

corrupted.²⁰ "There are such clergymen, no doubt, but I think they are not so common as to justify Miss Crawford in esteeming it their general character" and he goes on to claim that she has been misled by the 'common-place censure' of 'prejudiced persons'. Yet as a matter of generally agreed history we now know just how deep the contamination went and how far the combined reforms of Methodists, Evangelicals and Tractarians would fall short of success.

²⁰ Independent evidence exists, of course, in the works of Henry Fielding; Cowper and Eighteenth Century diarists.

Prophets, Spouses and Story-tellers in Africa

ADRIAN EDWARDS C.S.Sp.

In trying to understand the world, or, at least that part of it with which we are involved, we can look for a prophet, or even turn prophets ourselves, or we can tell stories about the world. The excellence of the prophet is that he parts the wheat from the chaff; the excellence of the story-teller is that he makes chaff look like wheat, perhaps even transmutes it into wheat. The poet, if he is lucky, is something of both prophet and story-teller: the theologian, if he is, as many theologians appear to be, unlucky, will falter when he should speak in prophetic judgement, and fail too in the task of imaginative transmutation. In apocalyptic, the two modes of understanding are fused, as we see in Daniel or Revelations, much to the bafflement of most of us. But for the purposes of this review¹ it seems possible to see prophecy and story-telling as complementary and inter-acting opposites. Perhaps I should say that I am myself more in sympathy with the story-teller than the proph-

¹ The books reviewed in this article are: *African Christianity* by Adrian Hastings. Geoffrey Chapman, London 1976. pp 105 £1.50. *African Christian Marriage* by Benezri Kisembo, Laurenti Magesa and Aylward Shorter. Geoffrey Chapman, London 1977. pp 242 (no price indicated). *African Tradition and the Christian God* by Charles Nyamiti. pp 76. (No price or date of publication given). *Spearhead No 49*, Gaba Publications, P.O. Box 908, Eldoret, Kenya. *Prayer in the Religious Traditions of Africa* by Aylward Shorter. Oxford University Press, Nairobi 1975. pp 146 £5.75. *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa*, edited by T. O. Ranger and John Weller. Heinemann, London 1975. pp 285 £2.50. *Regional Cults* edited by Richard P. Werbner, ASA Monographs, 16, Academic Press, London, New York, San Francisco 1977. pp 256 £7.20. *Myth, Literature and the African World* by Wole Soyinka. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1976. pp 168 £5.95. *Uhuru's Fire* by Adrian Roscoe. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1977. pp 281.

et; but I shall try to be fair as I move between the polar interests of my fellow-Adrians, the prophet-watching of Adrian Hastings and the story-hearing of Adrian Roscoe, taking a look in between at that prophetic institution in which so many stories end, namely marriage.

I have called Adrian Hastings a prophet-watcher, and the term is surely not unfair. Not only does his very useful book on *African Christianity* provide us with much in the way of sympathetic insights on such African Christian prophets as William Wade Harris, an outstandingly successful evangelist, without support from any church, who told his converts to join the missionary churches, Simon Kimbangu, whose five months of preaching repentance were followed by thirty years of imprisonment by the Belgian administration, and Emmanuel Opoku-Pare, who founded the Sacred Order of the Silent Brotherhood, after a vision while fasting on a Commonwealth Scholarship in London, but he tends to stress the prophetic strand in the Christian presence in Africa. Hence the abiding impression that his book leaves is of Christianity in Africa as, in the Biblical phrase, "a great cloud of witnesses", some greater, some lesser, each striving to deepen his or her own understanding of Christ and to pass it on to those around.

This impression emerges out of a thematic approach, in which each chapter surveys a different set of experiences and potentialities, with history, rather than social anthropology or theology, providing the intellectual framework. The first chapter gives the historical background of the missionary era, and the second deals with the contemporary pastoral situation with the innumerable communities of village Christians that form the base of African Christianity, while at higher levels, bishops' meetings and councils of churches try to map out new strategies. Chapter 3 entitled "Cultural Revolution" discusses the attempts by both politicians and theologians to achieve "authenticity". Chapter 4 deals intelligently with African attitudes towards health and sickness, and the opportunities and problems for Christians. Should missionaries run hospitals? Can we believe in witches? (A yes to the first, a qualified no to the second).

Finally, the last chapter, entitled "Power, Politics, and Poverty", examines the Christian commitment to justice. While Fr Hastings recognises that in any crisis 95% of bishops take the official view, he sees hope for the future in the emergence of African liberation theology, and the closing vignette is that of the Calvinist theologian Beyers Naude, at his trial in Pretoria, declaring, in the words of the New Testament, "We must obey God rather than man".

There are some themes, of course, of significance in the history of African Christianity which Fr Hastings has been obliged to pass over or underplay through considerations of length. Such are

the missionary contribution to education and to the growth of written literature in African languages, or the role of clergymen in the emergence of African nationalism between 1870 and 1920. More seriously, while the balance between the different parts of Anglophone Africa is fairly well held, and there are interesting remarks on Mozambique and Zaire (though to link Angola with Mozambique as characterized by “an almost complete absence of local clergy”, p 32, is a howler), but the former French colonies deserve, even in a book of this size, more mention.

There are statements, as well as emphases, to which one can object. The suggestion on page 68 that killing of witches in Africa never took the numerical toll of the great European witch-hunts is a little surprising, since we have been told a few pages earlier about the massive drownings carried out by Tomo Nyirenda in the Northern Rhodesia of 1925.² The claim that African poverty in South Africa is “often” worse than seventy years ago (p 78) seems equally questionable.³ Politically, Fr. Hastings seems to be one of those whose esteem for Julius Nyerere has led him to believe that Tanzanian reality is rather closer to the ideal than is actually the case. While public rhetoric stresses local initiatives and self-reliance, in actual practice decisions are made by the bureaucracy, just as they were in the colonial period,⁴ and the main achievement of Tanzania socialism so far, the grouping of a large proportion of the population in *ujamaa* villages, seems to be a particularly good example of the triumph of bureaucratic wishes. Home-grown capitalism seems to be the force most likely to cut the bureaucracy down to size, since *ujamaa* and similar ideologies are all too similar to

² T. O. Ranger in his essay on “The Mwana Lesa Movement of 1925” in *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa* gives a figure of 191 witches killed by Tomo Nyirenda in three months. Jan Vansina, using newspaper reports, estimates that out of 505 people given the poison ordeal as suspected witches in the Kuba area of the then Belgian Congo, 250 died. (See his essay in *Man in Africa*, edited by Douglas and Kaberry, 1969). On the other hand, there were many areas of pre-colonial Africa where witchcraft fears were weak, or even non-existent, or where they took a form which did not generate killings.

³ See Merle Lipton, “Race, Industrialisation and Social Change; a Comment” in *African Affairs*, Jan 1977, pp 105-7. The rise in real wages has not, of course, prevented the rise in real oppression which has operated over the same period.

⁴ This view seems to find support in two books describing local-level administration and politics in two different areas of Tanzania, Joel Samoff's *Tanzania: Local Politics and the Structure of Power*, University of Wisconsin Press, on Moshi, and J. R. Finucane's *Rural Development and Bureaucracy in Tanzania: the Case of Mwanza Region* Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

colonial slogans of indirect rule and community development.⁵

However, one's main reaction to this book is admiration at the way Fr. Hastings has synthesised material from a wide range of sources. Even though this synthesis is received wisdom rather than a substantially new approach, it is still the received wisdom of the well-informed. On "authenticity", Fr. Hastings sees that Mobutu and Nyerere are really looking for an appropriate mythology and that the "African theology of Idowu and Mbiti, while glorifying and over-simplifying the past, is at the same time far closer to European theologizing than its practitioners realize. To import too rapidly the standard attitudes of contemporary European theology would, Fr. Hastings suggests, be a source of misunderstanding the vitality of African Christian life. Thus, the divisions of Christianity are often a source of pride rather than of scandal to African Christians, and their ecclesiology tends to favour a multiplication of ranks and roles, which can, paradoxically, serve as a bulwark against autocracy. Angels and fasting may be out of fashion in Europe, but they are very significant for many Africans.

Fr. Hastings recognises three trends in theology in Africa. There is "African theology" of the kind already mentioned, in which a static, tension-free, tableau of the African past is set up, either as with Idowu's *Olodumare* dealing with the author's own ethnic group, or a portrait with items drawn from a variety of peoples, and is interpreted through basically European categories. Then there is "liberation theology", at present only really significant in southern Africa, but which Fr. Hastings sees as potentially relevant for all Africa, since it can grapple with problems of oppression and suffering with which "African theology" has little obvious concern. Finally, there is an African pastoral theology, at present mainly practised by bishops. To my mind, "liberation theology" is unlikely to detach itself from its political context, and the most hopeful future, theologically speaking, lies with an African pastoral theology. Fr. Hastings rightly relates the emergence of "African theology" to the need of the elite, ecclesiastical as well as lay, for ideologies which can shore up their identity, and lessen the evident ambiguity of their relations with the "Western world"; but this opens up a line of argument which, if followed much further, would have obliged him to recast his book, since it would have led to discussions of class conflicts in the independent African states, and how they affect, and are experienced in, the Christian churches. Certainly, his concern with prophetic witness has provided many insights, but still leaves open crucial problems as to how a society

⁵ A good case might be made for arguing that colonial and post-colonial Africa has been a case of Marx's "Asiatic Society", in which a bureaucracy effectively dominates a state made up of village communities which possess a certain amount of political and economic autonomy. In much of "African Socialism" as in "indirect rule" and "community development", there is a failure to examine the ways in which the bureaucracy can be a factor militating against development.

opens up to evangelization and how Christian symbols and values acquire relevance for particular groups over periods of time. Charisms are surely given to communities as well as to individuals.

Two other books before me, Charles Nyamiti's *African Tradition and the Christian God*, and *African Christian Marriage* by Benezeri Kitembo, Laurenti Magesa, and Aylward Shorter represent different kinds of theological concern. Fr. Nyamiti, a Tanzanian priest, is concerned to stress that a real, if not fully developed, monotheism is part of African tradition, that "African theology" of the tradition-oriented kind needs to enter into dialogue with liberation theology, and that reflection on African traditional attitudes and insights can enrich the spiritual lives of African (and presumably non-African) Christians. More than this, Fr. Nyamiti writes clearly, has read fairly widely, and has an attractive courtesy and seriousness of approach. Unfortunately, his enterprise never quite seems to get airborne. Why?

One reason seems to be a weakness common enough among theologians or, for that matter, literary critics. The written sources employed are already often compilations, such as Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy*, so that the voices of the original speakers are decidedly muffled, since we are at a third remove from the primary sources. This would matter less if Fr. Nyamiti tied down his discussion to one particular area or ethnic group, but he has very few specific references. The same weakness applies to his discussion of liberation theology. While recognizing the shakiness of much of Cone's theorizing, he complains that the more modest J. D. Roberts offers no concrete proposals "to overcome the evils of oppression". Neither does Fr. Nyamiti. Even his condemnations of South African racialism are summaries of the work of Ntwasa and Moore. "Treating women as inferior to men" appears as one of the "white social aberrations which have also influenced theology" on page 36, whereas on page 37 we are told, with apparent approval, that St Paul teaches "that woman is subordinate to man".

Underlying the whole argument is a curious, no doubt unconscious, sleight-of-hand. Fr. Nyamiti is arguing that Africans can without loss of self-respect accept the Christian revelation as a fulfilment of their own traditions, but the African traditions of which he approves are those which fit the exigencies of European theology. On other aspects of African religion, Fr. Nyamiti is extremely critical; "God's unique role among people has been usurped by the medicine man, spirits and superstitious objects. . . . Hence recourse to God is rather rare, and in most cases the general attitude is almost 'practical atheism'. Furthermore, superstition and the consequent lack of critical spirit lead to a false notion of God".⁶ Fr. Nyamiti seems not to appreciate that an understanding

⁶ Page 10. It should be said that Fr. Nyamiti's view of Western society and religious attitudes is equally pessimistic.

of the non-theistic elements in African religion can help us to understand the how and why of much of African tradition. Even his appreciation of African theism is well behind contemporary scholarship, which is concerning itself with the historic setting and development of forms of African faith in the High God.⁷

Of the three authors of *African Christian Marriage*, Benezere Kisebo is a Ugandan Anglican layman, Fr. Laurenti Magesa is a Tanzanian Catholic priest and theologian, and Fr Aylward Shorter is a White Father missionary and anthropologist. This book was written as a report for the Catholic bishops of Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, and it was able to draw on a number of research reports referring to South, Central, and East Africa. It is good to know that all the research reports should eventually be available in print.

The three authors mention in passing Fr. Hastings' *Christian Marriage in Africa*, which I reviewed some years ago in *New Blackfriars*, as being a source of research hypotheses. Unfortunately this has the same weaknesses as *Christian Marriage in Africa*, that is, lack of detailed analysis of what is happening at the grass roots and an attempt to find liberal answers to conservative questions, plus a flaccidity of style and thought which is quite its own.

These are harsh words. What do I mean by them? First, to explain my phrase, "liberal answers to conservative questions", I would argue that much writing on Christian marriage in Africa starts off from the traditional view that a Christian who takes his religion in any way seriously gets married in church. Those who get married in some other way are therefore bad Christians, or, if we try and give liberal answers, victims of either appallingly inept pastoral care or rigid legalism on the part of their churches. It is at least possible to propose explanations which do not look for sinners or scapegoats. Thus, acceptance of baptism and rejection of church marriage may be seen as part of a common enough human strategy of dealing with change by going along with its broad direction, but protecting oneself against its impact in one's private life. Or if one wishes to be more theological, one might give consideration to the way the impact of Christianity on the first generation of African converts has so often been to give a much more dynamic quality to the traditional High God,⁸ rather than insight into the incarnational and sacramental aspects of Christianity. An understanding of the specifically Christian nature of marriage can emerge from a community's gradual growth in Christian insight; it

⁷ For an account of the discussion on this point at the Conference on the History of African Religion at Limuru, Kenya, in 1974, see *African Religious Research*, Vol 4, No 2.

⁸ I imagine that this is fairly general among converts from some form of "paganism" to Christianity, and may help to explain some features of the early Christian period, such as the rise of Arianism.

is doubtful if changing the rules or doing away with all the rules would make this an instant process.

If the authors had concentrated on encouraging their local contacts to report on how such a growth in insight is taking place, and how well it operates in particular social settings, their report would have been well worthwhile. As it is, we are given only a few glimpses of what people actually think and do, though some of these, such as the wedding of two South African graduates are extremely interesting. Nor is this compensated for by any notable advance in the theoretical problems of how to relate theology and social anthropology, either in some mutual unmasking in which anthropology would reveal the hidden cultural biases of theology, theology the veiled ethical preconceptions of social anthropology, or by concentrating on points of apparent common concern. Do anthropologists and theologians really mean the same thing by marriage,⁹ or, rather, assuming they have the same thing to talk about, have they mutually intelligible languages? This is one of the many instances where, to be practically useful, one has to be first exhaustingly theoretical. As the authors have not developed the much-needed theoretical framework, their book remains a bricolage of information and opinions, glued together by conventional progressive theology.

To be fair, the authors see some of the points which need to be made, that a church wedding does not necessarily equal a Christian marriage, that its performance or non-performance does not necessarily indicate the presence or absence of Christian faith, and that marriage changes in response to other changes in society. Thus, evidence is produced from Malawi, an area where the co-existence of matrilineal kinship systems with high rates of labour migration would seem very unfavourable to stable marriages, that church weddings have become widely accepted precisely because they seem to offer a greater measure of stability. There is also Fr. Boerakker's evidence from eastern Uganda, where church weddings benefited from the stability of customary marriage, until this began to weaken. The lack of a strong background of theory in the book means that it is difficult to assess evidence drawn from the local reports. Thus, we are told about Kitwe (Zambia) on pages 194-5 that marriages between church members tend to be stable, while church weddings are rare, because the relevance of church weddings to Christianity is not seen (all of which is quite possible), but on page 10 we have been told that fear of a legally indissoluble marriage discourages weddings in church. Combine this with the

⁹ For that matter it is not clear that anthropologists always mean the same thing by marriage. Levi-Strauss's basic argument in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* is that kinship systems are generated by marriages; Esther Goody in *The Context of Kinship* sees marriage as an aspect of the formation and dispersal of households. While Dr Goody's argument is tied to one society, the Gonja of Ghana, I suspect it is capable of much wider application.

traditional instability of marriage in largely matrilineal Zambia, it seems that the idea of Christian marriage has “got through”, but has not been accompanied by a general acceptance of church weddings, but one wishes the authors had not left readers to work this out for themselves.

The flaccidity of style is a reflection of this general lack of tautness of thought, and, one has to say, of scholarly accuracy. St Thomas Aquinas did not say that sexual pleasure in marriage is always sinful; what he did say was it is wrong for a man to use his wife as, to employ modern parlance, a mindless sexual object.¹⁰ The bishops of Chad have explicitly denied that they have a “marriage catechumenate” of the type recommended on page 40.¹¹ The Council of Trent did not anathematize the Greek Orthodox for allowing the re-marriage of Christians who had a living spouse, but it certainly did not approve of the practice.¹² The authors’ assertion to the contrary, anthropologists do not frequently remark that marriage is frequently more stable where polygamy flourishes.¹³ The significance of “woman marriage”, which surely merits more than the one sentence given to it, is rather that it enables a woman to obtain a kinship power and status similar to a man’s than that it enables a kinship line to be continued.

Received ideas, ancient and modern, are too readily accepted. Thus, we are told that school leavers go to the towns because of the “gleaming lights of the cinema halls and the wild sounds of the jazz bands”¹⁴ rather than from economic pressures. On the permanency of sacramental marriages, we are first told, on page 47, “For Jesus there was no circumstance that could justify breaking the bond forged by marriage, nor was there any circumstance that could justify married people forging a new bond”, and this, the standard Roman Catholic position, is repeated on page 52. By page 54, however, we learn that “remarriage in church is both a more logical, and a more theological, solution to the problem of the divorced and remarried”. The reason behind this evident inconsistency seems to be that the authors have mixed up two questions which are, logically and theologically, separate; the admission to communion of people in an irregular marriage situation from which they cannot, morally speaking, withdraw, and the pos-

¹⁰ For this see Fr. Fabian Parmisano’s extremely interesting articles on medieval attitudes to marriage in *New Blackfriars*, July and August, 1669.

¹¹ See *Afer* (The African Ecclesiastical Review), 1972, 3 p 273.

¹² Cf. the treatment of this point in E. Schillebeeckx *Marriage*, Vol II, 1965.

¹³ The case which the authors seem to have in mind is one where a limited number of prosperous men are polygamists and can use their wealth to keep on good terms with their affines. Even here, however, there is not a one-to-one relation between polygamy and marital stability. The really significant factor is the economic stratification of the society.

¹⁴ Page 125.

sibility of divorce, in the normal English sense of the word, for valid sacramental marriages.

The authors are again conventionally progressive in their support for birth-control programmes, but do see the likelihood of birth-rates remaining high until there are other means of support in old age than contributions from one's children. They do not discuss what is at least a strong possibility that sparsity, rather than density, of population is a significant cause of lack of development in several African countries.

Habent sua fata libri; this book may do good by its call for the development of Christian marriage guidance, and certainly the making of the local reports will have stimulated discussion. Yet if one compares the bland, imprecise praise of community in the last chapter (e.g. "the Christian churches in the second half of the twentieth century have experienced a discovery of human values") with J. V. Taylor's study of the Anglican church in central Uganda,¹⁵ or the books of such missionaries of the first half of the twentieth century as E. W. Smith or Diedrich Westermann, Christian thinking on African church problems has not really gained much deeper understanding over the past twenty years or so.

Having blamed Aylward Shorter, I now have the pleasant duty of praising him, and may perhaps do the same at some future date for his co-authors. Fr. Shorter's *Prayer in the Religious Traditions of Africa* is smaller than Professor Mbiti's *The Prayers of African Religion*, but is in a sense wider ranging, since it is not so concerned to stress the monotheistic element in African religion. There is also an interesting discussion of African patterns of prayer, and an attempt to establish a typology of African religions between the poles of strict deism and explicit theism. Fr. Shorter apart from making available these prayers drawn from many sources, does also open up for discussion a number of other questions, such as the relation between prayer and the other experiences of life. Perhaps in a second edition, Fr. Shorter will be able to add prayers from other sources, such as Theuws' collection of Luba prayers, or the Igbo prayer-poems in Egudu and Nwoga's *Poetic Heritage*.

Before turning to the story-tellers, it would be worthwhile to look at two recent books, both of which show the range of relations that may exist between a prophet and his, or, occasionally, her, society. Both *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa*, edited by T. O. Ranger and John Weller and *Regional Cults*, edited by Richard P. Werbner, have articles by Matthew Schoffeleers¹⁶ on the M'bona oracle of Malawi. While this cult goes back

¹⁵ *The Growth of the Church in Buganda* 1958. The best book I have ever read on missions.

¹⁶ The article in the Ranger and Weller volume is concerned with the shrine's interaction with the missions, that in *Regional Cults* with its position in the local social structure.

several hundred years, it is not seen as being concerned with the maintenance of primordial custom; rather, successive mediums have been the barometers of their society. This only makes the more significant the way the cult has gradually taken a Christian colouring. M'bona, the slain prophet after whom the cult was named, was now seen in the light of the gospel accounts of Christ, and was spoken of as "the black Jesus". Yet, if contemporary Malawi traditional religion has been deeply influenced by Christianity, Malawian Christianity, as Schoffeleers points out, has also been shaped by traditional myth and symbol.

From another angle, W. M. J. van Binsbergen shows how, in an area of Zambia characterised by a variety of healing cults, once a cult attains more than purely local significance, ideological and organizational pressures begin to push the cult into assuming the appearance of a Christian church. Not all traditional cults, of course, are under such heavy pressure from Christianity. If, as Richard P. Werbner shows in his study of the Mwali or Mwari oracles of Zimbabwe, Galani, the daughter of an important oracle priest, declared herself a Christian and a church leader, this reflected the opposition she had faced in her bid to acquire her father's position. Like the M'bona oracle, the Mwali oracles seek consensus. Werbner rejects the interpretation which sees these oracles as master-minding the great rising of 1896-7,¹⁷ but calls our attention to the resistance to the inroads of the cash economy which the oracles have encouraged under white rule.

Kingsley Garbett's study of the Korekore oracles is mainly concerned with the means by which the oracles of greater repute check and validate new mediums, and preserve a certain degree of hierarchical order among oracles. Here, the oracles were not able to stay out of all involvement in the guerilla war, one medium being sentenced to twenty year's imprisonment for allegedly aiding the guerillas. How do Zimbabwean Christians see all this? An Anglican priest, Salathiel Madziyire, gives in *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa* a shrewd account of various types of spirit possession, expressing respect for some kinds of traditional medium, seeing others as ambiguous and uncertain, and perceiving in the multiplicity of teen-age mediums a mixture of charlatanism and the sense of generalised and incomprehensible crisis that emanates from the political situation. It would seem fair to say that for the mass of the Zimbabwean people not only their religious but their political ideas show a variety of blends of Christian and traditional imagery. It is not enough to say that this is the result of the blocking of channels of political choice and communication; rather, political consciousness and imagery draw on religious

¹⁷ This is the crucial question of Zimbabwean historiography, since on it depends the interpretation of the origin of Zimbabwean nationalism, either as the resurfacing of a previously existing moral community, or as primarily a reaction to colonisation.

belief and practice for their metaphors, or at least for many of them, and the survival of the specific religious tradition helps to keep the transposed metaphors alive and relevant. I do not think this only happens in Zimbabwe; it is perhaps an obscure realisation of its quasi-universality, and not simply an unscrupulous quest for votes that has led the Euro-Communists to angle for Christian support. But let us keep to Africa and move on to the story-tellers.

Wole Soyinka, poet, playwright, novelist, and now literary critic, is a Nigerian and, ethnically, a Yoruba, heir therefore to perhaps the most complex of the non-Muslim cultures of Africa. His outspoken courage has gained him a wide hearing among thoughtful young people in Nigeria, where the publication of his *Myth, Literature and the African World* was an important literary event. It must be said that despite the vitality, often brilliance, of the style, which makes one feel that something very important is being said, and that perhaps even more important things are just beneath the surface of the text, it is a difficult book even for those who have some understanding of the Nigerian, or general African scene. Let me be rash enough to attempt the interpreter's role.

Professor Soyinka seems to be saying two very different things in this book. The first is that African literature requires the emergence of an African secular consciousness which cannot be Christian or Marxist or Muslim, and will reject also the *négritude* of Sartre and Senghor; Soyinka claims, in examining the work of a number of authors that such a consciousness as he desiderates is actually coming into being. The second line of argument is a completely different one, drawn explicitly from Nietzsche, and with surely some unconscious influence from D. H. Lawrence, that there is need for a return to the gods of the earth, and to reorient drama to a ritual context. Both arguments involve a rejection of Christianity, the first as an alienated form of consciousness for Africa, since it has not emerged from within the historical experience of the continent, the second as being, like Buddhism, a celestial religion, which, unlike African religion, which is terrestrial and life-affirming, turns its back on the richness of human life.

I do not honestly feel that Wole Soyinka has really synthesised the two arguments. What he is perhaps aiming at is some claim that because of the special characteristics of African religion, notably a fundamental man-centredness (a quality which Fr. Nyamiti recognised, albeit only to condemn it), and the way the individual and society, humanity and cosmos, are seen as interacting entities, rather than as antagonistic contradictories, as well as its being rooted in the specifically African experience of history, it can be a source of literary, and general human, creativity. If this is more or less what he means, I certainly would not wish to reject it out of hand. Honesty demands some very serious qualifications though.

First, the assertion that tragedy emerges from religious ritual,

is not self-proving, though it is an excellent research hypothesis. While Wole Soyinka takes the cases of the three Yoruba gods, Obatala, Ogun, and Sango to prove his point, what he says about the ritual dramas in their honour and their general position in the complex of Yoruba belief is extremely limited and vague. He becomes much more precise when he discusses the work of writers who have used these myths, but then the transition from ritual to literature has already taken place. He may be speaking only as literary critic, but, if so, he should not have made such sweeping claims for the meaning of the gods in the cultivation of valid life-attitudes. While Wole Soyinka severely criticises Bolaji Idowu for stressing the monotheistic elements in Yoruba traditional religion, he does not see that he is himself falling into the opposite trap of classifying Yoruba religion as polytheistic. A theologian, Adeolu Adegbola, has very cogently argued that Yoruba mythology is fluid and subject to sharp local variations, and the cults of the gods are essentially marginal to the central set of Yoruba rites, the divinatory system of *Ifa*.¹⁸ In which case, Wole Soyinka is guilty of the same fault that he so berates in the Marxists and negritudists selecting a set of ideas from Europe and arbitrarily imposing them on African reality.

Then, Wole Soyinka's own attitude to Christianity is much more ambivalent than appears at first. Several pages of the book are dedicated to discussing the literary expression of reconciliation. Conton's *The African* is condemned for "a rather obvious piece of propaganda for Christian ideology"; after a rather milder criticism of Lewis Nkosi's *Rhythms of Violence*, he assures us that "My response to these samples of the literature of reconciliation must not be taken to mean a cynical approach to the principle itself", and Soyinka then commends two other South African writers, Richard Rive and Dennis Brutus, who have successfully tackled such themes.

Wole Soyinka's novel, *Season of Anomie*, gives much more clear evidence of the significance that the Christianity he has repudiated still has for him. The story deals, under a transparent disguise, with the inter-ethnic violence that marked the Nigeria of 1966. Capitalism, corruption, and violence are all seen as different aspects of the established disorder. What is interesting is the alternatives, of which there are four, bohemian mockery of society, amusingly portrayed in the lighter, earlier chapters, traditional ritual, with exuberantly detailed animal sacrifices, proletarian solidarity, which hardly gets more than a hopeful mention or two, and Aladura Christianity.¹⁹ It is among the Aladura church mem-

¹⁸ See *New Blackfriars* May 1978. It is rather difficult to give a Nietzschean interpretation to a religion centring on standardised techniques of decision-making. Some Yoruba cults had "Dionysiac" aspects, for instance, the spirit-possession experienced by the priests of Sango.

¹⁹ "Aladura" refers to a group of indigenous Nigerian churches, characterised by faith-healing and speaking in tongues.

bers that the survivors of the massacres find pity and shelter, and the faith and love which enable people to surmount ethnic antagonism is described with respectful empathy. Comparing *Season of Anomie* to some, at least, of the "African theology" literature, one remembers the dictum of Kierkegaard that the man who explicitly rejects Christianity may yet be a much more reliable guide to it than are its avowed defenders.

Adrian Roscoe's *Uhuru's Fire* (Uhuru being the Swahili word for freedom) has a title which points to two of the themes discussed in this study of East, Central and South African literature in English, the relation of literature to "political culture", and the relation between written English and a spoken background of other languages. It has to be said that neither theme is developed with much rigour or thoroughness, but the book itself is necessary reading for anybody interested in English-language literature in Africa, and many of the points he makes in passing will surely point students on to further research.

The most interesting writers considered by Dr Roscoe are a cluster of writers associated with Nairobi, notably the poets Okot p'Bitek and Taban Lo Liyongo, and the novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o. None of them were mentioned by Professor Soyinka, which is a bit odd, since Okot p'Bitek, also an avowed opponent of Christianity, is like Soyinka concerned to forge a genuinely African secular consciousness, and the other two are also trying to develop a positive critique of society which will be rooted in specific cultural experiences, in a way which some of the French-language writers whom Soyinka quotes surely fail to do.²⁰ Okot p'Bitek has written a series of "Songs", long poems with a narrative form, but whose mood is one of satirical reflection. Adrian Roscoe stresses their innovatory and public aspects, but curiously seems to miss the obvious English Literature parallels.²¹ While he throws light on p'Bitek's writings in Luo, a novel, *Lak Tar*, and a Luo version of one of the Songs, he does not mention his work as an anthropologist and his harsh criticism of the readiness of anthropologists and theologians to hellenize African religions.²² Dr Roscoe does mention Taban Lo Liyong's field work, but not the versified anthropology of *Eating Chiefs*. If he had done, it might have balanced the impression given here that Taban Lo Liyong leans heavily to innovation as against tradition; in fact, like almost all the African writers who are any good, Lo Liyong is extremely ambiguous in his attitudes to both modernisation and tradition.

²⁰ Thus, Sembene Ousmane is surely influenced by the French tradition that goes back to *Germinal*, and Mongo Beti reflects an equally French anti-clericalism.

²¹ Dryden, Pope, the non-romantic Byron, and the earlier Auden.

²² *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, East African Publishing House, 1972 is forceful, though largely negative. *The Religion of the Central Luo* is more positive.

Adrian Roscoe is good on Ngugu wa Thiongo, noting both his firm grip on the realities of social relations and his concern with guilt and expiation, which is related to his Presbyterian upbringing. Yet literature by and about the Kikuyu, like literature by and about the Igbo, suggests that even traditional religion and society generated quite considerable burdens of guilt. There is also mention of the uproar that led to the transformation of the Department of English in Nairobi University into the Department of Literature, but more details on what the actual consequences have been would have been welcome.

None of the white South African writers are considered, nor, for that matter, the senior Cape Coloured writer, Peter Abrahams, but there is a detailed and valuable discussion of two of the Coloured writers, the poet, Dennis Brutus, and the prose writer, Alex La Guma. For these writers the common African question, tradition and/or/versus modernity, can have no meaning. Adrian Roscoe notes that their sensibility is closer to that of black American writers, which seems true enough, but scarcely sets us much further forward on understanding the way the variety of social relations and speech patterns available in South Africa shaped these visions of the world. Oppression in itself is sterile.

Is this article merely a stringing together of book reviews, or does some common pattern emerge? What emerges, I would like to think, is the surprising success that the Christian mission and the contemporary Christian churches have had in creating, or contributing to, awarenesses and identities valid for people who are not in any strict sense practising Christians. Christian congregations in Africa are often as dull and frustrating as those in any other part of the world, but they now exist within societies whose social imaginations now draw upon Christian story and symbol, just as all manner of African attitudes and perceptions continue, as a matter of course, to function within the Christian congregations. And both the Christian presence in the world, and the human presence in the church, are only noticed when they do what both prophet and story-teller strive to do; namely, to surprise.

Mature responsible person with special qualities required to lead small team of caring residential workers in Rehabilitation Hostel in East London.

Please write for further details to:

The Secretary
Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association
21a, Kingsland High Street
Dalston, LONDON E8