand proper was closed to the missions. In 1850 the Norwegian missionary H. P. S. Schreuder succeeded, however, in overcoming King Mpande's resistance on this point. So much impressed was

Mpande by Schreuder's medical cure of one of his royal ailments that he at once gave the Lutheran missionary land at Empangeni (Zululand) and permission to build a mission station there. "Thus was Zululand opened to the Gospel—by the medicine bottle!"[16]

The mission work of the American Board developed rapidly. The principle of self-support and self-propagation by the Zulu Church was stressed by the missionaries from the beginning. In 1860 a "Native Home Missionary Society" was organized by and for the Zulus for the support of Zulu workers, and in 1870 the first Zulu pastor was ordained. The young Church accepted in 1879 the so-called "Umsunduze Rules", drawing a sharp line between the old heathen customs and the new Christian ethics. Dr. J. D. Taylor has described these rules as "an ironclad code of conduct which was used to stiffen the moral backbone of Christians".[17] A decisive stride forward was taken in the last year of this period, 1885, with the formation of the so-called "*A6aisitupa*" (The Six), a committee of six Zulu members who were entrusted with the Home Missionary Movement. This was a bold step towards devolution of responsibility to the African Church. At about the same time (in 1883) the mission succeeded in giving the Zulus that precious gift, the whole Bible translated into Zulu.

The evangelistic advance was supported by successful educational work, especially through the institutions at Amanzimtoti and Inanda. The American Board was also particularly instrumental in negotiating with the Natal Government in 1856 about so-called "Mission Reserves", which are large tracts of land in the immediate vicinity of mission stations. Zulu converts were invited to settle upon these reserves which have proved to be of great importance for the building of a Christian community in Natal.

Of the British Societies the Wesleyans eventually took up the challenge of their missionary, William Shaw. Important links in the chain of mission stations which he had visualized were welded from about 1847. A characteristic feature of the rapid development of their work during this first period is the *Unzondelelo*[a] revival movement, beginning in 1866.[18] At the outset, the Zulu leaders of this movement were not encouraged by the missionaries, who had their apprehensions of the possible separatist trends of the *Unzondelelo*. In 1878, however, the movement received authoritative approval. It has proved to be

[a] *Unzondelelo*: zeal.

"a striking example of Bantu initiative wisely used" (Brookes).[19]

The Anglicans under Bishop J. W. Colenso laid the foundations of their mission work among the Zulus. The diocese of Natal was formed in 1853. Colenso, through his linguistic ability and ethnological interest, was well equipped to wield a great influence among the Zulus. In 1870 the first Bishop of Zululand was consecrated and the new diocese became separate from the diocese of Natal. The Free Church of Scotland began their work among the Zulus in 1864, the first missionary being James Allison, earlier working in connexion with the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society.[20] Lutheran Societies from the Scandinavian countries and from Germany also constituted a strong missionary force in Natal. Through Schreuder's influence the Norwegians concentrated their efforts in Zululand itself. German societies (Berlin and Hermannsburg) followed about 1850, while the Church of Sweden Mission began its work at the end of the period, in 1878.

The first half-century is thus the period of the laying of the foundations. At the same time it is a period of serious crises in the Mission Churches. Two of the great leaders during this time, Colenso and Schreuder, played important parts in these crises. Colenso, that "attractive if wayward personality", was deposed from his episcopal see in 1864 because of his radical views pertaining to Biblical problems and questions of Church discipline (he favoured baptism of polygamists).[21] The Colenso controversy shook the colony of Natal for a considerable time. Schreuder, the rugged Norwegian Viking, was consecrated bishop in 1866. Seven years later he left the Norwegian Missionary Society as it was too Low-Church for his liking, and formed his own organization under the Church of Norway.

(*b*) *1885–1915*

A decisive factor for mission as for other work during these thirty years was the discovery of the gold mines around Johannesburg in 1885. The "Witwatersrand" became not only the gravitation point of African labour but also an important centre for missionary activity. A host of new mission organizations were attracted to this field from Europe and America. William Shaw had during the 'twenties stated that there was not a single missionary station between his residence and the northern extremity of the Red Sea. Two generations later his successors were confronted with a problem

of an altogether different order: the "multiplication of missionary agencies" and "overlapping" of efforts in Natal and Zululand.

Most of these new mission organizations were the outcome of radical revivals in Europe and America of the "Holiness", Pentecostal and Apostolic Faith type; others belonged to the Seventh Day Adventists (from 1892); others again represented the Salvation Army. An important organization in Natal was the South African General Mission, the leader of which was Rev. F. Suter. He became especially well known as the principal of the Dumisa Training Institute for Pastors and Evangelists, an interdenominational institution. Several Zulus who later were to become Separatist Church leaders received their initial theological training at Dumisa.

The Ethiopian problem, or the Separatist Church movement, was felt as a disturbing element during this period. We should, however, also remember the positive consequences on mission work of this situation. The threat of the Separatist Church movement on the one hand and the rapid growth of the number of missionary societies on the other hand became strong incentives towards missionary co-operation. A platform for this co-operation had already been built in 1881 through the formation of the Natal Missionary Conference, and the scope of co-operative endeavour was widened by the institution of General Missionary Conferences for the whole of South Africa from 1904 onwards.

All the same, the World Missionary Conference in session at Edinburgh in 1910, when referring to the conditions of mission work in South Africa, did "bewail the extent of overlapping, which has prejudicial influence on the attitude of the Natives affected by it, and tends to neutralize that wise and careful discipline which is so necessary in the upbuilding of a Native Church".[22] Towards the end of the period, after seventy-five years of mission work in Natal and Zululand, eighteen different societies were united in the Natal Missionary Conference. The number of European missionaries represented in the Conference was 263. African ministers were forty-six, and full members 60,000. The probable total of adherents of all societies was 200,000. To this should be added certain undenominational societies not attached to the Natal Missionary Conference, and a considerable number of missionary agencies operating only in Johannesburg, although from this central position influencing Zulus also elsewhere than on the Witwatersrand.[23]

(c) After 1915

The tendencies towards "multiplication of missionary agencies", on the one hand, and on the other towards more co-operation between the societies has been accentuated during this last period. The *Christian Handbook of South Africa* (1938) enumerates forty societies as engaged in mission work in Natal and Zululand, ranging in size from Mission churches of 100,000 members and more (Methodists, Anglicans, Lutherans) to small groups of less than 1000.[24] We should also mention the Roman Catholic Missions. The work in Natal has been entrusted since 1882 to the Trappist Order (Congregation of Mariannhill), and that in Zululand to the Benedictine Order since 1923. The Roman Catholic advance among the Zulus during this last period has been both extensive and intense.

The outstanding fact about church co-operation during the period was the formation in 1936 of the Christian Council of South Africa. The Council is doing its most valuable work through its seven sectional committees on Education, Evangelism, Literature, Medical Work, Native Welfare, Women's Work, and Youth Movements. Although not envisaging any federation or union of the constituent Churches, the Christian Council acts as the mouthpiece of the œcumenical cause in South Africa.[25]

Missionary policy

A brief analysis of the missionary policy followed in the leading missionary societies is necessary at this point. In concentrating our attention upon the period which saw the rise of the Separatist Church movement—approximately 1890–1910—we stress that this summary is simply meant as a background for the main problem which we are discussing in this book.

Henry Venn, Rufus Anderson, and Gustaf Warneck expressed the programme of modern Protestant missions, as far as the "Native Church" is concerned, in the slogan: "A self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating church."[26] This was taken to mean that the young Church in China, India, or Africa should be independent and indigenous. This policy was, however, so far of only theoretical interest. It was discussed in the transactions of the Mission Boards in London or Boston. It had not yet been tried out in the field. When this mission policy was brought to the South African mission field it caused some consternation among the missionaries, whether Britishers or Americans. I mention three examples of this.

When John Kilner, a secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, went on a "kind of deputational hurricane" to South Africa, he was impressed by the "amazing modesty" of the missionaries. "He marvelled at the modesty which prevented them from putting forward some of the Native leaders who were fit for the work."[27] He emphasized the need of an African ministry, and no less than fifty or sixty names were registered of men who might be ordained as "Native Ministers on Trial". Kilner met, however, with opposition from some of the "modest" missionaries, who "felt that the action was too hasty and there were serious misgivings on the part of some".[28]

The conference of Foreign Mission Boards of the United States sent a circular in 1895 to the missionaries in the Zulu field stressing the need for a self-supporting Church. When this circular was translated into Zulu, the words for self-support (*ukuzondla*) and self-government (*ukuziphatha*) were not clearly understood. Some of the African leaders, reading the circular in Zulu, "believed that the missionaries were withholding from them the rights of Congregational Churches" (that is, of forming independent, self-governing congregations).[29] They resented missionary control. This was one of the reasons for the formation, in 1896, of the separatist Zulu Congregationalist Church.

Something of the same problem was felt by Presbyterian mission leaders. Dr. Stewart of Lovedale was not altogether willing to follow the lead from Edinburgh urging the ordination on an increased number of African ministers. In an agitated moment, he seems to have claimed that the main cause of Ethiopianism was to be found in the interference of European mission boards in the matter of ordination of Africans.[30]

One should perhaps not draw too far-reaching conclusions from these three examples. But they are not insignificant. They show that some missionaries in the field—representing some of the most influential missionary societies working in South Africa at the time—felt the danger of a too hasty application of Henry Venn's and Rufus Anderson's principles.

Ten years later the situation had changed. Missionaries of a younger generation, filled with the ideals of a self-governing African Church, had begun their work. They were in the years 1905–10 confronted with a situation where the Ethiopian problem was felt as most disturbing and perplexing. This was bound to affect mission policy very definitely. At General Missionary Conferences in 1904 and 1909 the problem was

tackled by two missionary leaders, E. Jacottet of the Paris Mission in Basutoland and J. Lennox of Lovedale (United Free Church of Scotland).[31]

Jacottet urged that missions had to adapt themselves to the new situation created by Ethiopian secessions. "Let us take what is good in the programme of Ethiopianism, and be truer to it than the Ethiopians themselves." This would be accomplished by making the Mission Church indigenous and at the same time separate from the European Church. "A little less Presbyterianism, a little less Anglicanism, a little less Lutheranism (not to speak of all the other larger or smaller South African *isms*) would do no harm, and a little more Africanism would do a great deal more good. Christianity must lose its European form and colour, it must become as African a religion to the Africans as it is to-day a European religion to the Europeans." In order to achieve this aim, "complete separation" between the European and African churches was of paramount importance. This separation, or segregation as we should say to-day, was made "quite imperative" because of two considerations, according to Jacottet: (1) "The general feelings of the European towards the native" in South Africa. (2) Only in a segregated church would the African be allowed full scope for self-development. Experience had proved to Jacottet that Africans who were connected with a European church "would always have to play second fiddle". To him the aim which the mission had to strive to attain was the independent native church, although *ad hoc* European supervision and help was necessary: "I do not mean that the native churches should be *at once* completely independent and self-governing."

The segregated African Church was discussed by Lennox five years later. He referred to the discussions which had taken place in the Anglican Church of the Province at that time. While certain Anglicans asked for special bishops for "Native" work, the majority were for "maintaining visibly the unity of the whole Catholic Church, white and black".[32] Lennox opposed this "incorporating union" of the European and African sections of the Church. With such an arrangement "everything which gives outward expression to the belief and permanent form of the Church is imposed from above on that which is below". Lennox stated the consequences of his supposedly more democratic approach: in the South Africa of race conflict, Lennox emphasized, this implied a segregated church divided into one White section and another, African section in order to give to

the latter freedom of expression and opportunity for development and leadership.[33]

The most notable result of these views, as expounded, for instance, by Lennox, was the formation in 1923 of the Bantu Presbyterian Church. The Church of Scotland Missions then decided to accept the consequences of the mission policy professed by them and other Protestant missions in making the experiment of this autonomous and segregated or "parallel" Bantu Church. The first African Moderator of the General Assembly of the Bantu Presbyterian Church was Right Reverend Y. Mbali. From 1923 to 1946 there have been altogether twenty-one moderators, of whom ten have been European missionaries and eleven African ministers. The enrolment which in 1923 was some 24,000 has now (1946) risen to 30,000. The Bantu ministers have received a sound theological education, first at Lovedale and latterly at Iona House, Fort Hare. The number of European missionaries compared with that of African ministers is small. They have no power of veto in the General Assembly, but have equal votes with the African brethren. The African moderators have a very considerable influence in the Church.[34]

Some Protestant missions in South Africa have followed the example of the Bantu Presbyterian Church; others have not. Anglicans and Roman Catholics oppose the policy of parallel and segregated churches, claiming that the Catholic Church is indivisible.

(3) "*NET VIR BLANKES*—FOR EUROPEANS ONLY"

If it is a fact—and I believe that it is—that nowhere else has the Separatist church movement grown to such dimensions as in the Union of South Africa, this must mean that there is in South African society some particular root cause not found elsewhere, at least to the same extent, which leads to this result. This root cause is the colour line between White and Black. Nothing more than a cursory glance at the history and sociology of racial discrimination in South Africa can be given here, but it is obvious that any inquiry into the life of the independent Bantu churches must give some consideration to the racial caste system in that country.

Public and private life in South Africa is dominated by the colour problem. Everything, from public conveyances and conveniences to national legislation, is literally or figuratively

stamped with that warning sign of racial segregation, expressed in the two official languages of the country: "*Net Vir Blankes*—For Europeans Only." There are differences in the general attitudes of Boer and Briton to the Bantu, but there is now in essence a common front, a common attitude.

(a) Land and labour

It may seem strange to start a discussion of this problem with a few notes on the land question. However, as has been rightly said, "the Native question *is* the land question" (W. M. Macmillan), so it can be argued that even the Separatist church problem is a corollary of the land problem.[35] The increase in the number of Bantu independent churches could be shown on a diagram as a parallel to the tightening squeeze of the Natives through land legislation. Some of the African land-buying syndicates before 1913 were composed of Ethiopian leaders, and even to-day one of the highest ambitions of a successful church leader is to find land for the founding of a church colony of his own. Professor Jabavu, one of the most level-headed and best known of African spokesmen, uses very strong language when characterizing the Natives Land Act of 1913 in an article about "Bantu Grievances." He there stresses that the Act of 1913 was felt as the worst of their grievances.[36] This Act, the first link in the chain of segregational legislation, lays down that no Native, *qua* Native, may purchase or even hire land except in certain scheduled areas. This meant that in Natal, with its 25,000 square miles of territory and its European population of 132,000 (Census 1921), the one million Zulus were restricted to the purchase of land in an area of less than 4000 square miles.[37] For South Africa as a whole it meant that one million Europeans held a larger share of the land than the approximately five million Africans, who were restricted to the so-called Reserves. It is fair to record here that only 15 per cent. of the Union is cultivable.[37a] The passing of the Natives Land Act of 1913 explains the bitterness with which African agitators at that time used to accuse the Whites: "At first we had the land, and you had the Bible. Now we have the Bible, and you have the land." The effect of the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 has not yet been widely enough felt as to alleviate substantially the hardships experienced by Africans.

The result of the 1913 Act was that many Africans moved from Natal, either to the Reserves or to the towns, especially Johannesburg. The taxation policy was

another cause of the city-ward trend of the Africans. Then the Urban Areas Act of 1923 (amended in 1930) further emphasized the segregation policy begun in 1913: it aimed at "the segregation of Natives *from* the towns and the segregation of Natives *in* the towns",[38] the reason being that European farmers wanted to secure farm labour. No wonder that the Africans, debarred by such restrictive legislation both from the land and from the towns, asked themselves almost in despair, "*Siyangaphi?*"—"Where are we to go?"

In 1926, the legislation in a Joint Session of the two Houses put the placard "*Net Vir Blankes*—For Europeans Only" on any skilled labour in the mining industry.[39] This made the existing industrial "Colour Bar" legal. The result has been "loss in the earning power and opportunity for the Native, the growth of anti-White prejudice, and the general embitterment of race relations throughout the Union".[40] Because of this "Colour Bar Act" the unemployed problem during the economic crisis in the early 'thirties was neatly "solved" by substituting "white" for "black" labourers wherever possible.[41] These socio-economic factors directly affect the argument in this book: many of the outbursts of the Independent Church movement occurred during this period of bitterness caused by African unemployment. The existence to-day of a considerable number of Independent Church leaders who prior to the enforcement of the "Colour Bar Act" were occupied as skilled artisans and craftsmen, seems to point to an important relation between these two phenomena in the life of Africans at the present time. It is pertinent to our subject to observe that these restrictions were most strongly felt on the Witwatersrand, the most important centre of the Independent Church movement.

So far African labour has not had much help from the South African trade unions, which are practically "lily-white", as they put it in the Southern States of America. There are only a few African trade unions, in which the urbanized African's leadership urge can find some outlet and where his organizing abilities can be developed. But African Trade Unions are not recognized by the law, and—to make the White domination technique fully effective—the African, by the Native Labour Regulation Act of 1911, is deprived of the strike weapon. Native strikes are, as such, illegal. The resort to strikes was "for Europeans only—*net vir Blankes*".

The "Industrial and Commercial Workers Union", often referred to as the "I.C.U.", did attain a certain degree of