

RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR MESSIANISM IN AFRICA

by Max Assimeng*

Introduction

The sociological study of messianic ideas and redemptive preachings, with expectations of a deliverer by people claiming to be an oppressed group, which seemed at the outset as a marginal field of academic concern, has now attracted serious sociological and anthropological studies.¹ This change of attitude is probably due to the realization, by students of society, that fringe social phenomena can generate, or become, unanticipated consequences when societies undergo social change. The pursuit of messianism, therefore, like the spotting of flying saucers, has been seen to be of more than curiosity interest, owing to the significant role of "thresholds" in social history. Because of the importance of leadership in social movements, many students of social change believe, as does Joseph J. Spengler, that "the state of a people's politico-economic development, together with its rate and direction, depends largely upon what is in the minds of its members, and above all, upon the content of the minds of its elites, which reflects in part, as do civilizations, the conceptions men form of the universe".²

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1. See, for instance, B.R. Wilson, "Millennialism in Comparative Perspective", Comparative Studies in Society and History, vi, 1, October 1963, pp.93-114; R.J.Z. Werblowsky, "Messianism in Primitive Societies", Listener (London) 20 October 1960, pp.684-686; A.F. Chamberlain, "New Religions Among the North American Indians, etc." Journal of Religious Psychology, vi, 1, January 1913, pp.1-49.
2. Joseph J. Spengler, "Theory, Ideology, Non-Economic Values, and Politico-Economic Development", in Ralph Braibanti and Joseph J. Spengler, (eds) Tradition, Values, and Socio-Economic Development (Durham, 1961) pp.4-5.

Messianism, in this paper, is deemed to imply a collective and conscious expectation, by a group of people, of a hero or a historical epoch which promises an impending socio-cultural dispensation or ushers in a new and golden age.³ Pursuers of messianism believe that the millennial age will differ from the existing social structure which is conceived as characterized by hardship, injustice, and oppression. Although messianism as a concept is usually associated with Judaeo-Christian doctrines of origin and eschatology, and is derived from the notion of time as a lineal process starting from somewhere and going to somewhere, it has seemed possible to treat it as a sociological phenomenon which has had, and continues to have, widespread occurrence and fascination in history.⁴ Consequently, our interest is not on religious prophetism alone, but also on certain secular movements in African history which have envisioned a situation of social regeneration with compensatory potential for the alteration

3. Literature on messianism is considerable. See, for instance, R.H. Charles, Eschatology, Hebrew, Jewish and Christian. (London, 1899); Abbe H. Silver, A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel from the first through the seventeenth centuries. (N.Y., 1927); Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium. (N.Y., 1961); Yonina Talmon, "Millennarism" in International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Vol.10, Macmillan, 1968) pp.349-362. For Islamic religion, see D.S. Margoliouth, "On Mahdis and Mahdism", Proceedings of the British Academy, 1915-1916, pp.213-233.
4. The introduction of the notion of history into African traditional thought has been crucial to the development of messianic movements on the African continent. As V. Magg points out, "In the ahistorical epoch the myth of creation with its rituals helps to preserve the universe. This concept of the world knows no eschatology but only a cyclology". Quoted in Marie L. Martin, "The Church facing Prophetic and Messianic movements", Ministry (Moriija) ii, 2, January 1963, p.55.

of social statuses and roles. Far from messianism being considered exclusively as a flight from reality, therefore, it is sought in this paper to demonstrate the positive role of messianic movements as an attempt to seek modifications in certain types of social reality.

It is difficult to make a very neat distinction between messianisms which are distinctly religious, and those which should be seen as specifically secular. In this difficulty the African metaphysical foundation of the necessary relation of the natural and supernatural worlds makes it more complex. But in this problem sociologists need only to remind themselves that the man who gave a name and an inspiration to their discipline thought that he had been endowed with a divine task, in strict apocalyptic fashion, "to liberate mankind from the fetters of erroneous thinking and to lead his fellow men into the path of true knowledge".⁵ Even in his moments of partial mental stability, Auguste Comte, apparently assuming the self-appointed role of the father of positivism, never abandoned the vision that through him as a divine medium, a better social dispensation would emerge to replace the then status quo in which he, together with other intellectual "prophets of Paris", had lived a life of philosophical negation. Thus, throughout the centuries, many people have visualized various social situations, either revolutionary or reactionary, which have mirrored some ideals they have of society. Although the medium of social regeneration would distinguish religious messianism from a secular one, both arise from the same source: a desire to escape disillusionment and frustration, and, consequently, obsession with apocalyptic fantasies such as those which convinced Mahatma Gandhi, for instance, to plan the industrialization of India on lines of cottage factories. Africa, too, has had both forms of messianism, and it is possible, therefore, to specify some of the social and cultural circumstances, and probable psychological foundations, which gave rise to salvationist ideas and expectations.

5. Rene Fulop-Miller, Leaders, Dreamers, and Rebels (London, 1935), p.223. Cf. Frank E. Manuel, The Prophets of Paris (Cambridge, Mass.: 1962).

It is contended that messianic movements emerge when situations of structural conduciveness and strain combine in particular ways, and that this is irrespective of the area or period of occurrence. Far from messianism being considered exclusively as a response to oppression or a "vehicle for growing opposition to white domination",⁶ it is hypothesized that some tensions inherent in the imperative of rapid social modernization can generate various wish-fulfillments, one of which may adopt messianic ideologies.

Studies of religious and secular messianism in Africa, could also afford an opportunity to see how this limited range of research problem in social change might fit certain generalized sociological theories on social structure, cultural systems, and role acting personalities; and whether, in view of the African material, the explanations serve as a useful guide to further research in this type of social process. It is in this respect that the paper raises, too, the question of the extent to which the concept could be given a sharper logical clarity and refinement, so that it would be more fruitfully used in systematic research on certain types of collective movements. Obviously the usefulness of a scientific concept is evaluated largely by the ease and precision with which it enables a researcher to assemble and analyse a certain mass of data.

Dimensions of social structures

It is suggested that for a social system to persist and change in a predictable manner, there should be a fair amount of order and coherence in the system. Here one is in agreement with Godfrey and Monica Wilson who made this the core of their analytical system in

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6. This interpretation is particularly characteristic of writers of Marxian persuasion. See, for instance, Peter M. Worsley, "Millennarian Movements in Melanesia", Rhodes-Livingstone Journal (Lusaka), xxi, March 1957, pp.18-31. See also his The Trumpet Shall Sound (London, 1957).

their study of social change.⁷ The relational category in social systems which is irrespective of the actual occupants of particular positions in the system of social arrangements, is located as social roles. These roles Talcott Parsons and other sociologists of the structural-functional model regard as the building blocks of social systems or the action frame of reference. This view treats biological systems as ultimately the bearers of the unit called "action", but assumes that the orientational structure of social action makes it possible to analyse social action while regarding genetic factors and processes as given, and while recognizing the capability of the individual to creatively modify the systems of social relations.⁸ In this respect social change could, then, be regarded as an intelligible process in which is traceable "significant alterations in the structure and functioning of determinate social systems".⁹

One of the usual criticisms against the generality of a value system in the social structure is that it supposedly assumes the existence of universal consensus on prevailing values and institutional arrangements. Thus Ralf Dahrendorf, a leading social conflict theorist, regards the very conception of "social system" as a utopia because, to him, a system of this kind sounds immobile, is isolated in time and space, and promises the absence of conflicts and disruptive processes.¹⁰ The validity of such

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7. Godfrey Wilson and Monica Wilson, An Analysis of Social Change (Cambridge, 1945).
 8. Talcott Parsons analyses this more elaborately in The Social System (Glencoe, III: 1951).
 9. Alvin Boskoff, "Social Change: Major Problems in the Emergence of Theoretical and Research Foci", in Howard Becker and Alvin Boskoff, (eds) Modern Sociological Theory in Continuity and Change (N.Y., 1957) p.231.
 10. Ralf Dahrendorf, "Out of Utopia: Toward a Reorientation of Sociological analysis". American Journal of Sociology, lxiv, 2, September 1958, pp.115-127. See also David Lockwood, "Some Remarks on 'The Social System'", British Journal of Sociology, vii, 1956, pp.134-146.

criticisms becomes not wholly tenable, however, because there is already implicit in differential patterns of socialization the assumption that different peoples will be sensitive to this general pattern of the cultural goal differently.¹¹ This differential sensitivity to the value patterns of the society is very crucial; it helps our understanding of the varying degrees of sensitivity to threats and strains in the social system. For the purposes of this essay, it also enables one to appreciate the selective nature of participation in collective movements, and the relationship of this selectivity to the pattern of status placements in the society as a whole. This seems to be implicit in Wilbert E. Moore's notion of flexibilities in a social system, especially his stress on "uncertainties in socialization", and "role ranges and deviations".¹² African societies, too, have certain forms of cultural ideologies, or more or less orderly and comprehensible pictures of the universe, however unarticulated these may have been in the traditional social setting. These cultural ideologies, or myths, indicate the life history of these societies, their place in the divine scheme of things, and the direction of the societies in time.

A social system requires more than a centralized cultural goal system. It also prescribes ways for achieving these goals in the form of normative patterns. No complete "goodness of fit" exists between the cultural goals and their institutionalized norms, however.

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11. Theorists of social equilibrium and integration are themselves not unaware of this differential sensitivity to the general value system. See, for instance, Edward Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties: Some Particular Observations on the Relationship of Sociological Research and Theory", British Journal of Sociology, viii, June 1957, pp.130-145.
 12. Wilbert E. Moore, "A Reconsideration of Theories of Social Change", American Sociological Review, xxv, 6, December 1960, p.818.

Indeed, one of Robert Merton's major contributions to sociological theory is his analysis of the anomic consequences of this lack of perfect harmony between these two subsystems of society.¹³ What appears to be without doubt, however, is that conformity of some kind is essential for the system to be a going concern at all. Otherwise one encounters a situation of general role and norm indeterminacy, which is the very antithesis of a social 'system'. This problem has occupied the attention of students of social phenomena since Hobbes underpinned the dilemma of order in human relationships.¹⁴

Messianism and Social Change

Students of mass movements have focused attention recently on some of the underlying properties which have given rise, in one way or the other, to the desire to effect basic institutional changes in society. The concept of strain, or exigency, has become fairly utilized in this endeavour. This approach begins with the assumption that sources of social change can be both external and internal to the structure of the society. For the individual, this exigency is regarded as "consciously or unconsciously desired or expected state of affairs, and

13. Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (N.Y., 1957), especially chapters iv and v on "Social Structure and Anomie".

14. The centrality of "order" as a theme in sociological analysis of social systems, has been emphasized in Edward A. Tiryakian, "Structural Sociology", unpublished manuscript. The present writer acknowledges his indebtedness to Professor Tiryakian for kindly making it possible for him to see this manuscript.

an actual situation".¹⁵ This experience is followed by a desire to redefine the situation as interpreted by individuals in a manner which results in variant forms of social action. Our problem, therefore, revolves principally around the specific tensions which motivated certain groups in Africa to seek adaptive mechanisms to their strains, and in the way they did.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, accounts have been given by missionaries, historians, and anthropologists, of various spontaneous collective movements in Africa. These movements have generally been animated by a desire to seek modifications, through spiritual agencies, in the social structure as they have seen it. Two types have been clearly discernible: there has been the nativistic type, which has sought a return to earlier modes of life which promised social security, happiness, and stability.¹⁶ A movement of this nature usually emerged as the group began to experience some cultural stress as a result of contact of two or more different cultural systems. The loss of tribal land has been a significant predisposing factor in the origin

15. G.K. Zollschan and Robert Perrucci, "Social Stability and Social Process: An Initial Presentation of Relevant Categories", in G.K. Zollschan and Walter Hirsch, (eds) Explorations in Social Change (London, 1964), p.89. A similar approach is adopted in Howard Becker, "Normative Reactions to Normlessness", American Sociological Review, xxv, 6, December 1960, pp.803-810; David F. Aberle, "The Prophet Dance and Reactions to White Contact", Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, xv, 1, 1959, pp.74-83.
16. An attempt at a theoretical specification of the personality syndrome of participants of such collective movements, is made in Max Assimeng, "Status Anxiety and Cultural Revival: Pursuit of the Good Old Days", Ghana Journal of Sociology, v, 1, February 1969, pp.8-14.

of some of these movements.¹⁷ The goal in such a movement has been to restore to its followers a stable orientation, sense of satisfaction and relief, and abundant meaningfulness of life.

In South Africa, one of the first recorded movements which advocated the reversal of social roles by a return to the past, centered around a Xhosa, called Mukana or Nxele, during the fifth Kaffir war of 1818-1819. Mukana expounded the notion of an African God, Dalidipu, who was claimed to be stronger than the white man's God. The leader taught that the African God would punish the white God and all Christians, and that he, the leader, was the instrument of the native God to destroy all Europeans, and to bring back to life all Africans who had died or been killed in the wars with the Europeans. This teaching very easily obtained followers, but the early death of the leader led to the disintegration of the movement.

Millennial fantasies did not cease in South Africa, however. On one morning of May 1856, a sixteen-year-old girl of the same tribe, called Nongqause, claimed to have been spoken to by the spirits of the dead while on her way to draw water from a spring. These spirits allegedly described themselves as the "eternal enemies of the white man", and announced themselves as having come from the battlefield beyond the sea to aid the land. This form of encounter was accompanied by commands for specific social actions and rituals which were to help the actualization of the goal of the people. "The spirits had given orders that all cattle were to be killed and eaten and no one was to cultivate the land. Then, on a certain day,

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17. For some of the responses to land alienation among the Kikuyus of Kenya, see Annette Rosenstiel, "An Anthropological Approach to the Mau Mau Problem", Political Science Quarterly, lxviii, 3, September 1953, pp.419-432; C.G. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, The Myth of "Mau Mau": Nationalism in Kenya (N.Y., 1966); J.C. Carothers, The Psychology of Mau Mau (Nairobi, 1954). On general African responses, see Daniel Thwaite, The Seething African Pot, a study of Black Nationalism 1882-1935 (London, 1936).

millions of fat cattle would spring out of the earth and great fields of corn would appear ready for eating. At the same time the sky would fall and crush the white people and with them all the blacks who had not obeyed the commands of the spirits".¹⁸

Proto-political cultism, as the foregoing movements have often been characterized, has not been confined to South Africa, although that country seems to have become, as a fertile "soil", the principal welter of such movements.¹⁹ In that country, many of the movements still exist, and now wait confidently for the occasion when they would die and go to the Heavenly Jerusalem to occupy senior positions. Members of such movements believe that the reversal of social roles would be their compensation for their present deprivation in the secular world; thus, when white men die and go to seek sympathy from the Creator, their response from Him will be, according to the cultists: "No! Nobody can rule twice!"²⁰ Teachings such as the foregoing, or the expectation of a new coinage with a black king on one side and a white man with a pick axe on the other, or indeed the belief that on the inauguration of the tribal millennium blacks and whites shall eat from the same plate have been seen to be specifically related to the white

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18. On the Mukana and the Nongqause episodes, I have relied mainly on Edward Roux, Time Longer Than Rope. (London, 1948), passim. For further information on the Nongqause story, see Sanni Metelerkamp, "The Prophetess: A Tale of Cattle Slaying 1857", African Observer (Bulawayo), iii, 2, June 1935, pp.65-73.
19. Perhaps the best account of South Africa's religious independentism is still B.G.M. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets in South Africa (London, 1961). See also G.C. Oosthuizen, "Causes of Religious Independentism in Africa", Fort Hare Papers, iv, 2, June 1968, pp.13-30.
20. Quoted in R.G. Lienhardt, "Some African Christians", Blackfriars, xxxiii, 382, January 1952, pp.14-21.

settler social structure in South and Central Africa. Thus, Malawi experienced a short-lived millennial teaching in 1907 when a certain Chikunda prophetsess, called Chanjiri, predicted that by the end of that year "all Europeans would have to leave the country and that no tax be paid".²¹

Nativistic ideologies, in a traditional society which has come into active contact with European civilization, are not likely to be able to endure for long as a value-orientation for social action. Apart from the power of the superior culture group to quell any tendency towards insurrection in pursuit of nativistic ideas, the inroads of European social and cultural ways of life into the African background had become irreversible. Also, the association of western culture with what David Livingstone called the "cornucopia of western goods" was an inducement enough for the African to begin to appreciate some aspects of the foreign elements, and to select those which had instrumental significance in terms of man's achievement of a proper and harmonious relationship with his environment. Although people differ in their estimations of the results and benefits of social change and culture contact, it is soon realized that the cost of hanging on to ancient ways of life is too high, especially when external ideologies have begun to restructure the cognitive systems of native peoples. Students of acculturative process recognize that what happens in culture contact is a form of "cultural reinterpretation" - others call this "re-orientation" or "reconstitution" - so that, while the receiving culture retains the satisfactions derived from earlier ways of life, it in fact profits from the

21. See G. Shepperson and T. Price, Independent African (Edinburgh, 1958), p.156. It was during this same period that the outbreak of the African watch Tower movement occurred in Malawi, with a decidedly anti-tax and anti-white teaching. The latter episode has been described in R.D. McMinn, "The First Wave of Ethiopianism in Central Africa", Livingstonia News (Malawi) ii, 4, August 1909, pp.56-59.

adoption of new cultural forms which seem to be of lasting utility.²²

The more numerous forms of value-oriented collective movement have, therefore, been of the syncretistic type, although these, too, have initially sought a route to the paradise through a super-empirical medium. Examples of these are the African Watch Tower movement and Kimbanguism in Central Africa, the various Aladura praying sects in West Africa, and the many African-led religious movements in South Africa. These movements, with their multi-purpose activities, have adopted European modes of social organization and arrangements, although still operating principally with traditional African religious concepts and expectations. The types of oppression from which salvation has been sought, and the nature of competence conceived of supernatural powers, have also varied. While witchcraft fears, need for good health and long life, have predominated in the *raison d'etre* of religious movements in West Africa, in Central and South Africa witchcraft fears have been less in number, although those few movements of purely witch-hunting kinds, such as the Ba Muchapi itinerant witchfinders of the 1930s and the Lumpa sect of Alice Lenshina, and the Tomo Nyirenda thaumatur-

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22. For some comments on acculturation, see M.J. Herskovits, "The Role of Culture-Pattern in the African Acculturative Experience", Presence Africaine, vi-vii, 34-34, 1961, pp.7-16, and his Acculturation, the Study of Culture Contact (N.Y., 1938). See also Bruce P. Dohrenwend and Robert J. Smith, "Toward a Theory of Acculturation", Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, xviii, 1, Spring 1962, pp.30-39; A.P. Elkin, "The Reaction of Primitive Races to the White Man's Culture, A Study of Culture Contact", Hibbert Journal, xxxv, 4, July 1937, pp.537-545; David P. Ausubel, "The Maori: A Study of Resistive Acculturation", Social Forces, xxxix, 3, March 1961, pp.218-227; E.C. Freeman, "Two Types of Cultural Response to External Pressures Among the Florida Seminoles", Anthropological Quarterly, xxxviii, 2, April 1965, pp.55-61.

gical use of the Watch Tower teaching,²³ have attracted large following. But it will be useless to recount the places and number of all messianic movements which have been encountered throughout Africa. As the history of Mahdism in the Sudan, and that of Idara Contorfil in Sierra Leone, indicates, these movements have not been confined to areas of Christian influence alone. Participants in the Maji Maji rebellion of German Tanganyika in the beginning of this century, for instance, were made to believe that magical rites and ancestral blessings could equip rebels in their attempts to resolve cultural conflicts and crises.²⁴

Secular messianism

Secular messiahs are, however, not easy to locate in Africa. The distinction between religious and secular forms of collective movements could be very tenuous, especially when one considered the differential conceptions of the aims of social movements by their participants. Although Marcus Garvey's programme of the repatriation of Afro-Americans to the African continent could be regarded as a form of secular messianism, it is not easy to disentangle the religious and mythical foundations of this

23. The present author has studied the various syncretistic tendencies and variations in the Watch Tower movement in central Africa, in A Sociological Analysis of the impact and consequences of some Christian sects in selected African countries (Unpublished D.Phil. Thesis, Oxford University, 1968). See also Jacques E. Gerard Les Fondements Syncretiques du Kitawala (Bruxelles: 1969); Robert Kaufmann, Millenarisme et Acculturation (Bruxelles, 1964).
24. Cf. R.M. Bell, "The Maji Maji Rebellion in the Liwale District", Tanganyika Notes and Records, No.28, January 1950, pp.38-57.

"Africa for Africans" programme.²⁵ Thus, one clue to the study of messianic teachings would be the survey of the ideologies of various social and political movements in Africa. Our definition of secular messianism would have to be, ideal-typically, essentially Marxian, as contrasted to the earlier movements we have alluded to which could then be regarded as Mosaic. Secular messianism is deemed, in this paper, to refer to those social movements in which, as a result of a particular dream of a perfect future, groups of people have been mobilized to work for the building of new foundations of society.

When people in Ghana followed the proceedings of the inauguration of the Volta River hydro-electric scheme at Akosombo in the Volta Region in January 1966, they probably had in mind the likely industrialization potential which the scheme would render towards the economic development of the country. Students of the relationship between ideas and social action, on the other hand, saw in this scheme an example of the behavioural implications of certain categories of thought. The scheme showed, in particular, the social role of dreamers in history, or what Dorothy Emmet calls "the social anthropology of vocation".²⁶ Our concern is on the salvationism inherent in the message of Kwame Nkrumah, who was then the political

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25. Marcus Garveyism is discussed in Ira De A Reid, "Negro Movements and Messiahs 1900-1949" Phylon, x, 4, 1949, pp.362-369; William Pickens, "The Emperor of Africa, the Psychology of Garveyism", Forum, lxx, 2, August 1923, pp.1790-99; Edmund E. Cronon, Black Moses, the story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (Madison, 1955).
26. Dorothy Emmet, "Prophets and their Societies", Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, lxxxvi, January-June 1956, pp.13-23.

leader of Ghana, and on the social and psychological context which gave receptivity to his teaching. No attempt at an analysis of the logical consistency or otherwise of his teaching is envisaged in this essay. Our assumption is that the possibility that a particular form of fantasy would be incorporated in the general value system of a particular collective movement would depend less on the logical consistency or intrinsic value of the idea, than on the extent to which the idea appeals to the interests, needs and predicaments of certain segments of a population.

Ghana's contact with the outside world dates far back, and increased from the fifteenth century when Portuguese traders and other commercial adventurers made attempts to seek agreements with some coastal chiefs. Political and mercantile heroes of one European country or another penetrated further into the country until various rivalries ended with the signing of the bond between the British government and a confederacy of Fanti (central Ghana) chiefs who thus placed themselves under British judicial and military protection. On successive occasions until well into the twentieth century, the Ashanti, the Northern Territories (now known for administrative purposes as the Northern and the Upper Regions) and the British Mandated Togoland were also to come under British colonial administration.²⁷

Meanwhile, Christian missionaries of various denominations and sects had laboured in the country, and had pioneered the provision of services in the fields of health and education. With these developments, protest movements of various kinds arose in the country. Slowly but progressively, the missionary, and, later, government schools produced at a remarkable rate a considerable number of elementary school pupils who did not have the opportunity to obtain higher education, but whose semi-

27. For brief but concise account of these social and political developments, see J.D. Fage, Ghana, A Historical Interpretation (Madison, 1959).

education did not equip them well for respectable jobs.²⁸ These people poured into the towns in a rural-urban migration motivated mainly by the need for job and novelty, as well as escape from traditional forms of social control and authority.

The world economic depression of the early 1930s stimulated various economic difficulties and employment problems, augmented later by the plight of ex-servicemen whose post-discharge conditions of life were far from enviable. Articulation of their grievances were sharpened by the establishment of nationalist newspapers by radical (mostly) foreign residents of the country, such as Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria and Wallace-Johnson of Sierra Leone. But of particular significance for our discussion is the period between 1947 and soon after, when the United Gold Coast Convention was founded, and when Kwame Nkrumah was called to become the general secretary of this political party.

In June 1949, after disagreeing with his colleagues on problems of party policy and strategy in the nationalist movement, Nkrumah resigned from the United Gold Coast Convention and founded the Convention Peoples' Party. He had apparently become aware of the size of the population which had become alienated from the chiefly, traditionalist, elitist leadership of the country. It was to this huge stratum of the population that he announced a dream in which, across a certain parapet he had seen the mother of Ghana, with her body bathed in the blood and wounds of her sons and daughters who had fought to save her from colonial domination. In the dream he claimed to have heard "the mortals resound the echo and the rejoinder, Seek ye first the political kingdom and all things shall be added unto it". It is hardly worth recounting the considerable imagination which was fired by this vision. From then on he declared "positive action" (non co-operation with governmental authorities), and was subsequently arrested and imprisoned.

28. Cf. Philip Foster, Education and Social Change in Ghana (London, 1965).

When precisely Nkrumah became a messiah to his followers is not quite clear, although many stories about him since the dream pointed to the wonders he was said to be able to perform. It was believed that from the prisons he could get in touch with his political colleagues outside, through some inexplicable medium. Whenever European colonial officials wished to kill him, it was said he could change into a bird, a cat, or some other species when under apprehension. Like Joseph Kasavubu in the early history of Congolese (Kinshasa) nationalism, there were photographs in the country which showed an angel with Nkrumah, and at times indicating Jesus handing over power to him. The fact that from the prisons Nkrumah could win elections and be released immediately to form a government, increased the peoples' wonderment of their leader, and of his miraculous nature.

Nkrumah became what might be termed a popular leader, and the various promises he gave to the people, including the work on the gigantic Volta River Project which was claimed to be able to usher in the earthly millennium, were accepted and believed by the majority of the Ghanaian population. The theme of the present essay is principally this: in contrast to the South and Central African messianic movements we have mentioned, Nkrumah seems to have believed that the paradise would have to be brought about by technological, rather than expressional, means. The weakening and ultimate disintegration of the colonial-chiefly-elitist triumvirate in the country's political structure - G.S. Pettee calls this process "a perfect somersault in society"²⁹ - gave the Ghanaian leader an even greater hold on the organizational methods necessary for his work. As in other social expectations of a millennium, some of the participants in Ghana appear to be still impatient with the delay in the inauguration of the economic and social "second coming". It is significant that the first statement made on Radio Ghana by Colonel Emmanuel K. Kotoka, leader of the military insurrection, on the fall of

29. George S. Pettee, The Process of Revolution (N.Y., 1938).

Nkrumah in February 1966, was to the effect that "the myth surrounding Kwame Nkrumah has been broken".³⁰

Conclusion

What we have tried to demonstrate in these types of messianism is a considerable amount of underlying frustration and mental strain, and the consequent attempts by people to meaningfully restructure those social forces which gave rise to such strains. In messianic movements, what one finds are attempts to aggregate the interests of people who seem to have alienative predispositions towards the existing social structure and its institutional arrangements. In our attempt to refine the concept of messianism as a more fruitful tool for research into movements of this nature, several questions become pertinent. One might wish to know, for instance, why the messianic orientation in South and Central Africa appealed mainly to non-logical medium, whereas that of, say, Ghana, adopted positive, rational calculations as instruments. Messiahs, whether religious or secular, are obviously not followed by all participants in the wider social system; also, even in the participation varying degrees of commitment exist. One may wish to know, then, the psychological properties which predispose some people to follow messianic expectations, and with such varying degrees of interest. Put differently, one would want to know the light which a study of differential participation in messianic movements could throw on what Daniel Lerner has described as "the congruence of biography with ideology".³¹

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30. Some of the myths which were associated with the personality cult of Kwame Nkrumah, are discussed in Dennis Austin, "The Nkrumah Myths", Venture, xviii, 5, June 1966, pp.6-9.
31. The theme of the relationship between human experience and attitudes towards social issues, is developed in Daniel Lerner, The Passing of Traditional Society (Glencoe, III: 1958), especially p.23.

There is, also, the problem of the degree to which value systems should deteriorate before people come to regard it as a source of severe strain as to cause the need for their restoration. Although sociologists are more interested in the existence of the relationship between ideas and social action, rather than in the content of the ideas themselves, it would be revealing to analyse the extent to which followers of a messiah are prepared to regard this dream as a genuine report of his choice as a true vehicle of divine inspiration, or as a deliberate attempt at crackpotism and swindling and charlatanry. The extent to which expressional movements, whether in Africa or in Oceania, have served as breeding avenues of a new elite in society, and as new bases of social mobility, has also not been adequately explored. These many questions, and some more, obviously could bring students of social psychology, sociology, and political science together in the attempt to understand some of the modes of adaptation to strains in social structures, especially those strains that arise as a result of culture contact.



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