



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service

Services des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

CANADIAN THESES

NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30.

**THIS DISSERTATION
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED**

THÈSES CANADIENNES

AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30.

**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE**

BROTHERHOOD OF THE CROSS AND STAR: A SOCIOLOGICAL CASE STUDY OF
NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

by

Friday Michael Mbon

A dissertation

Presented to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

University of Ottawa, Canada

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies

Ottawa, Canada, 1986

© Friday Michael Mbon, Ottawa, Canada, January 1986.

Permission has been granted to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film.

The author (copyright owner) has reserved other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her written permission.

L'autorisation a été accordée à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de microfilmer cette thèse et de prêter ou de vendre des exemplaires du film.

L'auteur (titulaire du droit d'auteur) se réserve les autres droits de publication; ni la thèse ni de longs extraits de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation écrite.

ISBN 0-315-33289-1

Sociologists have been particularly active in studying 'the new religions' and in attempting to connect their emergence with larger social patterns and possible pathologies.

--Roger Walsh, "'Foreword'" to
Ken Wilber's A Sociable God, p.viii.

Brotherhood is likened to the elephant which six blind men visited. Each of them described the elephant differently according to the respective part which each of them touched. The same thing is what the world is purporting the Holy Father to be according to each person's view and wisdom. As a matter of fact, He is never any of those things. . . . very shortly many people from different institutions of learning will publish different ideas about the Holy Father.

--Olumba Olumba Obu, The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 5.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late father who went to be with our ancestors while I was doing the field research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

By appreciation we make excellence in others
our property.

--Voltaire

Many people--far too many to name them all here--helped me during the preparation of this dissertation. They included Professors, colleagues, friends, and even my own students at the University of Calabar. I thank them all for their help and co-operation.

A few of these persons deserve special mention. Dr. Roger Lapointe, Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa, served as the director of this work. To him I give my first thanks, not only for his scholarly guidance and generosity in sharing with me over the years his time and huge reservoir of knowledge of the Sociology of Religion, but also for his personal warmth, friendship, humanity, patience and understanding. His critical, provocative comments and questions on this work both provided me with new ideas and helped me to clarify my own thoughts.

I thank Professor Stanislaw Swiderski of the same Department whose continued interest in my work has been a source of great encouragement. Indeed, it was a course on African cultures and religions which I took from him, plus his own enthusiasm and deep interest in studying these subjects that first inspired me to begin to study scientifically the religions and cultures of our people. Moreover, before I left for the 'field,' Prof. Swiderski, himself a respected anthropologist and ethnographer, briefed me on the 'anthropological' and

"phenomenological" method of field research. For all this, I am deeply grateful to him.

Next, I register my gratitude with all the academic and administrative staff of the said Department for their encouragement and support. In particular, I thank them for generous financial support in the form of Teaching/Research Assistantships, and for kindly letting me use "Theodore" (the Department's word processor) in writing up this work. "Theodore" was a great time saver, and saved me many a grey hair! I am also grateful to the School of Graduate Studies and Research of the University of Ottawa for its occasional grants, and for partially financing my trip to the University of Manchester, England, to see what Gabriel Amadi had written about the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star (BCS), since access to that thesis was impossible through any other means.

Leslie MacDonald gave me the very first lesson in word processing. Thereafter Sheila Redmond took over the training and stayed with me throughout the whole ordeal, always coming to my rescue whenever I inadvertently punched the wrong code and got stuck! To both young ladies I say: "Merci bien..!"

Without the goodwill and co-operation of members of the BCS, it would have been difficult, if not altogether impossible, to carry out this research. For that reason, I hereby express my sincere gratitude first of all to Leader Olumba Olumba Obu for permitting me to study his movement and for accommodating my interviews in his very busy schedule. I also thank him for his kindness in donating to me the first thirty-five pieces of Brotherhood literature that I ever read.

Many members of the BCS served as my informants during the fieldwork. Unfortunately, it is not possible to name them all here. But those not mentioned by name herein should also know that I am truly grateful to them all for their help. I am especially thankful to Senior Pastor Offu Ebongo, the movement's Secretary-General, for always keeping me in the know of events taking place in the movement, and for even setting aside a special "information folder" in his office for me. In a special way, too, I thank the following officers of the movement for the various ways in which they co-operated with me and, consequently, made my yoke easy: Pastor Effiong A. Umo, my former student at the University of Calabar, who was my escort during my very first visit to Leader Obu and during my first visit to Biakpan, Obu's birth place. Pastor Umo also always faithfully kept me informed about goings-on in the movement. I held many interviews and later corresponded on a number of occasions with Pastor Kenneth E. Bassey, the manager of Brotherhood Press. I thank him very much for his assistance. Apostle V.E. Ekpenyong and I had many conversations both in his office and at his home concerning many aspects of Brotherhood teachings; in addition, he kindly sent me copies of his own writings on the movement. He deserves my heart-felt gratitude. I am grateful, too, to Apostle E.K. Ukpai, Leader Obu's first cousin and the movement's treasurer, with whom I spoke often and who gave me much useful information about his cousin's boyhood days. For their various forms of assistance, I thank Pastors E.A. Essien-umoh and B.J. Etuk, Evangelist I.I. Inyang, Senior Christ Servant E.E. Ema, Deaconess Alice Ebong, and Apostle Dominic Ine Onuwabhakpokpo.

I only ask of these and all members of the BCS that if any aspects of my interpretation of their worldviews are different from their own self-interpretation, may they take no offence but graciously regard those particular aspects merely as the impressions of a blind man trying to describe an elephant!

My thanks also go to Dr. Harold W. Turner, Director of the Centre for New Religious Movements at the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, England (formerly located at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland) for making it possible for me to visit the Centre and for his courtesy in taking the time and trouble to reply to my many enquiries. In addition, I had occasions at conferences to discuss with Dr. Turner some of the ideas expressed in this work.

Finally, I thank my employer, the University of Calabar, for granting me leave of absence to complete this task.

CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Friday Michael Mbon had his elementary, secondary, and college education in his country, Nigeria. Subsequently, he proceeded to the United States and Canada for his university education. At the time he wrote this dissertation, Friday held the following academic qualifications: B.A. in English and M.A. in Religion from Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan (1975; 1976); M.A. in English from the University of Calgary, Alberta (1978); and S.T.M. from McGill University, Montreal (1979). During the duration of the present work, he held a confirmed (tenured) position as lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Calabar, Nigeria. He has to his credit many articles in learned journals and books. Friday has travelled extensively to China, India, Israel, Italy, South Korea, Thailand, and Turkey--to study the religions of those countries in their historical and socio-cultural settings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES	1
1. The Problem	1
2. Previous Work on the BCS	8
3. Methodological Issues	14
(a) Data Collection	14
(b) Scope and Focus	21
Chapter	
I. OLUMBA OLUMBA OBU AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE BCS	31
1. A Brief Biography of Olumba Olumba Obu	31
(a) His birth, birth place, and family background	31
(b) Obu's Education	46
(c) Obu Leaves Biakpan for Calabar	50
2. The Beginnings of the BCS	54
(a) The Name of the Movement	63
(b) From 26 Mbukpa Road to 34 Ambo Street	67
3. Obu's Role in the BCS	70
4. Obu's Personality and Personal Charisma	72
II. STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BCS	
1. Leader's Representatives	85
2. Bishops	87
3. Elders	90
4. Senior Prophets/Prophetesses	91
5. Prophets/Prophetesses	94
6. Senior Pastors/Pastors	94
7. Senior Apostles, Senior Deacons/Deaconesses, Senior Evangelists	96
8. Apostles, Deacons/Deaconesses, Evangelists	98
9. Spiritual Council of Churches	100
10. Fellowships and Associations	103

Chapter

Page

III. BROTHERHOOD BELIEFS AND PRACTICES	113
1. BCS Teaching on Love	115
2. BCS Attitude Toward the Old and New Testaments	118
3. BCS Doctrine of God (Theology)	121
(a) The Nature of God	122
(b) The Names of God	125
4. Brotherhood Christology	128
(a) The Limitations and Failures of Jesus	129
(b) The Incarnations of Jesus	134
5. Man and Woman in the Incarnation of God	140
6. The Holy Spirit	156
7. The Deity of Obu	158
8. Good and Evil	175
9. Obu's Soteriology	194
10. Brotherhood Thanatology	201
11. Brotherhood Ethics	216
12. Obu on Marriage	224
13. Dated Eschatology and Utopian Vision	232
IV. BROTHERHOOD PRACTICES AND INSTITUTIONS	255
1. Baptism	257
2. Feet Washing	259
3. Meeting of the Spirited Children	260
4. Healing	261
5. Ministry Work	269
6. Fasting	271
7. The Wednesday "Watch and Pray"	274
8. The Pentecostal Assemblies	275
9. Mother's Day	280
10. The Institution of Christ's Studentship	280
11. The Institution of Christ's Servantship	290
12. Special "Weeks"	299
V. HAVING ONE'S CAKE AND EATING IT: OBU AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL CULTURE	301
1. Obu Having His Cultural Cake, Or So It Seems	302
(a) What Is Man?	302
(b) Brotherhood Feast	304
(c) The Pluriformity of Spiritual Beings	314
(d) The "Living-dead"	318
(e) Going Barefoot	318
(f) The Holy Oil and the Holy Water	321
2. Obu Eating Away His Cultural Cake	323
(a) Denying the Existence and Powers of the Spirits	323
(b) Condemnation of Cultural Fraternities and Societies	328
(c) Polygyny	331

Chapter	Page
VI. THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE CROSS AND STAR	339
1. Nigeria's New Religious Movements and Nigerian Politics	340
2. Nigeria's New Religious Movements and Nigerian Economy	360
(a) Brotherhood Economic Manifesto	360
(b) Brotherhood Economic Manifesto in Practice	370
3. Nigeria's New Religious Movement and Social Life	380
VII. PUBLIC RESPONSE TO NIGERIA'S NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS	397
1. Positive Response	399
(a) Members' Response	399
(b) Response from (non-member) Secret Admirers	404
(c) Response During the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970	417
(d) Government Response	418
2. Negative Response	421
VIII. BROTHERHOODISM IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	447
1. Why the Emergence of New Religious Movements in Contemporary Africa?	448
2. The Question of Typology	456
(a) Is the BCS a Sect or a Denomination?	457
(b) A Suggested Classificatory Label for African New Religious Movements	474
3. Dated Eschatology and Utopian Vision: What if Prophecy Fails?	485
4. The Question of Succession in the BCS	489
5. Brotherhood Syncretism	495
CONCLUSIONS	503
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	513
APPENDICES:	
A. Abstract	539
B. The Many Names of Olumba Olumba Obu	543
C. Some Brotherhood Fellowships	545
D. What Brotherhoods Consider to Be Sins	547
E. Yearly Statistics of Obu's Visitors 1978-1984	549

INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Africa seems always able to produce something new.

--C.K. Meek¹

Outside the sphere of . . . orthodox Protestant and Catholic churches in Africa, something new of immense power and creativity is coming into being; and if . . . it is a creation of the Spirit of God, proclaiming a new Word of God from the Bible . . . then we ignore it at our peril. We must examine it, critically but sympathetically, to see what it has to teach concerning a genuinely African theology; for a Christian theology, if it is to be truly Christian, must not rest merely on past formulations but must be a reflection on what God is doing in the present.

--David B. Barrett²

1. The Problem

One of the physical consequences of the dissatisfaction expressed by contemporary African Christians against Western mission-style

¹C.K. Meek, 'The Religions of Nigeria,' Africa, 14, No. 3 (1943), p. 117.

²David B. Barrett, Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. xix.

Christianity has been popular experimentation with new religious initiatives, forms, ideologies and structures. This study is about one new religious movement that is actively engaged in that new religious experimentation and innovation.

The movement studied here is officially known as the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star (BCS),³ but members also call it Christ's Universal Spiritual School of Practical Christianity. Both appellations, especially the latter, are intended to stress that the movement is not a church in the sense that term is understood in traditional Christianity, but a practical spiritual school where Christianity is not only taught but, more importantly, also practised.

Begun in Calabar, south-eastern Nigeria, in the late 1950s initially as a prayer-cum-Bible-study group involving only a handful of people (mostly women and children), this new religious movement has today grown into a strong multi-thousand-member and international movement with an "explosive" membership which, as its Leader, Olumba Olumba Obu (1918-) says, increases everyday and is "multiplying in geometrical progression."⁴ The movement's membership is at present

³ This movement should not be confused with the African Brotherhood Church in Kenya.

⁴ O.O. Obu, The Return of the First Begotten of God to the World (Calabar: Brotherhood Everlasting Gospel Centre, 1983), p. 32. Unless otherwise indicated, all Brotherhood publications are published either by the movement's Everlasting Gospel Centre or the Brotherhood Press, both located at the movement's current headquarters at 34 Ambo Street, Calabar, Nigeria. Henceforth, only the titles of the publications will be given, followed by the date of publication, when known, and the page numbers referred to. As a rule, Brotherhood publications are not usually dated because, they believe, "the gospel" contained in them is eternal and therefore transcends dates. See Minutes of the Spiritual (Footnote Continued)

fast approaching two million within its short history of thirty years. Indeed, its rate of international growth has become so phenomenal in recent years that members proudly speak of the movement's global impact as "the cyclone of spirituality starting from Nigeria . . . and engulfing the whole world."⁵ At the time of this writing, the movement has branches all over Black Africa, in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, Australia, Japan, India, and the West Indies. Indeed, the BCS sees the whole world as its "mission field," believing that it is now Africa's turn to evangelize the world, especially the White world. But this self-imposed mission to the entire world is by no means peculiar to the BCS; rather, it is characteristic of most new religious movements in the so-called primal societies today.⁶

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of new religious movements in contemporary Africa. First are those which have, for various reasons, terdiversated from the historic missionary-founded churches. Often called "schismatic" or "separatist" movements, this category generally continues to reflect some of the ideologies of the mother churches, despite intensive changes, adaptations and particular emphases

(Footnote Continued)

Council of Churches (henceforth SCC Minutes), April 2, 1977, p. 8; cf. August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 1 & 2 (1981), p. 27.

⁵ Sunday Concord (Lagos), January 1, 1984, p. 10.

⁶ On the phenomenal penetration into the West of new religious movements from the so-called primal, missionized societies, Bryan Wilson makes the following remarks: "It is perhaps an interesting paradox that societies which, in days of their greatest relative strength, devoted so much energy, time, and money to exporting Christianity to the rest of the world, should now become importers of a diverse array of religious ideas and practices of older cultures." In his Religion in Sociological Perspective (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 104.

within themselves. Second are those new religious movements founded by charismatic individuals independent of any mother church. These are commonly referred to as 'spiritual' or 'spiritualist' (sometimes 'spiritist') movements or churches because of their emphasis on pneumatology and spiritual healing. The BCS belongs to this second category.

Efforts made so far to analyze the membership of Nigeria's new religious movements have tended to stress economic factors as crucial in the explanation of adherence to these movements. But such explanations fail to account for the incidence of socially highly-placed, economically well-to-do members flocking into these movements and forming a significant proportion of their membership. Because of the presence of this calibre of members in the BCS, we felt that there must be factors other than economic considerations which attract people to this particular movement. Therefore, one of our major aims in this study was to seek to discover the reasons for the tremendous popularity of the movement, which continues to attract and retain teeming numbers of adherents from all levels of the social strata in and outside Nigeria, and is constantly shaping the worldviews and life-styles of these members. A religious movement that is capable of influencing the lives of thousands in this way naturally constitutes a 'problem' worthy of scholarly investigation by the academic disciplines that study religion. Herein, therefore, lies our justification for carrying out this research on what, in our opinion, is the fastest-growing, most dynamic, and religiously and socially most puissant and most controversial new religious movement in contemporary Nigeria.

In conceiving this research, we also sought to discover how much of the movement's beliefs and practices are similar to those of traditional Christianity, since the BCS claims to be Christian; how much of these resemble African native religious beliefs and practices; how much are peculiar to the movement, and how much are syncretistic. At the back of our mind also was the question as to whether the old theory of deprivation and disprivilege had anything to do with involvement in this particular movement. In this connection, we were trying to test the validity or otherwise of the conventional characterization of "sects" or new religious movements as a "response to a range of either personal or collective unsatisfied needs or aspirations--deprivation, frustration, oppression, anomie, personality disorder or alienation;"⁷ or, as Susan Budd claims, whether it is necessarily always true that the impact of religion "tends to be greatest among groups which are marginal to the obviously important political and economic aspects of modern society--women, the old, the very poor, the distressed and stigmatized;"⁸ or whether adherents of new religious movements, according to Royston Pike, referring specifically to the Jehovah's Witnesses in Britain, consisted merely of "the frustrated, the hard-pressed, underprivileged" or "men and women who are intensively dissatisfied with their lives but do not know what to do about it."⁹

⁷ See James A. Beckford, "Sociological Stereotypes of the Religious Sect," Sociological Review, n.s. 26, No. 1 (1978), p. 110.

⁸ Susan Budd, Sociologists and Religion (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1973), pp. 17, 18.

⁹ E.R. Pike, Jehovah's Witnesses (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), p. 135.

Also at the back of our mind was the question as to whether or not Russell Dynes and Earl Brewer were right when they respectively remarked that "churchness is associated with high socio-economic status and, conversely . . . sectness is associated with low socio-economic status,"¹⁰ and that "the sect-type, in the material and instrumental aspects, is characterized by poverty,"¹¹ the latter remark reminding one of Charles Glock's "relative deprivation" theory.¹²

The aim of "testing" the theories mentioned above was to provide "a case evidence" that might lead to the confirmation or revision of the theories. But as this aim itself was not the main purpose of this study, we were very careful not to allow it to detract from our main concerns. Indeed, we believe, with Bryan Wilson, that "even though the theoretical issues remain important to the sociologist of religion, increasingly the test of the discipline is not in its broad theoretical (and often--it may be admitted--speculative) generalizations, but in the work that is done in the field."¹³

¹⁰Russell R. Dynes, "Church-sect Typology and Socio-economic Status," American Sociological Review, 20, No. 5 (1955), p. 559.

¹¹Earl D.C. Brewer, "Sect and Church in Methodism," Social Forces, 30, No. 4 (1952), p. 402.

¹²For the early statement of Glock's "relative deprivation" theory, see his "The Role of Deprivation in the Origin and Evolution of Religious Groups," in Robert Lee and Martin E. Marty, eds., Religion and Social Conflict (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 24-36; see also the interpretation of this theory in research in C.Y. Glock, B.B. Ringer and E.R. Babbie, eds., To Comfort and to Challenge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

¹³Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 11.

An attempt was also made in this work to understand the connection between the BCS as religious movement and the social, religious and cultural context in which it has been nurtured and sustained in terms of the latter's belief system (chapter V). The idea here was first to see which of the traditional ethno-religious elements (if any) the BCS has adapted into its belief system and which (if any) it has impudently rejected. Secondly, we thought that by taking a brief look at the socio-cultural and religious belief system of the environment out of which it has emerged, we would be able to assess and appreciate better the movement's doctrinal and philosophical innovations, because, as Robin Horton and J.D.Y. Peel have said, "the only way to explain religious innovation is to relate it to the experience of its authors in the social context of its emergence."¹⁴

Ultimately, we hoped that the information provided in this research about the history, structure, worldviews, self-understanding, and public image of the BCS would help to enhance parallel or comparative studies of new religious movements globally and in Nigeria in particular. Furthermore, without presuming to play the role of an unsolicited religious sociologist, we hoped, too, that somehow this study would also identify problems and prospects in need of attention by members of the movement, and thereby be of some use to them.

¹⁴Robin Horton and J.D.Y. Peel, "Conversion and Confusion: A Rejoinder on Christianity in Eastern Nigeria," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 10, No. 3 (1976), p. 497.

2. Previous Work on the BCS

Unfortunately, the BCS has not yet received the kind of scholarly attention that it certainly deserves. To the best of our knowledge, the only attempts, to date, to study the movement scientifically, mostly at the undergraduate level, have been those of either active or backslidden members.¹⁵ The only work on the movement at the graduate level is Gabriel Amadi's doctoral thesis completed in 1982 at the University of Manchester, England. Even here, the work is by a member of the movement. Formerly a minister of another new religious movement in Nigeria, the Spiritual Healing Church of the Lord (SHCL), founded by Michael Agbaraka Samuel Wobo in the Rivers State in 1960, Amadi became

¹⁵ Studies that are fully or partially on the BCS at the undergraduate level include Margaret Ekpo, "Charismatic Religious Leaders in the Cross River State: A Case Study of Leader O.O. Obu (Brotherhood of the Cross and Star); Bishop Etim Akpan Otong (National Assembly Church), and Edidem Bassey (Spiritual Kingdom Church of Christ), B.A. research project, University of Calabar, 1980; Essien Akabom Offiong, "Schism and Religious Independency in Nigeria: A Case Study of Calabar," B.A. research project, University of Calabar, 1983; Umo Efiiong Nkereuwem, "African Christianity: A Case Study of the History of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star," B.A. research project, University of Calabar, 1983. Dr. John A. Laoye has also attempted biographico-historical study of Obu and the BCS in a short unpublished mimeograph entitled "Olumba Olumba Obu and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star" (n.d.), 37 pages. As the final cosmetic touches were being added to the present work, the author ran into a recent 4-page article entitled "The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star in Great Britain," by Dr. M.Y. Nabofa of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Dr. Nabofa was on Sabbatical at King's College, University of London, during the summer of 1984 when he became interested in tracing the history of the BCS in England. It is indeed gratifying to know that at least one other scholar has at last considered the movement deserving of academic attention. Nabofa's article was published in vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 8-11 (October 1985) of Religion Today: A Journal of Contemporary Religions, a journal newly established by King's College's Centre for New Religions.

converted and baptized into the BCS in the course of his research and now serves as one of the movement's Prophets, which office he, in fact, held on a part-time basis at the Brotherhood congregation ("bethel")¹⁶ in Manchester while writing his thesis there.¹⁷

Written for a degree in History, Amadi's work itself is not exclusively on the BCS, however. Rather, it is a comparative historical study of the biographies, ministries, and ideologies of the founders and leaders of his former and present churches. Amadi's stated aim was to show how these two religious leaders with different, almost diametrically opposed ideological orientations--respectively power and moral purity--"vie with each other in the recruitment of adherents in Nigerian society . . ." and what this society finds appealing in either of the movements.¹⁸ As an insider, Amadi has had the advantage of having access to the inner workings of the movement. He shows, in fact, intimate knowledge of the meanings of Brotherhood doctrines (which he prefers to call "ideologies"), of the structure of the movement's ecclesiastical and administrative processes, and of its goals and aspirations. His method, however, is mainly historical and, consequently, his style largely narrative and descriptive. It is in the methodology, style and focus, therefore, that our own interpretative and

¹⁶ A Brotherhood place of worship is called a "bethel" (from the Hebrew word beth-el, meaning "house of God" or, nonliterally, "sacred spot" or "house of prayer;" see Genesis 28:19).

¹⁷ See SCC Minutes, January 2, 1982, p. 24.

¹⁸ See Gabriel I.S. Amadi, "Power and Purity: A Comparative Study of Two Prophetic Churches in Southeastern Nigeria," Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, 1982, p. 23.

sociological analysis of the movement goes beyond Amadi's work. As the historical approach is not our particular focus here, we do not go into any historical details of the beginnings and development either of the movement itself or of its teachings, as Amadi has done through the compulsion of his particular discipline (History). Here we merely attempt a sociological interpretation of bare historical givens. Those interested in a more detailed historical narrative will therefore find Amadi's work closer to their particular interest.

Apart from the works mentioned above, sporadic passing references to the BCS in newspaper and journal articles, and Etim Ayankop's "mini thesis,"¹⁹ the present study is the first major work by a non-member of the movement. Moreover, according to Turner's Bibliography, the most recent and comprehensive work on Black Africa's new religious movements, there is at the moment no published full length study on the BCS.

One cannot help wondering about the reasons for this academic silence on a movement as conspicuous and influential as the BCS. There seem to be several reasons for this obvious lack of research interest on the movement. Probably the first of these reasons is that prospective researchers on the movement seem to have been discouraged by the movement's irrefractory demand that they be baptized first before carrying

¹⁹ Written for an M.Litt. degree at the University of Aberdeen (1975), Ayankop's "Brotherhood of the Cross and Star," was done without fieldwork and completed within something like an academic semester. This piece of work was not considered substantial enough to be included in Harold W. Turner's Bibliography of New Religious Movements in Primal Societies, vol. 1: Black Africa (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall, 1977). According to Turner who supervised it, Ayankop's work was "not at full master's level and I have not included (in Bibliography) theses below that level except in a few very rare cases." (Personal correspondence dated March 25, 1980).

out their research. This, indeed, was the impression we got from Leader Obu himself during our very first meeting with him. On that occasion, he narrated stories of intending researchers who never went back to the movement after their initial appearance, because they had been expected to get baptized before beginning their work. This may be why the very little that has been written on the movement has been written mostly by its active or backslidden members. Then again, it is only recently that Obu has become willing to grant audience to interviewers who are usually journalists. Less than a decade ago, he strongly objected to any request to be interviewed by anyone. At that time he would reportedly turn away many a curious journalist. In fact, as late as 1978 he told one journalist who went to know from him about his movement:

. . . I wonder what you want to know. . . .
 You have heard and you have seen, what next? I
 will not tell you further, because there is
 nothing you are going to write that will change
 the world. I don't need any publicity.²⁰

Indeed, Obu has the reputation of being particularly suspicious of academics who, he says, have shown lack of wisdom in wanting to research into the beginnings of the beginningless and the end of the endless. In that connection he once made the following remarks:

Professors in history, from different
 universities have from time to time been coming
 to us to tell them the origin of Brotherhood.
 We have in each case laughed at the limitation
 of their wisdom, and have asked them to go and
 love one another. Anybody on the surface of

²⁰ Obu in interview with Raymond Ekpu, as reproduced in BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 101.

this globe who tells you that he has known the foundation of Brotherhood is a liar.²¹

Such initial attitude toward potential researchers, although very much relaxed now, has remained a major deterrent to this day.

Another possible reason for the lack of scholarly interest in the movement may be that some scholars simply do not consider it important to study it because it does not maintain any clear link with the prevailing religious traditions in the societies into which it has penetrated, or because it does not have any conspicuous connection with the political structures of those societies. But our study has attempted to show that there are such connections, albeit covert and generally indirect. Perhaps if the BCS had been more actively and more overtly involved in politics and social revolutions, it might have drawn academic attention to itself.

Furthermore, non-Brotherhood academics appear to be afraid of negative public opinion or of the criticism of their friends, colleagues and relatives who might be critical of them for meddling with a movement which many Nigerians consider to be made up of "pseudo-Christians," "lions in sheep's clothing," "the deceived and the deceivers," "occultists," "members of a terrible secret society," "mystics," "confusionists," "followers of the illiterate Olumba Obu," "the mercenary church," or whatever names the movement is commonly called by antagonists. Indeed, many Nigerian church people consider it ignoble and degrading for one to "descend so low" as to associate oneself even in day-to-day dealings with members of the movement, let alone going to

²¹ O.O. Obu, What Is Brotherhood? (n.d.), p. 3.

their homes and places of worship in the name of doing academic research. In fact, this researcher had a good dose of such criticisms even from university intellectuals who ought to know better, and was even shunned by members of his own church when they got to know that he was "getting mixed up" with "the Obu people." Thus, the very fact that in Nigeria simply being seen around members of the BCS can be looked upon as a kind of social stigma may have been a serious enough factor to deter some from carrying out a meaningful and much needed academic research on the movement. This unfortunate situation is somewhat similar to the attitudes of some Northern American and European academics toward Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.²²

These, then, are some of the possible reasons why scholars have so far shied away from studying the BCS. There may be other reasons, but whatever those may be, the present study by an outsider testifies to the fact that members of the movement are not at all that "terrible" in any way. They are just as ordinary as any of us. In fact, they can be as friendly as any can be and, as an organization, quite open,

²²For the controversy surrounding the question as to whether academics should go near the "Moonies" or attend Moon-sponsored conferences, see, for example, Irving Louis Horowitz, "Science, Sin and Sponsorship," in I.L. Horowitz, ed., Science, Sin and Scholarship: The Politics of Reverend Moon and the Unification Church (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1978), pp. 260-81; Irving Louis Horowitz, "The Politics of New Cults: Non-prophetic Observations on Science, Sin and Scholarship," in Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, eds., In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1981), pp. 161-70; Roy Wallis, "An Open Mind about Moonies," Times Higher Education Supplement, October 1, 1982, p. 15; Roy Wallis, "Should Academics Attend Moonie Conferences?" Queen's News, No. 83/03 (October 1983), unpaginated; and Roland Robertson, "Scholarship, Partisanship, Sponsorship and 'The Moonie Problem': A Comment," Sociological Analysis, 46, No. 2 (1985), 179-84.

fortunately more so now than before, to genuine scholarly investigations. This study further testifies to the fact that no scholar need be afraid of Brotherhood baptism. It will not be forced on anyone. All that any prospective researcher has to do when the question of baptism comes up (as it naturally will)—is simply to explain politely to the Leader of the movement or any of his close associates that, for the purposes of research intended for the academic community, it is best for the researcher to write about the movement as a detached, neutral, and objective investigator, and not from the stance of a baptized, committed member of the movement. Both the Leader and his associates will understand, as indeed they have been quite willing to understand and co-operate with this researcher.

3. Methodological Issues

(a) Data Collection

In view of the fact that there were almost no known previously published studies on the BCS at the time this research was conceived and carried out, the method followed in gathering the information analyzed here suggested itself quite naturally. It consisted mostly of fieldwork involving nearly three hundred hours of interviews (mainly the open-ended question type) with the Leader of the movement, his followers, ex-members and non-members, the use of questionnaires, participant observation at the movement's assemblies, and intensive study of the movement's abundant literature, particularly the copious mimeographs of Obu's sermons and Bible class lectures, all this over a

period of more than three years. The movement's literature provides, even more than oral interviews, an excellent source for identifying the movement's major dogmas, doctrines, practices and orientations, and also serves as the most authentic documentary aid for our interpretation and analysis of observed facts and Brotherhood ideology. As a participant observer in the movement's meetings, church services, and rituals, this author was always careful not to allow too much participation, sympathy and friendly association with members to eclipse his scholarly objectivity.

One of the difficulties that frequently confronts the field researcher, especially during oral interviews, is the temptation for him or her to play the role of an unpaid scribe in the presence of his or her interviewees. The impression such a researcher can so easily give to these interviewees is that he or she is merely interested in gathering information and data and not in them as persons. In such cases, the interviewees would naturally feel as though they were simply objects or spectacles to be observed and not persons to be appreciated and respected. This writer was always conscious of this problem and did everything possible within his power of control not to give such impressions. For instance, even on occasions when the use of a tape recorder was neither possible nor the wisest thing to do, attentive listening was done more than note taking. Most of the field notes were therefore taken as soon as he returned home each day, before he did anything else. His experience in this exercise was that he usually remembered between seventy and eighty-five percent of the main points of each interview, depending, of course, on the maturity, education, intelligence, knowledgeability, fluency, and coherence of the

interviewee. In each case, the remaining unremembered fifteen to thirty percent would usually "come back" to him on other occasions when he was either resting, or speaking with the same or another interviewee, or reading a piece of the movement's literature. This method was found to be quite workable since he always allowed himself ample time between interviews to go home and write down his notes.

A day or so following each interview, he would return to his field notes and try to analyze the data in order to get at both the articulated (avowed) and latent meaning or implications of the recorded facts. The analysis of one interview was then compared with that of another in order to get at something like the whole picture on a given subject of the interview. This was done in the full consciousness that information obtained in one interview on any particular subject was but only a part of the whole story, and in the full awareness that no one interviewee had the whole truth on any issue; hence the necessity of interviewing as many people as possible on the different topics which form the basis of our analysis. Indeed, in following this cross-checking method of interviewing, this writer always kept at the back of his mind a statement which Obu himself had made once concerning the difference of opinions among his followers. In one of his sermons he told them: "If any person should come to interview you people, such a person would fail because you have different opinions about me."²³ Where there were obvious discrepancies in the views expressed by

²³ Sermon preached on January 9, 1982; reproduced in Gospels of Total Liberation: From Cross to Star (1982), p. 188. Compare a similar remark in The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4 (1980?), p. 44; and SCC Minutes, December 29, 1979, p. 13.

individual members, reconciliation was always sought from the Leader's office which members regard as the source of final authority on all matters of belief and practice, and to where Obu himself has directed by saying: "Anything that you do not know, come to the Leader's Office and inquire and you will be given an authentic information. Do not ask any member, otherwise they will just tell you what they know."²⁴

The interviews themselves varied in length, ranging from forty-five minutes to a total of ten hours (of two to three hours each time), depending on the subject matter, on how much the interviewee knew, and on the quality, clarity, and coherence of his or her thoughts about the subject. In general, most of the respondents, especially the educated ones, were very intelligent in their responses. But a good number of them often tended to "fill in logical gaps with devotional material," to borrow Paul Tillich's interesting expression.²⁵ As to the eventual use of the information obtained from the interviews, this, again, varied according to quality and usefulness. Interview respondents were selected rather randomly, but leads were also got from Leader Obu himself, from the movement's key administrative and ministerial personnel, and from the interviewees themselves. In most cases, the interviews were conducted in the members' homes. This gave the interviewer the opportunity to observe their living conditions at the same time. In all cases these face-to-face interviews also provided an excellent opportunity for the interviewer and his respondents to get

²⁴Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins (n.d.), p. 66.

²⁵See Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 106.

personally acquainted. This acquaintance helped to dispel any doubts or suspicion that they might otherwise have entertained.

Conventional questionnaires were used judiciously and only occasionally. When used, they were mainly for gathering such gross data as age, sex, social position, occupation, education, etc. One problem with the use of pre-structured questionnaires is that they are too confining in the sense that they cause the researcher to seek answers to only the questions he or she had previously formulated, thus giving no room for fresh questions. But in the open-ended interview situation, one question leads spontaneously to a new one, and the researcher is in a much better position to discern new categories and to sense new visions. Of course this takes more time, more perception, more pains and greater creativity on the part of the researcher, but the outcome of such efforts is usually well worth the trouble.

A second problem with the use of questionnaires is that they tend to be impersonal, especially if they are mailed to respondents. Such an impersonal method of gathering information is not very useful for research in religion which is a very personal, sensitive and serious subject. Careless use of questionnaires in our kind of research might prove to be counterproductive in the sense that respondents might feel threatened by it, or find the procedure profane or irreverent, and consequently be unwilling to co-operate fully with the researcher.

Thirdly, many data are too complex, in any case, to be solicited by questionnaires without running into the danger of misunderstanding and misinterpreting the respondents' information and intentions.

Obviously, the goal for employing all the methodological strategies described above was to gain as much insight as was humanly possible into

the beliefs and practices of the BCS. In using these techniques, however, one was always aware of the fact that beliefs, defined here as "basic assumptions about what is real or possible and what is not,"²⁶ are not always only those things which the believers claim to believe, but also those things which the observer may infer from the believers' verbal and non-verbal responses to particular objects or situations.²⁷ The notion of reality or "what is real" as used throughout this study means more than simply what is observable, measurable or, for that matter, only what is open to the five senses. In the context of religion, reality includes, in the words of Margaret Chatterjee, "the entire cosmic order, including man's place in it, the existential whole which is so highly personal, and which, for the religious man, is none other than the Divine milieu."²⁸

As pointed out earlier, one of our purposes in carrying out this research was to delineate those beliefs and practices of the BCS which make this movement unique or distinctively different from other Christian bodies in Nigeria. In attempting to do this, the phenomenological approach to the study of religion was found to be particularly valuable. In using this approach, however, one did not

²⁶ Barbara W. Hargrove, Reformation of the Holy: A Sociology of Religion (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Co., 1971), p. 43; cf. Clyde Kluckhohn, "Values and Value-orientations," in Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, eds., Toward a General Theory of Action (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 432.

²⁷ See Milton Rokeach, Beliefs, Attitudes and Values (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1968), p. 2.

²⁸ Margaret Chatterjee, "Religion, Understanding, and Sharing Insights," Religious Studies, 20, No. 1 (1984), p. 102.

expect, as did Tillich, that everything which phenomenology tries to describe be always "convincing" to "everyone who is willing to look in the same direction;" that the description always illuminate other related ideas; and that it make the reality which these ideas are supposed to reflect understandable.²⁹ To expect total conviction and understanding all the time from everything phenomenology tries to describe is perhaps to expect a little too much from this methodological procedure. In fact, such an expectation is just like expecting a camera to explain convincingly and clearly to "everyone who is willing to look in the same direction" what the photograph that camera has taken is all about or means. Indeed, Tillich further said that "phenomenology is a way of pointing to phenomena as they 'give themselves,' without the interference of negative or positive prejudices and explanations."³⁰ Here again we disagree with him when he permits no "explanation" whatever to be employed in phenomenological descriptions. We believe that there are instances where explanation, for example the explanation of a religious performance or religious symbolism by the religious group or actors, may be invaluable for the observer's or "anyone's" understanding of, though not necessarily for his or her conviction about, the performance or symbolism. In fact, our methodology anticipates a synthesis between a strictly structural analysis and interpretative, explanatory analysis, focussing on the latter, because we agree with both Wilson and Susan Hekman when respectively they say

²⁹ Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, p. 106.

³⁰ Ibid.

that the heart of sociological analysis is explanation³¹ and that "the raison d'être of social science (is) an 'explanatory' activity which necessarily involves a 'stepping back' from the actors' concepts, a clarification and assessment of those understandings."³²

(b) Scope and Focus

We must confess ab initio that the present work is unavoidably propaedeutic or prodromal. It was conceived and pursued with the full awareness of the complexities involved in researching religious faith, and of the fact that no reality is exhaustible or can be described completely at any given time. As such, this work can only represent a tiny fragment of all that could be known and written about the mystery that is the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. For example, the whole domain of Brotherhood understanding of the spiritual world--that is, Brotherhood metaphysics--has not been fully explored here. Neither have we tried to penetrate the inexpressible, mystical dimensions of the religious life of the movement; that is to say, those dimensions of the religious life which Talcott Parsons calls the category of "nonempirical reality," or "the nonempirical effective elements which cannot be fitted into the pattern of rational techniques."³³ Such

³¹ See Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, pp. 35-36.

³² Susan J. Hekman, Weber, the Ideal Type, and Contemporary Social Theory (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 191.

³³ Talcott Parsons, "The Theoretical Development of the Sociology
(Footnote Continued)

dimensions of the religious life are largely outside empirical sociological enquiry and often defy facile sociological description and explanation. But we are methodologically bound not only to be aware of these impervious areas but also to recognize their impact on the religious people's definitions of reality. "Recognition of such a concept as a residual category," says Parsons elsewhere, "is surely better than denial of its relevance altogether."³⁴

The "relevance" of which Parsons speaks here is obviously methodological, and refers to the fact that non-empirical data "hidden" in the mystical dimensions of the religious life are also methodologically relevant to an understanding of the worldviews, ideologies, behaviours, and life practices of a given religious group. In the words of sociologist Michael Hill, "the incorporation of beliefs that cannot be tested by the methods of the empirical sciences is an important part of the attempt to account for perceptions of meaningful reality that the actor regards as authentic and which cannot simply be dismissed as mistaken."³⁵ Indeed, as Hill further remarks, if we limit our analysis of the religion of a people to only the empirically investigatable or visible reality, we run the risk of likely misunderstanding or even omitting much that might be significant and

(Footnote Continued)

of Religion," in his Essays in Sociological Theory, rev. ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 201.

³⁴ Talcott Parsons, Action Theory and the Human Condition (New York: The Free Press, 1978), p. 327.

³⁵ Michael Hill, A Sociology of Religion, (London: Heinemann, 1973), p. 35.

meaningful to the people concerned.³⁶ Hill emphasizes the point by saying:

. . . since religious adherents themselves regard certain kinds of non-empirical statement as meaningful, this would seem to indicate that a satisfactory explanation of their actions must at some point include--at least in part--this aspect of their definition of the situation. . . . In particular, the sociological perspective is based on a recognition that the meaningful reality of the adherents to a particular set of religious beliefs³⁷ forms an integral part of the field of study.

In this regard, therefore, we have taken seriously the values; expressed and unexpressed, of members of the, BCS. We emphasize this point in order to underscore the difference between our methodology and that of those social scientists who "could hardly take seriously the central religious fact of transcendence which escapes the research instruments of social science."³⁸ As Wilson rightly points out, "the sociologist's interest in values is to regard them as data; other men's values are the sociologist's facts . . . and (are) to be the subject of scientific, sociological enquiry."³⁹ The values of which Wilson speaks here include, inter alia, "intimations of the supernatural; metaphysical speculations and ideas, emotional orientations, beliefs,

³⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 13, 17. Cf. Elizabeth K. Nottingham, Religion and Society (New York: Random House, 1954), pp. 2-3.

³⁸ Joseph H. Fichter, "Youth in Search of the Sacred," in Bryan Wilson, ed., The Social Impact of New Religious Movements (New York: The Rose of Sharon Press, 1981), p. 21.

³⁹ Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 10.

rituals, and patterns of religious socialization and organization."⁴⁰ Thus, as Wilson further remarks, "the sociology of religion takes the formulations of a religious movement, or the religious disposition of a people, as its points of departure."⁴¹ Wilson stresses the point more elaborately as follows:

The statement of beliefs, the prescriptions of ritual, and their basis of legitimation, are all taken as basic data--as phenomena existent at the emergent level from which the sociology of religion must proceed. The sociologist is not concerned to test the 'truth' of belief. He is not concerned with the efficacy of rituals. He does not attempt to judge between divergent interpretations of a tradition. He does not challenge the claimed legitimation for practices and ideas which religionists endorse. All of these things he must accept as part of the data. He proceeds at the emergent social level, with a body of information that must, in the first instance, come from the believers themselves.⁴²

These remarks remain the guiding principle of our methodology throughout this study.

But to take seriously into methodological consideration the reality of "things unseen" in religious beliefs and practices points not only to the limitation of the exclusively phenomenological method of investigating spiritual realities,⁴³ but also is indeed in direct opposition to nineteenth century rationalistic positivism which characteristically dismisses as rationally and empirically inadequate

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, p. 107.

and untenable any appeal to "things unseen."⁴⁴ However, in appealing to the non-empirical as a methodological tool in this study, we have consciously sought to maintain an appropriate balance between arcane religious interpretation and positivist explanation.

In further recognition of the limited scope of this study, we wish to point out that no one can without shameless self-conceit lay claim to full knowledge of any religious movement at any given period of that movement's history. This is so because, as sociologist Donald Stone has quite rightly pointed out,

knowledge about the new religious groups is situational. It is produced by the interaction of the researcher with the focus and object of study. It is always an interpretation, influenced by the personal preferences, attitudes, and states of consciousness that the researcher (and reader) brings to the study.⁴⁵

Since, therefore, what is known about a religious movement is particular

⁴⁴In chapter X of his Essays in Sociological Theory, pp. 197-211, Parsons has given a very useful account of this revolt against rationalistic positivism in the works of Pareto, Malinowski, Durkheim and Weber. He defines rationalistic positivism as "the tendency to treat the actor as if he were a rational, scientific investigator, acting 'reasonably' in the light of the knowledge available to him." (p. 199). Parsons goes on to observe that "this was the path taken by Tylor and Spencer with the general thesis that primitive magical and religious ideas were ideas which in the situation of primitive men, considering the lack of accumulated knowledge and the limitations of techniques and opportunities of observation, it would reasonably be expected they would arrive at." (loc. cit.) One should note, however, observes Parsons elsewhere, that "the positivistic systems, to an important degree in the very process of transcending their scientism, reintroduced, in modified form, both nonempirical cognitive components and nonrational components into the picture." See Parsons, Action Theory and the Human Condition, p. 247.

⁴⁵Donald Stone, "On Knowing How We Know about the New Religions," in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds., Understanding the New Religions (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), p. 142.

to a given situation, and since the personal preferences, attitudes and states of consciousness of the one who makes such knowledge possible are not static, one cannot, consequently, at any time boast of being in full command of the whole truth about any given movement. Moreover, with particular reference to the BCS, it is to be borne in mind that this research was carried out during the first generation of the movement. Therefore, many of our observations here may be regarded as only tentative since, as Richard Niebuhr has observed, later generations of any religious group are bound to bring about changes in their teachings, worldviews and ideologies which are remarkably different from those of the preceding generations.⁴⁶

Furthermore, this study is limited to a particular geo-cultural milieu, the Cross River State of Nigeria. We are well aware of, but do not discuss here, the possible and necessary adaptations which the BCS must make as it moves outwards to other cultural groups within and outside Nigeria. A discussion of such processes of adaptation would require a separate full length, sui generis study. However, several considerations have influenced the choice of our geo-cultural area of concern. Among these are, firstly, the fact that Calabar, the Cross River State capital, is the birthplace of the movement and currently its world headquarters and centre of activities, where also lives its founder and pilot. Obu himself says that "the city of Calabar has been the greatest theatre of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism (1929; rpt.: New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

Because of that reason some antagonists of the movement often refer to the movement scornfully as "Calabar Church." Secondly, it is in this part of the country that the movement has, for all practical purposes, made the greatest impact. Thirdly, at the present time, most of the movement's membership live in this part of Nigeria.

In carrying out this project, we were very sensitive to the moral aspects of research. In the course of our research and fieldwork among members and non-members of the movement, we frequently ran into delicate situations and information often about personal relationships within and outside the movement which, without sacrificing the objectivity and substance of our research, were best left unrevealed in these pages, in order to avoid any explosion that might destroy whatever peace and unity that now exist among members of the movement and among themselves and non-members.

Our final methodological consideration deals with the multi-dimensional nature of studies like this one. One of our experiences in studying new religious movements has been the fact that these movements lend themselves to diverse interpretations and theoretical-cum-methodological conceptualizations. For example, one may broach the movements from the perspective of the history of religions, if one is interested in the history of their origins and development;⁴⁸ or from sociological considerations, if one is interested in the social factors that contributed to their origins and development and in their

(Footnote Continued)

⁴⁹ Easter Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Realm of the Holy Spirit (1982), p. 63.

⁴⁸ This is largely what Amadi has done with the BCS.

relationships to the structures of the societies in which they are found, that is, in their social impact; or from a psychological point of view, if one is merely interested in the psychological motivations that lead people to join the movements and in the movements' various methods of conversion. Indeed, one may also approach the movements from the perspective of social organization, if one is mainly interested in talking about the new social arrangements and structures within the movements themselves as social organizations. Furthermore, one may also study the movements from the angle of theology. Indeed, it often appears as if the study of a given religious movement were incomplete if any of these methodological slants were left out. This multi-dimensional methodology is of special benefit to the sociology of religion, because the various related disciplines throw much light on its specific concerns as well as broaden its perspectival horizon.⁴⁹ It is, in fact, good news that such a marriage of approaches is workable, for it shows that all academic disciplines are ultimately members of the same family called knowledge, and are therefore entitatively related. However, unless one is very careful, one can also confuse matters if one tries to lump together holus-bolus the various approaches in a single study. In the end, as one studies these movements it might be worth one's while always to remember this pertinent remark by Anson Shupe:

"That we, as outside observers, give them theological, psychological or

⁴⁹ See David O. Moberg, "Virtues for the Sociology of Religion," Sociological Analysis, 39, No. 1 (1978), p. 2; see also Roger O'Toole, Religion: Classic Sociological Approaches (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1984), p. 6.

social structural interpretations is our enterprise and not inherently theirs.⁵⁰

For our purposes, however, since the nature of our subject points to such a procedure, a brief historical background of the BCS is given here; then the movement's beliefs and practices are described in great detail, interpreted and analyzed within the framework of social analysis and comparative history of religion. But as we said earlier, our approach is mainly sociological and analytical, and only incidentally historical. This social structural analysis views the BCS as a social organization subject to the same problems and needs faced by other human organizations involving groups of persons, struggling not only with the so-called ultimate questions, but also with questions of growth, organization and survival. This kind of analysis is evident in our concern with the concrete social facts connected not only with the origin of the movement and its beliefs and practices (chapters I, III, IV, V), but also with its structure and organization (chapter II), and with the social impact of the movement (chapter VI). Many parts of our discussion are therefore unavoidably historical. For example, Obu's biography and the beginnings and development of his movement (chapter I), the continuities and discontinuities between the BCS doctrines and those of other religions (chapters III and V), the response of Nigerian society to the existence and activities of the movement (chapter VII), are more or less historical. Thus, in many sections of this study, the line between a strictly sociological analysis and a strictly

⁵⁰ Anson D. Shupe, Six Perspectives on New Religions: A Case Study Approach (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), p. 235.

socio-historical analysis is rather thin. After all history belongs in the ambience of sociology. That is why one may legitimately speak, for instance, of the sociology of history or of the sociological history of (something). Indeed, as Hill has said, in the end, "sociology at large is often regarded as an imperialistic discipline, which swallows up its academic neighbours....",⁵¹

With these prefatory matters behind us, we now proceed with our first chapter, in which we take a brief look at the biography of the founder and leader of the BCS and the beginnings of his movement.

⁵¹Hill, A Sociology of Religion, p. 266.

CHAPTER I

OLUMBA OLUMBA OBU AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE BCS

. . . an understanding of the motivation and drives of the leader doubtless require (sic) insight into his biography and psychology.

--Roy Wallis¹

Although the origins of religion in general cannot be a scientific question, the origins of particular religions can be. . . . For example, the scientific study of the origins of Islam is perfectly legitimate.

--Bryan S. Turner²

1. A Brief Biography of Olumba Olumba Obu

(a) His birth, birth place, and family background

Anyone who tries to obtain authentic biographical information on Olumba Olumba Obu and his parental background will readily agree with Amadi that "the data on Obu's early life are scanty," and that "little is known of Obu's family background."³ Amadi, in fact, goes

¹Roy Wallis, "The Social Construction of Charisma," Social Compass, 29, No. 1 (1982), p. 27.

²Bryan S. Turner, "Sociological Founders and Precursors: The Theories of Religion of Emile Durkheim, Fustel de Coulanges and Ibn Khaldûn," Religion: A Journal of Religion and Religions, 1 (1971), pp. 35-36; 47 (note 16).

³Amadi, "Power and Purity," pp. 207, 208.

on to suggest, and he might be right, that the apparently deliberate silence on Obu's biography "seems (to be) an attempt by the movement... to be reticent about his early life." "This," continues Amadi, "stems partly out of ignorance, and partly in order to support the notion of his deity."⁴

Indeed, like Amadi, we also found it very difficult to obtain any reliable information about Obu's childhood. One major factor for this difficulty is the fact that there are today in Biakpan, Obu's birth place in the northern part of the Cross River State of Nigeria, very few people who can claim contemporaneity with the man. Neither his parents, siblings, nor close relatives are alive. Even those who can claim contemporaneity with him may not know very much about Obu, having not had much contact with him as a young man. He is said to have left Biakpan at the age of eight, to live with his mother's brother, Kanu Mba, in Calabar, some 140 kilometres or so away, where Kanu taught him trading in drapery. Furthermore, the very few people in Biakpan who know a little about young Obu seem to be sympathizers of the man's mission on earth, and therefore often tend to sugar-coat somewhat their stories about him as if in a conscious attempt to project his alleged supernatural origin. Thus, as far as the story of Obu is concerned, one does not end up with the kind of usually elaborate and fantastic stories that often characterize the founders and leaders of Nigeria's new religious movements.⁵

⁴Ibid., p. 208.

⁵See, for instance, the elaborate biographies of some founders and
(Footnote Continued)

Members of the BCS believe that "to seek to know the origin of Leader O.O. Obu and the source of his power can be likened like spending time seeking the origin of God and the source of God's power."⁶ Perhaps it is for that reason that Obu himself is at best reluctant, at worst altogether unwilling to be persuaded into revealing much about himself. However, he told this writer that he was born in 1918 and that until he himself recently began to tell people his birth year, no one else ever knew about it before, not even his biological parents. Then he went on to stress the spiritual significance of that year. It was no mere accident or coincidence that he was born that very year, he maintained, recalling the worldwide influenza epidemic which had occurred that very year. The outbreak of the influenza was not an "epidemic" as people then and now erroneously took it to be, Obu contended. According to him, what really happened that year was the working of the Holy Spirit to cleanse the world by destroying all its

(Footnote Continued)

leaders of some Nigerian new religious movements such as Josiah Oshitelu (founder of the Church of the Lord Aladura) in Harold W. Turner, African Independent Church, vol. 1: History of an African Independent Church, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967); Moses Orimolade Tunolase (Supreme founder of the Cherubim and Seraphim Society) and Captain (Mrs.) Christianah Abiodun Emmanuel (co-founder of the Cherubim and Seraphim) in J. Akinyele Omoyajowo, Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church (New York: NOK Publishers, 1982); especially pp. 25-45; Michael Agbaraka Samuel Wobo (founder of the Spiritual Healing Church of the Lord) and Garrick Braide (founder of the Christ's Army Church) in Amadi, "Power and Purity;" Gideon M. Urhobo (founder of the God's Kingdom Society) in Daniel Iwayo Ilega, "Gideon M. Urhobo and the God's Kingdom Society in Nigeria," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1982.

⁶ Umoh James Umoh and Asuquo Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star: Facts You Must Know (Lagos: W. & H. Commercial Arts Practitioners, 1979), p. xiii.

evil inhabitants,⁷ and to set up "the New Kingdom of God" on earth, which Kingdom is concretized and objectified in the movement known today as the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. Hence, that he was born that very year, Obu went on to declare, was symbolic of his role as the purifier and deliverer of the world from its many ills. In other words, it was in 1918 that the promised Comforter really made His^a presence felt in the world as the sole powerful spiritual reformer.⁸

Obu further compares his own physical birth and presence on earth to the lightning mentioned in Matthew 24:27, the specific origin of which is unknown but whose influence or effect is felt "across the whole sky from the east to the west." He particularly plays on the phrase "from the east to the west," stressing that although no one really knows his true origin, just as no one knew the biographies of Elijah and Melchizedek, his influence is now being felt from East Nigeria or "the eastern hemisphere" to the Western world (hemisphere). That story about his mysterious origin and his confirmation of the popular claim that he began to perform miracles at the age of five or six, were all we could get from Obu himself.

⁷ Interestingly, the traditional Yoruba of West Nigeria, J.D.Y. Peel tells us, also held the view that the Christian God had sent the influenza as a punishment on the practitioners of the traditional religions, and that the Christian religion was the 'way out of that punishment.' This view, says Peel, was one of the major factors leading to the conversion of the Yoruba to Christianity. See Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 292.

⁸ One's^a imagination comes to a cul-de-sac here as one tries to understand and believe that all who died all over the world in the 1918 epidemic were all evil and wicked.

Be that as it may, we do know from oral interviews that Olumba Olumba Obu was the first and only survivor of three children (two boys and one girl) born to a peasant couple in relatively comfortable economic circumstances by village standards, in the "little, hitherto unheard-of village of Biakpan in the Akamkpa Local Government Area of the present Cross River State". The name "Biakpan" is interpreted by Brotherhoods to be a derivative of two Efik words,⁹ obio and akpan. The former word variously means village, town, city or nation. The latter means "the first son;" but it can also mean "important" as in akpan nkpo (important thing). According to Brotherhoods, the full meaning of Biakpan, therefore, is "Obio Akpan Abasi" ("the City of the first Son of God").¹⁰ Also, in view of the spiritual importance which Brotherhoods bestow on the village (see chapter three, section 13), Biakpan may also be interpreted to mean "important City or Nation." One devotee of the BCS expresses these affectionate sentiments about the place:

If you are not one of the sons of God, you cannot live in BIAKPAN because BIAKPAN welcomes only sons of God. . . . But you, O! Biakpan, the one too little to get to be among the nations of the world, from you has come the one who is the ruler of the whole world, whose origin is from

⁹ Efik is the official language of the Cross River State of Nigeria spoken by most indigenes of the State; but there are also many other ethnic dialects within the State. Obu preaches and teaches mostly in Efik. His sermons and Bible lectures are later translated and published in English. If his audience is mixed, he preaches or teaches through a translator.

¹⁰ See Emmanuel Ndarake Udoh et al., Biakpan: Paradise Regained and Epistle to All Elects of God (1973?), p. 3; cf. SCC Minutes, August 11, 1973, p. 4. The Efik word "Abasi" means God or the Supreme Being; when spelled with small "a" at the beginning the same word refers to the gods, deities or spirit beings.

early time, from the days of time indefinite.
That here on earth there still exists a revealed
Beulahland, a modern Bethsaida, a modern
Nazareth! Wonderful! Unbelievable it sounds.¹¹

The village itself originally had between six hundred and eight hundred inhabitants. But with the establishment in 1963(?) of the rubber plantation there by the Cross River State government, the population of the place has now risen to about a thousand. Its northern and western neighbours are the Ohafia peoples of Imo State, while it is bounded on the east and south by the Ikun and Ukwu Ibom ethnic groups of the Cross River State respectively. In the early days, the Biakpan people had much religio-cultural and trading contact with the Ohafia people whose language (Ibo) the Biakpans also speak, in addition to their own dialect, Emom-eBiakpan, and Efik. This contact often resulted in feuds over boundary and trade issues. Like the Ohafians, the Biakpans are historically known to be a very pugnacious and piratical people, and there are many recorded instances of fierce fighting between the two peoples. On many occasions, the Biakpans plundered the canoes and boats of the Ohafians and other neighbouring peoples travelling on the Biakpan-portion of the Cross River.¹² The relationship between the Biakpans and Ohafians gradually worsened over the years to the extent that today, Obu himself tells us,

If you pass through Ohafia to Biakpan, the people (of Ohafia) will certainly ask you why you should go to Biakpan. . . . They will do everything to discourage you from going to

¹¹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹² See an account of such tribal conflicts in O.O. Obu, The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2 (1980), p. 39.

Biakpan.¹³ No Ohafia man says anything good about Biakpan.

The main occupation of the Biakpans is subsistence farming, supplemented by fishing and petty trading. However, since the establishment of the rubber plantation many Biakpans have found full-time employment at the plantation, and therefore do farming and fishing only on part-time basis. The plantation has improved the per capita income of the Biakpan people substantially. The new general manager appointed for the plantation in 1981 was a pastor of the BCS. In 1983, a Calabar-based newspaper accused him of patronage, stating that he "ensured that new appointments went only to members of the sect, while promotions were enjoyed by such members only."¹⁴ This same general manager is also reported to have displayed "conspicuously" in his office at the plantation's headquarters the photograph of his ordination beside Obu's portrait!¹⁵

Close to sixty-five percent of the population of Biakpan still practise Nigerian traditional religions staunchly. Indeed, this part of the country is notorious for its many "native doctors," traditional religious specialists or diviners, sorcery, witchcraft, and black magic. It is precisely because of this kind of religious background that many orthodox Nigerian Christians conclude that Obu's movement is nothing but a camouflage of the Biakpan traditional religious system, and that he obtains his spiritual powers from that system. Obu himself is not

¹³ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

¹⁴ Sunday Call (Calabar), February 20, 1983, p. 6.

¹⁵ Ibid.

unaware of this public opinion about his birth place. He, in fact, admits that, because of that public image of his native land, no person, "especially Ohafia people," would believe

that God has reincarnated in human form¹⁶ in Biakpan. . . . No Ohafia man will believe your story that Biakpan is the city of New Jerusalem, the city of God, but he will believe . . . that there is human meat (i.e. abode of cannibals), witchcraft, mermaid and concoctions. But definitely the true words of God cannot be found in Biakpan, because had God gone¹⁷ to Biakpan, He would have passed through Ohafia.

The Ohafia people, Obu goes on to say, believe that those who go to Biakpan "only go to be initiated into secret cults and societies, because they believe that Biakpan is the centre of witchcraft, mermaid and concoctions. . . . to the people of the area (Ohafia), Biakpan is always connected with evils rather than good."¹⁸

¹⁶One of the pillars of Brotherhood faith reads as follows: "To members of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, Leader Olumba Olumba Obu is God in human form. He is Jesus Christ back on earth. . . . Leader Olumba Olumba Obu is not a human being. He is God in human form." See Umoh and Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, pp. xvii, 2. We shall come back to this question of Obu's deity in chapter three (section 7).

¹⁷The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 38. As stated before, Biakpan is bounded on the north and west by the Ohafians, who are also adamant practitioners of Nigerian traditional religions. There has been much religious and cultural cross-fertilization between the two peoples. Thus, when Obu imagines what the Ohafians would say about God passing through their ethnic community on his way to Biakpan, the implication is that if God could choose to reincarnate in a place like Biakpan so strongly entrenched in traditional religious practices, why would he (God) not also choose to reincarnate among the Ohafians who are also as deeply rooted in the indigenous religious system? Also, geographically Ohafia still serves as the shortest link between the two States.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 39.

The remaining percentage of Biakpans are confessionally Presbyterians,¹⁹ most of them combining elements of Christianity and those of the traditional religions in their religiosity, a phenomenon of syncretism characteristic of most Nigerian Christians. Because such a large percentage of Biakpans are still practitioners of the traditional religions (which the BCS preaches against), Obu describes his birth place as "a closed society which does not believe in introducing any change in their tradition."²⁰

Obu's father's name was Olumba Obu. His father thus gave his first name to his first son; that is how the young man's full name came to be Olumba Olumba Obu, in keeping with the naming pattern in this part of the country according to which a child's first name is immediately followed by the first name of his/her father with the family name or surname coming last. Actually, senior Olumba's favourite name for junior Olumba was Koko-Ete (which literally means "Father's name-sake" in the Efik language). Young Olumba's mother's maiden name was Ibum (or Ibhun) Mba.

Although young Olumba's parents could not be said to have been rich even by the standards of those days, they were nonetheless known to have lived quite happily and contented with their lot in life. Neither the birth year nor death year of either parent is known; but one of our most reliable informants, an elderly man who claimed to be over ninety-nine

¹⁹ According to Obu, Presbyterianism was brought to Biakpan by Scottish missionaries in 1919, but has since made no progress because of Biakpan's adherence to the native religions; see ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

years old at the time of our interview in 1983, informed us that young Olumba's mother passed away before his father. This same informant also said that young Olumba's parents were both Presbyterians, and that senior Olumba had come to embrace the Brotherhood faith before his death,²¹ which means that he died after 1956 when the movement officially came into existence. Another informant told us that both parents died "before the (Nigerian) civil war started" (in 1967).²² Ibum Mba had died before the birth of the BCS.

We do not know much about the social background of Leader Obu's parents. About all we know is that his father hailed from one of the ruling families in Biakpan, and that were it not for his spiritual calling, young Obu would have been the next to "sit on the stool" (i.e. on the "throne").

The popular BCS version of Obu's biography begins from the time the young boy was just five or six years old, at which time, it is said, he began to show signs that he was an unusual, even supernatural child. Obu himself recalls: "I was enlightened by the Father about the people in the World and their state of sins when I was five years old."²³ Elsewhere he says: "I was not yet five years when I knew all things."²⁴ He also claims that it was at the age of five that he requested that his father should stop calling him Koko-Ete and begin to

²¹ Interview with Chief Kanu Ikpezu, November 26, 1983.

²² Correspondence from Pastor Kenneth E. Bassey, dated March 25, 1985.

²³ Prophets' Handbook, p. 12.

²⁴ Our Lord Jesus Christ the Alpha et Omega, p. 45.

call him Etubom, an Efik word which means "Master" or "Teacher." His father is said to have co-operated, as also did all the villagers later when they became acquainted with the young boy's mysterious ways and utterances. From that time until his death, Senior Obu became known and addressed as "Ase Teacher" ("Teacher's father"). At the age of five also, young Olumba is reported to have occasionally gone around his neighbourhood, especially in the evenings, jingling a small handbell and summoning his playmates to prayer in which he is said to have led out. On such occasions, he would reportedly ask his playmates not to call him Olumba any longer but to address him as "Teacher." That, it is said, was the beginning of what is today the BCS, starting as it did initially as a company of playing tots and growing into an international movement.

Young Obu is said to have got along well with his playmates and prayermates all the time, always preferring the pleasure of others to his own pleasure and convenience. He never quarrelled with or revenged any even when he had cause to do so. Instead, he would teach them to "love one another," and he is said to have practised what he preached.

One of the many stories about young Olumba's mysterious behaviour runs as follows: In the course of his "teaching" one day, one of his "pupils" misbehaved. The "teacher" thought it was necessary to discipline this pupil--just for his own good. So he gently spanked the pupil concerned. The latter ran home crying. His parents wanted to know what had happened to him on the playground. He said: "The teacher spanked me." His parents, who probably had not yet heard about this "teacher," wanted to know who it was. The crying tot led both parents to the playground where Obu stood teaching. He pointed at the young teacher and said: "That's the teacher who spanked me." The surprised

parents approached young Olumba and asked him, among other questions, who had made him a teacher. Obu is said to have replied: "If you had known me, you wouldn't have asked that question. But I must tell you now, that I am a teacher sent by God." This particular incident and others of its kind which followed, continued to baffle both Obu's parents and their neighbours.²⁵

It is also reported that one day in 1923 or 1924, at the age of five or six, Obu performed his very first miracle which confounded the entire village of Biakpan. The sad news had reached his parents that a woman in the Anokot compound in the neighbouring village of Onorowanza had suddenly died immediately after childbirth. Obu, it is claimed, was on the playground when he overheard the adults of the family talking about the mishap. He is reported to have interrupted the adult conversation by saying that the woman was not dead but was being "tried," and that his parents should let him go there to pray for the woman to resuscitate. Naturally, those who heard this strange saying from the tiny tot were a little taken aback. But when they appeared to ignore his request, young Obu insisted and persisted, reportedly beginning to behave in some unusual manner. Those who had already known about his play prayers and heard some of the wisdom-laden utterances from his mouth on previous occasions, especially with regard to how people should live amicably with one another, and the treatment of animals with respect and kindness,²⁶ pleaded with his parents to allow

²⁵ Story as told Amadi by one Chief Onugen Agbo Ajung, the Onum (Paramount Chief) of Biakpan; see Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 210.

(Footnote Continued)

him to be taken to the scene of the incident. But the parents, who did not seem to understand exactly what their child was saying, refused to let him leave the house. Thereupon, young Olumba is alleged to have told the spectators who had been pleading with his parents:

I am only waiting for the directives of my Father in heaven and not those of earthly father who cannot stop me from doing the will of my heavenly Father. When I hear from my Father in heaven, I will go there whether or not my parents agree.

A few moments after he had made these remarks, he is said to have begun to speak of a voice which was speaking to him, which only himself was hearing urging him to go immediately to resurrect the dead woman. Thereupon, he ran off to the scene of incident without the consent of his parents. All (except his somewhat displeased and confused parents) who had heard his expressed desire to go to the place of the event, followed him.

On arriving at the home where the death had occurred, he asked to be shown where the dead was. He was led to the room. On getting there, he is said to have asked the wailing crowd to leave the room. They co-operated. Immediately after that, he was heard to be praying for the woman in the local Biakpan dialect:

AWO ASSASAGIM GWE AREMI EYENG AREM OZOI, ADO
ATE YEN ONENWANA EWE URE GIRAI, YEN UGBU GBE.
DEME UVANA. IKUGE ONENWANA EWE UVANA.

(Footnote Continued)

²⁶ Young Obu is said to have refused eating flesh from his this early age, saying that animals were human and sacred and should therefore not be slaughtered for food.

MY FATHER IN HEAVEN, THE CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, YOU SAY THAT THIS WOMAN IS NOT DEAD BUT SHE IS ASLEEP. WAKE HER UP.²⁷

The deceased, whom many had testified to have been stone-dead when young Olumba arrived on the scene, is said to have been resurrected almost immediately, and Olumba is reported to have told her: "Carry your baby," and left the scene.

Naturally, the news of this miracle spread fast far and wide. The curious later flocked into Olumba's family to enquire from his parents as to the identity of this miracle child. Was he a human being, a ghost, a demi-god or a demon? Was this actually the Jesus Christ who had on his previous incarnation similarly resuscitated Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-56) and Lazarus (John 11:11-44)? Amadi sums up the mixed reactions of the Biakpan people to Obu's early miracles as follows:

. . . for the people of Biakpan, Olumba was an unusual child during his early days. Some believed that he was either possessed by the spirit of his ancestors, or a local deity. Others thought he was gradually losing his mind and would in time become a lunatic. A few held that he was simply an extraordinary²⁸ child, destined for an important divine ministry.

But many are still wondering today as to the identity of this miraculous man of Biakpan. When the young man was asked by the curious crowd how he had managed to resurrect the woman, he is reported to have replied: "I am not the doer but He who has sent me." That is the same answer

²⁷Wording of the prayer is as communicated to the writer in correspondence from Pastor Kenneth E. Bassey, dated March 25, 1985.

²⁸Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 214.

he still gives today, more than six decades later, to those who marvel at the wonders he continues to perform.

It is further reported that when young Olumba was old enough to help on the farm, his father asked him one day to accompany him and his mother to the farm. To this proposition the young man is said to have responded: "That's not why I came." When asked to explain what he meant, he said no more.²⁹ At that age, Obu is also alleged to have been able to foresee and predict future events. As Amadi puts it, "he would sometimes go to people's homes to forewarn them of impending disaster or danger to their lives. And those who failed to heed his warnings always did so at their cost."³⁰

Perhaps the main point of interest in all these stories is Obu's age at the time of these early miracles and baffling utterances. If indeed one accepts that these stories are true, then one may conclude that Obu's call to his prophetic/priestly mission was uniquely different from those of other founders/leaders of other Nigerian new religious movements. Unlike his counterparts, Obu's call, as Amadi has rightly pointed out,

was not followed by a period of training under another prophet. Neither was his spiritual power acquired by strenuous spiritual exercise. Rather from his youth, he merely became conscious of his mission. The voice which spoke to him, and through him, which he recognized as that of 'the Father', spoke in grave terms.³¹

²⁹ Interview with Chief Kanu Ikpezu, November 26, 1983.

³⁰ Amadi, "Power and Purity," pp. 212-13.

³¹ Ibid., p. 211.

(b) Obu's education

There are some controversy and inconsistency over the question of Obu's early education. Most of his followers and Obu himself often claim that he never attended school even for a day in his lifetime. That was the claim he made to this writer. However, a number of our informants admitted that he did go to elementary school at least for two or three years and that that was all the education he ever had. For instance, Apostle E.K. Ukpai, Leader Obu's first cousin and the movement's Secretary-Treasurer who said that he lived and grew up with young Obu in the Obu family, claimed that Obu did not have "any form of education."³² Also, a passage in a piece of BCS literature on the supernatural nature of Obu, contains these lines:

. . . Who is he that has never attended any school in life, and yet . . . is a teacher, and teaches with authority? . . . I know of no-one else but Olumba Olumba Obu, who is now in the Kingdom of mankind.³³

Another disciple writes: "Nobody has ever taught Him or has he ever attended school."³⁴

On the other hand, others claim that young Obu did attend school. But even among those in this group there is no consensus as to how long he was actually in school. Some say that he spent only two years in

³² See Apostle E.K. Ukpai, "The Dual Nature of the Universal Leader Olumba Olumba Obu," BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 66; cf. p. 69.

³³ E.U. Udoh, Unsearchable Riches, (1976?), p. 11; cf. M.D. Duke, The Supreme Being: Holy Father Olumba Olumba Obu, (n.d.), p. 61.

³⁴ S.A. Kevin, The Universal Love (n.d.), p. 38.

school; which would mean that he only read up to "Infant Two," that is, the first two years of elementary school. Others claim that he read up to "Standard Three," which would mean that he spent up to a total of four or five years in elementary school, assuming that he did not repeat any year.³⁵ Obu himself is reported to have admitted to one journalist: "I have never attended any theological institute but I went to school as a child."³⁶ But he did not say for how long he was in school.

Although several of our informants (especially non-BCS) maintained that Obu had been a member of the Presbyterian Church, and some that he was previously a member of the Apostolic Church,³⁷ Obu himself has never admitted that he ever attended any other Church or, for that matter, ever received any religious instruction from anyone or ever read the Bible at any time in his life, even to this day. He, in fact, agrees with the reasons which an average Biakpan person gives for not joining Obu's movement:

. . . he has never attended any seminary or Bible college or Training college; his father did not attend any church and so was the mother. How is it possible for him to become a priest without any formal training? He himself never attended any church. . . . he is deceiving his followers.³⁸

³⁵ In those days a child spent the first two years of elementary school in "Infant One" and "Infant Two" respectively. Thereafter, he or she spent a year each in Standards One to Six, terminating elementary school at the Sixth Standard at the end of the eighth consecutive year.

³⁶ Ray Ekpu in interview with Obu, as reproduced in BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 102.

³⁷ Cf. Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 209.

(Footnote Continued)

Agreeing with the person who makes such remarks about him, Obu asserts: "If he says this, he is correct because I have never been a member of any church denomination. I was not baptised into any faith. . . ."³⁹

The only Bible passage any human being ever read to him when he was a young man, according to him, was Proverbs 12:1,⁴⁰ read to him by his uncle who also taught him the only Christian hymn he ever learned to sing. That hymn, Obu recalls, was No. 96 in the Old Efik Hymnbook.⁴¹

(Footnote Continued)

³⁸The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 39. Obu, of course, says that it should not surprise anyone that some in Biakpan do not follow him. Rejection of the prophet by the prophet's people, he believes, is an indication that the prophet is indeed from God. According to him, his rejection by some in his native land is simply history repeating itself: just as his people had rejected him during his last incarnation as Jesus Christ, so it is now. See ibid., pp. 40-43.

³⁹Ibid.; emphasis added.

⁴⁰Proverbs 12:1 says: "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid."

⁴¹The said hymn was an Efik translation of Edwin Hatch's "Breathe on me, Breath of God," the full text of which runs as follows:

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will,
To do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine..

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life

(Footnote Continued)

Even though in all his contacts with Obu this writer never even one day saw him with Bible in hand, there is no doubt that Obu does have a marvelous knowledge mostly of the New Testament. In his sermons and Bible classes, he simply refers his audiences to relevant portions of this part of the Bible in order to buttress whatever he happens to be teaching at a particular time. When one asks how he knows so much of the Bible, having never read it, one is told that Obu is the Author of the Bible, and that it is therefore silly to ask the author of a book how he knows about the contents of his book.

The emphasis on the claim that Obu never attended any school is obviously intended, as one ardent devotee of the movement puts it, "to show how God can employ the foolish people of this world to confound the wise and use the simple things to confound the great."⁴² In other words, this claim is calculated to make both members and non-members of the movement marvel at Obu's supernatural knowledge and omniscience, as did the Jews over Jesus Christ (John 7:14-18), and the people of Mecca and Medina over the Prophet Muhammad whom Muslims believe to have been an illiterate (omi). The claim about Prophet Muhammad's illiteracy is very important to Muslims of all ages, because it is the basis of their collateral belief and conviction that he learned in and through his

(Footnote Continued)
Of Thine eternity.

⁴²M.D. Duke, The Supreme Being: Holy Father Olumba Olumba Obu (1981), pp. 61-62; cf. O.E. Akpan, Life After Death and Mastery of Life (n.d.), p. 116.

heart directly from Allāh. In that sense, the heart, not the head, is the important thing to Muslims. So to Brotherhoods.

Whether or not young Obu received any formal elementary education, it is evident that the man as we know him today did self-teach and self-educate himself to a remarkable and admirable degree. Although he preaches and teaches in the Efik language, Obu can also communicate in the English language, which, again, is a mark of the "educated" person in Nigeria. Thus, we are not dealing here with a mere illiterate visionary as his antagonists always portray him, but with a naturally intelligent, wise and rational individual who possesses a great wealth of knowledge and maturity of thought. These qualities of the man will become obvious in those chapters of this work that deal directly with his teachings and philosophy.

(c) Obu leaves Biakpan for Calabar

Young Olumba is said to have left Biakpan for Calabar at the age of eight to live with his uncle Kanu Mba who taught him trading in drapery.⁴³ As a young man serving his uncle both as an apprentice and a "servant" (house-boy), it is said that during his spare time,

He went about, and in most cases, splitting firewood and cleaning premises for people. He never accepted rewards for his services. Many people who lived in the same vicinity with him testified of his extraordinary kindness.⁴⁴

⁴³ See Ukpai, "The Dual Nature of the Universal Leader Olumba Olumba Obu," p. 66.

⁴⁴ Kevin, p. 40.

It is further claimed that he, in fact, continued this kind of kindness even after he had begun his itinerant preaching. It is said that as he went on his preaching rounds, if he met a helpless woman labouring in splitting firewood he would set aside his spiritual work and split the wood for her. Thereafter he continued his missionary work.⁴⁵ If it is indeed true that Obu actually went about offering free services to others, one would assume that in doing so he was already a living example for the type of life of selfless service he was in later years to expect of a special group of his followers called "Christ's Servants" (see section 11 of chapter four).

After the period of apprenticeship under his uncle which lasted for about ten years, Obu set out on his own as a draper at about the age of eighteen. He is said to have been very popular with his clients and to have been quite successful initially mainly because his customers found him to be very truthful. His popularity with his clients won him the nickname "One-in-town," meaning that he was the only truthful and honest draper in town, since he would truthfully tell his customers the actual cost price of his merchandise and how much profit he was making on it (which was not really much). These customers, it is said, usually found out from the whole-salers the true cost prices of the items concerned. Whatever prices they found out were always in consort with what young Olumba had told them. They kept doing this over a period of years until they were convinced beyond doubt that Olumba was indeed

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

different from other drapers who habitually tried to cheat them by over-charging them.

To enhance his popularity even further, Obu is reported to have shown special love and sympathy towards those who were in dire need of his wares but could not afford to pay for them at once or at all. In such instances, it is claimed, he would either give some of his merchandise free of charge to the very needy or ask them to pay for it instalmentally over a period of time. Quite often his prices were said to be the lowest in town. He did not believe in taking advantage of the people by trying to make too much profit off them. What seemed to have guided his business ethics was his philosophy that: "If you buy something for ten naira and sell at fifteen naira, know that you are a thief; you have cheated Christ."⁴⁶ In fact, Obu later came to believe that one should not sell anything at all or even rent one's house, since all things belong to God:

Since the world and the fulness (sic) thereof belong to God, to whom are you going to sell your article of trade? . . . How can you build a house and advertise for people to rent? You label it 'house to rent'. Are you asking Christ to take the house for lease?⁴⁷

Such is the philosophy behind Obu's policy of not charging visitors who happen to stay at the movement's guest houses. All this may sound like an unusual behaviour for a trader or businessman, but it endeared him to the people, hence his nickname "One-in-town." Because of this unusual behaviour, more and more people flocked to his stall to patronize him.

⁴⁶The Supernatural Teacher, Book 1 (1979?), p. 20.

⁴⁷Ibid.

Consequently, he sold more in one week than did any of his colleagues in two months. Soon Obu's trading business boomed to the extent that he could no longer handle it alone. So he had to enlist the help of a number of house-boys.

Although he is said to have been initially comparatively very successful in his business, Obu soon discovered that trading was perhaps not his real calling. For one thing, he soon discovered that if he wanted to stay in business, he could not continue to give out so much of his merchandise either gratis or on credit. Many to whom he had sold his wares on hire-purchase never paid up. He ~~never~~ even asked them, let alone take any legal action to recover his money. He was too kind and sympathetic a Christian to take such a course of action. For another thing, he came to discover also that, at least in Nigeria, it was impossible to be at once a truthful man and a successful businessman. He articulates this discovery as follows: "There is no businessman who can completely renounce falsehood because of profit motives. How is it possible to demonstrate all the virtues of God by a businessman?"⁴⁸ Since he preferred to remain a truthful, sympathetic and godly man, and could not therefore be dishonest as most successful business people in Nigeria are, his business soon began to collapse. He tells us how this happened:

At first I was a trader but my trading was not progressive. Why? (Because) I did not want to cheat anyone. When I give (sic) out goods on credit, my debtors refused to pay. Since I did not sue them to court, others took advantage to demand goods on credit in order to cheat me. Well, if I were to sue them to law court I would

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

not be a good Christian. The Bible teaches that if you have two shirts and another has none, you should give out to the needy. At God's appointed time, when I had to attend to my call, I forsookeverything and followed God. . . . Now, I have nothing to do with business, food and money. My duty is to preach and pray.⁴⁹

Thus, partly because of failure in business and partly because of a strong sense of divine call to full-time ministry, Obu abandoned his trading and embarked upon full-time ministry at about the age of twenty-six.

2. The Beginnings of the BCS

When asked about the physical beginning of the BCS, Obu's usual and consistent answer runs as follows:

. . . do not seek to know the genesis or origin of Brotherhood for Brotherhood has neither the beginning nor the end. Whoever wants to know the genesis of Brotherhood seeks to disgrace himself and to treat Brotherhood disdainfully and spitefully.⁵⁰

He insists that the BCS, like God himself, is eternal; that is, "Brotherhood was in existence before the world was and when the world was without form," and that "Brotherhood had existed in heaven before it descended to earth."⁵¹ As such, he contends, it is futile,

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 21. One should of course not take Obu seriously when he says that he has nothing to do with business now. As we shall show in chapter six below, there are many money-making activities and a lot of business going on in the BCS.

⁵⁰ Our Lord Jesus Christ the Alpha et Omega (n.d.), p. 7.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 7-8; cf. pp. 17-18.

frivolous and a waste of time for academicians and researchers to want to know when the movement began and under what circumstances. Such an impossible task, he says, is just like trying to find out the beginning of God. Adam, Obu teaches, was the first Brotherhood on earth.

Be that as it may, we do know that while in the trading business, young Olumba also found time for other social and religious activities. Sometimes he would leave his stall in the care of his servants or house-boys in order to go "witnessing for the Lord," that is, to go for Bible studies with and praying for people. After work in the evenings, he was often seen with a raffia bag (in which he is supposed to have carried his Bible⁵²), hanging down his shoulder, going from house to house preaching and praying for people. Amadi tells us that at this time Obu "also practised palmistry as he sold his wares."⁵³ Thus, he had already begun his itinerant preaching. This, in fact, was a continuation of the "ministry" which he had begun at the age of five in Biakpan, and the foundation of what is now the BCS. He was now about eighteen or nineteen years old. From this early itinerant preaching exercise, he got another popular nickname, okongo ekrat ("the man with the hanging bag").

He is said to have been very popular and successful during these beginnings of his mission. It is reported that he could pray many out of sick-beds, and those who were thus healed by him (mainly women and

⁵²Obu's first cousin, Apostle E.K. Ukpai, told this author that young Obu did go about with a Bible preaching and praying to people in those early days of his ministry. (In an interview, February 27, 1981).

⁵³Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 216.

children at first), became the very first members of the incipient movement. Before long, the story of his healing abilities and of the efficacy of his prayers began to circulate far and wide, and the young man, now in his early twenties, soon became the subject of the talk of the town and a precious commodity in the community, sought for by all who had both physical and spiritual problems, and these included people from all walks of life. What made him even more popular was the fact that he healed people without fees, which most of his clients could not afford anyway--a service which neither African traditional healers nor Western-trained doctors could offer free of charge.

As the demand on his time and attention escalated, added to the fact that his trading was no longer "progressive" for the reasons given above, young Olumba decided to quit trading altogether in order to devote more time to preaching and healing and to giving more attention to those who needed his help, whose numbers were now increasing daily by leaps and bounds. Young Obu had by now come to realize, more than ever before, that here lay his real calling and mission. Convinced that "the service of God requires full-time and not a part-time business,"⁵⁴ he quitted his business finally about 1942 or thereabout, and embarked upon full-time ministry. He was now about twenty-six years of age. He did not sell his business as most people would have done; instead, it is said, "he freely gave away all his articles of trade and bade good-bye forever to such business and business life."⁵⁵ This he

⁵⁴The Supernatural Teacher, Book 1, p. 22.

⁵⁵Kevin, p. 40.

did apparently in obedience to some mysterious voice which he is supposed to have heard one day as he was returning from the market.

According to his own account to Amadi, the said voice had

ordered him to do away with all his unnecessary possessions and return to a very simple and natural life. He was to completely discard such things as shoes (including slippers), trousers, jackets, long-sleeved shirts, ties, caps and even watches. He was never to use any of these things again, nor to use any form of transport. His meals were to be small and simple, consisting mainly of fruits. He was again reminded that he was on earth on a special mission, the nature of which called for great humility and simplicity. The fate and salvation of the human race depended on him and the success of his mission. If he failed, the voice warned, the result would be catastrophic for mankind.⁵⁶

From the time he heard that voice in the early 1940s, Obu seems to have been acting and ordering his lifestyle in compliance with the dictates of that mysterious voice. Today he dresses very simply, his clothes consisting only of his red and white soutanes (worn when he is on the pulpit), white T-shirts and shorts, and Efik traditional Ankra wrappers or "loin cloths" (worn on casual occasions, such as when he is receiving his visitors or when he is conducting his Bible classes). He wears neither watches, shoes or sandals. Neither does he any longer dress in the typical Western/European fashion which is the fashion most Nigerians have inherited from their colonial masters. Indeed, Obu is said to have declared: "The first and only time I wore a tie was on December 25, 1944. That was the first and last time I dressed that

⁵⁶ Amadi, "Power and Purity," pp. 217-18.

way."⁵⁷ Furthermore, as he is said never to have travelled out of Calabar since 1954, he therefore has no need for a car. Rather, he walks daily, barefoot, the three or four blocks between 26 Mbukpa Road (the movement's former headquarters) and 34 Ambo Street (their present headquarters) to conduct Bible classes or prayers or attend meetings, etc.

When the following began to increase in number and the demand on his time was becoming even more hectic, Obu could no longer go from house to house preaching and praying. Instead, he began to invite his clients to his residence. But very soon his residence became too small for the number of people that continued to throng into the group. So the group was moved to one of the member's (one Udom Abel's) larger living-room in a thatched mud house at No. 35 Wilki Street, Calabar, which soon became known as a "prayer house."⁵⁸ There, the man's 10ft. by 12ft. living-room became the first Brotherhood bethel and "spiritual hospital," where the searchers for healing met with him morning and evening for prayers and healing sessions. Soon news of Obu's ability to heal chronic cases of illness merely through prayers spread far and wide, and before long the number of sick people who came to be healed tripled in no time. Consequently, it became necessary to look for a place large enough to accommodate the increasing numbers of clients. Shortly, the group moved to a larger accommodation at No. 8 Eton Street, which venue was immediately renamed "the healing home." As the name

⁵⁷Quoted in Umoh and Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star: Facts You Must Know, p. ix.

⁵⁸See BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 76.

of the meeting place implies, the main attraction to this seminal 'movement' was healing and deliverance from the clutches of witchcraft and evil forces. Obu's ability to provide this kind of service has continued to be the major attraction to most members who join the movement today.

Besides his religious activities, Obu also found the time and the opportunity to get actively involved in the social affairs of the Biakpan people both in Calabar and in Biakpan itself. As will be pointed out in chapter six below, Obu strongly believes that being a Christian should not prevent one from participating in the social development programmes and projects of the community in which one happens to find oneself. Indeed, at this early stage of his career, Obu was able to demonstrate his in-born leadership and charismatic qualities during his involvement in the Biakpan community in the Calabar municipality and back at home. He is credited for bringing together the Biakpan people who were scattered all over the municipality and for forming what became known as the Biakpan Union with himself unanimously appointed the grand patron of the Union. His uncle, Kanu Mba, is said to have been the President of the Calabar main branch of the Union which subsequently had branches in Biakpan itself (the Biakpan Patriotic Youth League) and in other places throughout the then South-eastern State (now the Cross River State).

Although Calabar had become the headquarters of the Biakpan Union, all the branches in the State and beyond used to come together annually in Biakpan for the General Meeting where future plans and projects for the social development of the Biakpan Community were discussed. This

General Meeting was always presided over by the incumbent village head of the Community.

Several years after the formation of the Biakpan Patriotic Youth League, reports reached Obu in Calabar that the League's funds were being misused and even embezzled by some of its officers. Obu decided to go there in December 1955 to set things right and to bring the culprits to book. Unfortunately, he did not receive as much co-operation from some of the members of the Biakpan branch as he had anticipated. In fact, he is reported to have met with much opposition in his effort to do proper accounting of the branch's funds. Because of such opposition and lack of co-operation, he returned to Calabar the following January without accomplishing the task he had gone to carry out in Biakpan. He is said to have been so disappointed and unhappy about the situation there at home that he has never again set his feet on the soil of his birth place ever since that time. Obu himself confirms this when he says, while trying to discourage his Christ's Servants⁵⁹ from visiting their families: "Right from January 1956, have you ever seen me returning to Biakpan? . . . In your own case, you are always going home to visit your parents. How many years is it from January 1956 until now (1985?)?"⁶⁰

As he was leaving Biakpan to go back to Calabar that day, he is reported to have told those he met on his way: "I am going back with the key of this village. When I come back here, I will come back with a

⁵⁹On the identity and role of Christ's Servants in the BCS, see section 11 of chapter four.

⁶⁰The Truth about the Christ's Servants (1985?), pp. 106-107.

white robe."⁶¹ Of course Obu had no white robe then; neither had his nascent 'movement' as yet reached Biakpan. But those last words of his on this occasion are now being interpreted by his followers as having been prophetic, meaning that his next visit to Biakpan would be through his new religious movement, symbolized by the reference to the 'white robe' (the colour of the movement's soutane). Today that prophecy is fulfilled as indicated by the pride of place the village of Biakpan now occupies in BCS' ideology and vision of the new age.

Back in Calabar, partly because of the lack of co-operation and opposition he had recently encountered in Biakpan, and partly because of petty jealousies over his position as the grand patron of the Union, the patronage was taken away from him. Obu did not resist the decision of the Union, but is reported to have told its executive: 'Well, if you people don't want progress, then take the patronage away from me. After all, I did not ask for it. It was you who gave it to me freely, and it is you who are taking it away from me. You can keep your patronage.'⁶² The Union and all its branches are said to have collapsed shortly after the position of patron was taken away from Obu, and his followers now give a metaphysical interpretation to the collapse, saying that the Union had to collapse since its foundation (Obu) had been removed.

Meanwhile the young movement continued to expand in the size of its membership and in territory. It was not long before No. 8 Eton Street became too small to accommodate the teeming numbers of people who

⁶¹ Interview with Apostle E.K. Ukpai, February 27, 1981.

⁶² As reported by Chief Kanu Ikpezu in an interview, November 26, 1983.

continued to flock into the group in search of salvation.⁶³ It therefore became necessary for the nascent movement to look for a larger place. They were fortunate to find a plot of land quickly at 26 Mbukpa Road there in Calabar which they bought right away. There was already on the property an old thatched mud house which was about thrice as large as Obu's house at Eton Street. They immediately set about to renovate the old building for use temporarily as their new bethel, "spiritual hospital," and administrative headquarters. Meanwhile, plans were under way to erect a concrete, more permanent building on the property. Members grateful for "what the Lord had done" for them by miraculously healing and delivering them from the clutches of evil forces voluntarily and enthusiastically made generous financial contributions towards the building project. In addition, they also volunteered their labour. Through such enthusiastic collaboration and communal effort of members, a new building was up in no time and ready for use.

1956 is said to be the year the movement "physically manifested" or came into physical existence. However, members believe that metaphysically the movement is as eternal as its founder and leader; that there was never a time when it was not in existence. It was in that year that the movement was formally registered with the Federal Government in accordance with the Federal Republic of Nigeria Land Perpetual Act, Cap. 98. But it was not until March 25, 1964 that the Federal Government granted it the Certificate of Incorporation under the

⁶³For what constitutes salvation in BCS ideology, see section 9 of chapter three.

said Act. It is not quite clear why it took the Government eight years from the date of registration before the Certificate was granted and the movement consequently recognized as a bona fide religious organization. Perhaps the authorities wanted to see whether or not the young movement would survive, for it was very common in those days for many such movements to appear only ephemeraly on the Nigerian religious scene.

On August 8, 1958, Obu's group, now about sixty in number,⁶⁴ moved to the new site at Mbukpa Road. This was also the very day members started to put on their white soutanes for the first time, to mark the official inauguration of the movement. The August Pentecostal, described in section 8(b) of chapter four, was instituted in the BCS to commemorate both the move to the Mbukpa Road station and the official inauguration of the movement. It was also during the August Pentecostal of that year that the movement held its very first baptism service (by immersion) conducted by Obu himself.

(a) The Name of the Movement

Before the registration of the movement with the Federal Government in 1956, the body as yet had no official name. Before then, it was at times known among members simply as Ekuk ('Circle') meaning 'Holy Circle.' But Obu came to kick against that name, because the name Ekuk

⁶⁴The number of members at this early stage of the evolving movement is fulsomely inflated by Amadi who gives it as "about a thousand" ('Power and Purity,' p. 219). However, the number at this stage as given by a pioneer member of the group was "about 60;" see BCS Journal, 1, No. 1 (1982), p. 34. This source was probably not available to Amadi at the time he made this numerical exaggeration.

or "Circle" was the name antagonists had used to refer derogatorily to the movement and also the name some traditional religious specialists used for their own "circles" or secret societies.⁶⁵ At the early stage, the young group was also known among members as "Prayer Band." or Christ's Universal Spiritual School of Practical Christianity. It was in 1956, then, when the group was about to register the movement that they adopted the present name, the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. The meaning and significance of this name are explained and elaborated upon in an early series of three-sequel undated pamphlets respectively entitled What Is Brotherhood?, What Is Cross?, and What Is Star? In summary, the explanation of the name is as follows:

(a) Brotherhood: "Brotherhood means everything created by God. Brotherhood means oneness. God and everything created by Him put together are Brotherhood."⁶⁶ But the word "Brotherhood" is itself not without sociological significance. In an age when the sense of oneness, togetherness, and the traditional community, especially in the African context, has been lost in the advent of the perfervid individualism, loneliness, impersonality, and anonymity of modern technological society, the idea of universal brotherhood of human beings rings a soothing bell in the ears of those who hunger and thirst for friendship, togetherness and community and for a sense of belonging. Probably no other term in any language is powerful enough to evoke the

⁶⁵ See Prophets' Handbook (1965), p. 10.

⁶⁶ What Is Brotherhood?, p. 4.

kind of emotional warmth, loyalty and good will capable of cementing social relationships among the whole gamut of this movement's membership. Indeed, apart from the word love, there is perhaps no sweeter word in any language than the word brother and its feminine equivalent sister. For members of the BCS both brother and sister spell love, a concept which is no doubt the leitmotiv and the cornerstone of Brotherhood ideology. In fact, members say that when they greet themselves in the typical Brotherhood manner: "Peace, brother so-and-so" or "Peace, sister this or that," they are really saying: "I love you, brother or sister so-and-so, and wish you peace of the Father." Apparently this rhetoric of love and brotherhood, more than any other concept, has helped a great deal in making this "family" that prays together to stay together as a "moral community," thus enabling them to see themselves as a social unity.

(b) Cross: To Brotherhoods, the first meaning of Cross is that it "stands for the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of mankind and His death on the Cross so that man may have salvation and eternal life."⁶⁷ Additionally, Cross also signifies the hardships, the thorns and trials which the followers of Christ must experience as they try to walk daily in the footprints of Christ. Sociologically, "Cross means bearing another man's burden without complaining; tolerating all kinds of sinners--the murderers, the thieves, the

⁶⁷ BCS Journal, 1, No. 1 (1982), p. 5.

backbiters, etc."⁶⁸ In this context, Cross also means being loving, humble, forgiving, patient, and charitable in one's dealings with one's fellow men and women.⁶⁹ It also means being enduring, courageous, persevering and steadfast in the face of persecution for the sake God and the gospel.⁷⁰

(c) Star: This "signifies the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ over death through His resurrection and the glory of God granted to Him for the successful completion of the great Divine assignment given to Him by God."⁷¹ In addition, Star symbolizes the crown of glory which, according to BCS teaching, will be put on the heads of all the faithful who will have victoriously borne all the crosses of the Christ road. Obu expresses this notion succinctly thus: "The Cross is suffering one has to undergo and the Star is the glory one attains after having suffered."⁷² According to this teaching, without the successful and victorious bearing of these crosses, there will be no star. Or, as they elliptically express it: "No Cross, no Crown; no Crown, no Star."

⁶⁸ What Is Cross?, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 5ff.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 7ff.

⁷¹ BCS Journal, 1, No. 1 (1982), p. 5.

⁷² SCC Minutes, December 29, 1979, p. 21.

From 26 Mbukpa Road to 34 Ambo Street

It was not long before the 26 Mbukpa Road station became too small to accommodate the thousands that had continued to flock into the BCS in search of refuge from life's ills. The General-Secretary of the movement expressed the need for the second move as follows:

As the number of people afflicted by divers physical infirmities and spiritual sickness increased, it became necessary to put up a separate Healing Home at 34 Ambo Street . . . (the movement's present headquarters) where they Holy Father could administer prayers upon those who sought for them."⁷³

It is to be noted here that what drove the first members to the movement were "divers physical infirmities and spiritual sickness." However, important personalities who, though not having any immediate physical or spiritual infirmities, had heard of Obu's abilities to protect people from falling victim to witchcraft and the machinations of evil men and women, were also attracted to the young movement in search of such protection.⁷⁴

The problem of inadequate accommodation was even more acute during the Pentecostal periods (see section 8 of chapter four) when many more thousands from outside Nigeria joined their Nigerian brethren to observe this Brotherhood haji. As a result, it became necessary again to look for ~~a~~ bigger piece of land to set up more commodious buildings.

⁷³BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 91.

⁷⁴In chapter eight, we shall return to this question of the search for protection against witchcraft and evil forces as the main motive for joining the movement.

Again, they were fortunate to find a new plot of land almost immediately. This time providence had chosen 34 Ambo Street, three or four blocks from the Mbukpa Road station. They did not waste any time in starting the construction of buildings, thus enabling them to move again in the early 1970s.⁷⁵

To begin with, a temporary 20ft. by 40ft. thatched mud "healing home" was erected at the new Ambo Street site "where the Holy Father could administer prayers upon those who sought them."⁷⁶ This temporary structure contained rooms for prayers, the Leader's office, wards for the sick, a store, and a visitors' reception room, and for several years remained the centre of the movement's activities. Other more permanent buildings immediately followed this temporary building, so that by 1977 one found on the new premises the elementary school blocks, the Christ Students,⁷⁷ and Christ's Servants' quarters, the Brotherhood printing press, the large Pentecostal Assembly Hall, the guest house, a two-storey complex housing the Everlasting Gospel Centre and the main bookstore on the ground floor, etc. Meanwhile, work had started on a modern three-storey Secretariat in which are housed, among other

⁷⁵ It should be mentioned here that this move was not total. The RCS still owns the property at 26 Mbukpa Road, and still holds some of its meetings there. In fact, Obu's wife, known in the movement as "the Holy Mother" or "the God-Mother," lives there while Obu himself lives at the new site. He goes to the Mbukpa station daily either for meetings or to conduct prayers or Bible classes. He also makes his holy water and holy oil there (see section 1(f) of chapter five), and members go there to collect their rations of the holy stuff.

⁷⁶ BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 91.

⁷⁷ On the identity and role of Christ's Students in the BCS, see section 10 of chapter four.

departments, the General Secretary's office or Leader's office, the Treasury, the Registry, several offices, a branch of the bookstore, etc. Rooms on the third floor are reserved for guests. This complex was officially opened on August 6, 1980.

Thus, right from the day it was moved to the Mbukpa station until this day, the BCS has been on its way towards great accomplishments in regard to its successes in the rapid growth of membership, social and religious impact (see chapter six), and in other infrastructural achievements--achievements which have continued to evoke among both friends and foes feelings of amazement, admiration, curiosity, fascination and attraction. As mentioned in our Introduction, today the BCS has made inroads into almost all the continents of the world, with its congregations all over Black Africa, in the United States, South America, Great Britain, West Germany, Australia, Japan, India, and the West Indies, and boasting of a total membership of nearly two million within its short history of only three decades. Moreover, the movement is still making great strides towards other territories of the world, including recent missionary journeys in September 1983 to Rome (where they visited the Pope) and in October 1984 to Jerusalem the specific purpose of which trip was "to go and inform them that the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit (rolled up' in the person of Obu) are now on earth."⁷⁸

⁷⁸ The New World Missionary: A Journal of the New World Missionary Fellowship (1985), p. 23. See pp. 22-24 of this journal for the full report of the missionary journey to Jerusalem, and SCC Minutes of September 2, 1983, p. 14, for the report of the missionary trip to Rome.

3. Obu's Role in the BCS.

As we shall point out in the next chapter, the whole structure and organization of the BCS are tenaciously centred around the person of Olumba Olumba Obu. The movement moves and has its being because Obu is. He is the sole spiritual as well as physical Head and Leader of the movement in every sense of the titles 'Head' and 'Leader.' In other words, Obu is the movement's recognized and incontestable facile princeps. Indeed, his official title 'Leader' is pregnant with sociological significance, for sociologically defined, a leader is

one who leads by initiating social behaviour; by directing, organizing or controlling the efforts of others; or by prestige, power or position. The effective stimulus-giver in social behaviour. . . . one who leads by means of persuasive qualities and voluntary acceptance on the part of followers.

Both Obu himself and his followers know him first and foremost as the Leader of the movement, notwithstanding whatever other metaphysical titles may have been given him (see Appendix B). Obu is not simply the movement's Founder, Messiah, Saviour, Prophet, Teacher or Evangelist. He may, in a limited sense, be all these, but none of these roles fully describes his sociological role in the movement as does the well-chosen title 'Leader,' which, incidentally, is the title he seems to prefer to others, as when he says: 'The Leader's name is on the stamp and so

⁷⁹ Dictionary of Sociology, ed., Henry Pratt Fairchild (Paterson, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1964), p. 174.

you should address him correctly as Leader O.O. Obu, the Sole Spiritual Head.'⁸⁰

In so far as Obu is the source and point of reference in matters of belief and practice, he consequently represents the very source of divine knowledge, especially as he is regarded as divine by most of his followers. It is in this sense that he may be said to possess what Roy Wallis calls "epistemological authoritarianism," which he defines as "the location of authority, for what constitutes either the truth or the path to salvation in some source beyond the individual member."⁸¹ In this sense, both Obu himself and his followers see him as the sole repository of truth. This fact is implied in his official title "The Sole Spiritual Head" of the Brotherhood of the Cross (quite often of the Universe). It is also worthy of note that Obu himself did not choose this particular title for himself; rather, it was arrogated to him by his followers, indicating that they do, in fact, recognize him as such--as the incontestable guide to all truth, peace, happiness, serenity, health, and redemption. By virtue of his control over the content of his sermons, his interpretation of the Bible, and the fact that his prayers are thought by members to be more efficacious than any others, Obu occupies a special position as the movement's main and

⁸⁰ Prophets' Handbook, p. 10; emphasis added.

⁸¹ Roy Wallis, "Yesterday's Children: Cultural and Structural Change in a New Religious Movement," in Bryan Wilson, ed., The Social Impact of New Religious Movements (New York: The Rose of Sharon Press, 1981), p. 119; cf. Roy Wallis, The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976), pp. 11-18; see also Kenelm Burridge, New Heaven New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), pp. 111, 138, 155.

infallible interpreter of values. Members' belief in the effectiveness of his prayers and healing, their conviction of his deity and consequent purity of life add up to legitimize Obu's central position in the movement. He is also seen by members as the very nexus of the movement. As far as these members are concerned, the movement is inseparable from the personality of their Leader. Obu is the movement and the movement is Obu. Indeed, the movement is so closely linked with the personality and name of the Leader that members are often referred to by outsiders as "the Obu people." More will be said in the next section and in the next chapter about Obu's pivotal position in the movement.

4. Obu's Personality and Personal Charisma

Obu is without doubt a religious leader with tremendous magnetism and charisma, the latter term defined here not merely as the hold a leader has on his or her followers, but as defined more comprehensively by Max Weber as

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. . . . this peculiar kind of deference is paid to prophets, to people with a reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom. . . . It is very often thought of as resting on magical powers. . . . What is . . . important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his 'followers' or 'disciples'. . . . It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. This (recognition) is freely given and guaranteed by what is held to be a 'sign' or proof, originally always a miracle,

and consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader.⁸²

Obu is able to evoke in his followers feelings of obedience or loyal submission. When he preaches, for example, members of his audience are swept off their feet and feel that they are indeed in the very presence of God and that they must submit to his overwhelming authority and power. As a way of saying "amen" to the "truth" proclaimed by him, members habitually knock their foreheads thrice on the bare floor or ground--whether the proclamation is made in the Leader's living-room, congregation or elsewhere. Indeed, one might even say that Obu's followers are like iron filings that have been polarized by a powerful magnet. He is recognized by them as supernatural or superhuman and consequently they feel that they must be submissive, loyal, devoted and obedient to his will.

Obviously, Obu has been able to inspire or arouse such confidence in his followers. One way in which he has been able to do this is through his personal qualities. Obu easily impresses one as a good-natured, happy, loving, hospitable, tolerant, patient, forgiving, charitable, impartial, benignant, graceful, merciful, honest, moderate, universal, exemplary, spiritual, and, above all, truthful and trustworthy person. In addition to all these qualities, the man has a tremendous sense of humour, which quality is certainly a big plus for a

⁸² Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (1947; rpt. New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 358-59.

man who talks or preaches for hours on end. And the sincere, ever-present smiles radiating from his countenance certainly adds something positive to the man's naturally winning personality. In fact, it is the daily testimony of his followers that the man does indeed possess all these qualities. Such, then, are the virtues which strengthen, encourage and inspire his followers to develop and maintain such tremendous confidence in him. Here, therefore, lies the source of the man's personal charisma. Also, members are encouraged to maintain this confidence in him because, so they claim, Obu is able to provide them with the needs that are dear and close to their hearts--physical and spiritual healing, protection from all harms and dangers, health, wealth, children, and the rest. It would seem that without Obu's ability to provide these needs, his influence might not have been as strongly felt by his followers, his personal virtues notwithstanding.

In his well-known analysis of the charismatic leader,⁸³ Weber acknowledges the precarious nature of charismatic leadership when he discusses the need for the charismatic leader to constantly demonstrate his/her charismatic qualities. For instance, if the leader in question claims possession of magical or supernatural powers, he/she must constantly give tangible proofs of these powers in some miraculous performances. Only thus can the charismatic leader keep his/her followers convinced of his position as a charismatic leader, and

⁸³ See Ibid., pp. 358-73; cf. Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, with intro. by Talcott Parsons (1922; rpt. New York: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 46-47. Cf. Paul Johnson Doyle, "Dilemmas of Charismatic Leadership," Sociological Analysis, 40, No. 4 (1979), 315-23; Robert C. Tucker, "The Theory of Charismatic Leadership," Daedalus, 97 (1968), 731-56.

followers convinced of his position as a charismatic leader, and consequently overcome the precariousness of his/her position. Weber reminds us, for instance, that

the entire basis of Jesus' legitimation, as well as his claim that he and only he knew the Father and that the way to God led through faith in him alone, was the magical charisma he felt within himself. It was doubtless this consciousness of power, more than anything else, that enabled him to traverse the road of the prophets. . . . There was always required of such prophets a proof of their possession of particular gifts of the spirit, ⁸⁴ of special magical or ecstatic abilities.

This seems to be exactly the path Obu has trodden, at least in the view of his followers, as is evident from the literally hundreds of verbal and written testimonies given by them. As Weber has also pointed out, such testimonies are crucial to the charismatic leader because they tell him that his/her followers do indeed believe in his/her charismatic power and leadership. The followers' belief and recognition of their leader's charisma are very important to the leader in the continued maintenance and strengthening of his/her position as a charismatic leader. In the case of Obu, his followers' testimonies enable him to test his popularity, bolster his legitimacy, and assure the continuity of his position.

But followers' belief and recognition of their leader's charisma do not in themselves automatically endow the leader with charismatic qualities. Anyone does not begin to display charismatic qualities simply because a group of people behind him/her decide to believe or recognize

⁸⁴ Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 47.

that he or she has charisma. There must already be some measure of charismatic qualities in the prospective or potential leader for the prospective followers to recognize or believe in. What the followers' recognition does to the intrinsic charisma of the potential or beginning leader, it seems to us, is to bring it into conspicuousness and maturity. It is this eduction of the inherent charisma of the potential leader into distinction and prominence that is, ultimately, the function and consequence of the followers' recognition of and belief in his/her charismaticity. Only in that context can it make sense to say that a leader is charismatic because he or she is believed and perceived by his/her followers to possess charismatic qualities. In the final analysis, however, the whole question here is fundamentally circular, like the familiar theoretical question as to which comes first, the chicken or the egg. To stress the point either way is to engage in an unfruitful hair-splitting argumentation.⁸⁵

What is important for our discussion, however, is the fact that one strategy which Obu uses in strengthening his position as a charismatic leader is to make his followers continue to believe in his charismatic

⁸⁵ Speaking specifically of political charisma, Laciné Sylla has suggested that it is possible for a person who had no charisma previously to be "invested" with "charismatic attributes" by his/her followers. See Sylla's "Succession of the Charismatic Leader: The Gordian Knot of African Politics," *Daedalus*, 3, No. 2 (1982), p. 21. That kind of temporary and superficial "charisma" is not what we have in mind here, however. For an excellent discussion of charisma as a reciprocal, interactional process between a leader and his/her followers, see Roy Wallis, "The Social Construction of Charisma," *Social Compass*, 29, No. 1 (1982), 25-39; and Roy Wallis, "Charisma, Commitment and Control in a New Religious Movement," in Roy Wallis, ed., *Millenialism and Charisma* (Belfast: The Queen's University Press, 1982), pp. 73-140.

powers, and thereby to make them as dependent as possible upon him for meeting their spiritual, social, emotional and material needs. This strategy provides one useful explanation as to why the BCS is such an attraction to cross-sections of Nigerian society and beyond. As is evident from the testimonies of his followers, Obu's movement has no doubt served the social, spiritual, emotional and material needs of thousands of people within and outside Nigeria. But one must hasten to point out that these needs are not to be seen necessarily as those that have to do with "deprivation" as that term is usually understood in general contexts of adherence or membership in new religious movements. As will become clear from this study, there are numerous people in the BCS and, indeed, in other Nigerian new religious movements who cannot be said to be materially or socially "deprived" in the sense of lacking material wealth or social status. However, this class of people may feel a need for protection against the evil eye of enemies or against the dubious machinations of evil beings--human and non-human--hence their seeking refuge in the new religious movements.⁸⁶

But the very charismatic qualities which attract potential members to a religious movement may also accentuate their dependency on the charismatic leader. If the leader exploits this situation, his/her followers are not likely to achieve any measure of autonomy, individuality, and critical thinking.⁸⁷ A completely dependent and

⁸⁶ We shall pursue this argument, in chapter eight, concerning the main reason why people flock into the the BCS.

⁸⁷ See Arthur J. Deikman, "The Evaluation of Spiritual and Utopian Groups," Update: A Quarterly Journal on New Religious Movements, 9, No. 2 (1985), 2-12.

subordinate followership can be counter-productive and perilous in more than one way. In the first instance, the dependent followers may come to challenge, resent and resist their subordination. As Peter Blau has pointed out, the very social processes that promote stabilization of a power structure may also stimulate the emergence of opposition movements, and it would seem that the greater the success of the leader in establishing his/her power on subordinates, the greater the likelihood that eventually his/her power will be resisted.⁸⁸ In fact, there already seem to be danger signs in the BCS in the direction of resentment and resistance on the part of some members of the movement.⁸⁹

In any case, Obu seems to have diluted considerably the possibility of resistance to his power, at least while he is still alive. He does this by assigning positions of responsibility to those in the movement who would likely resist his power--the educated, the successful business men and women, the professionals, and the influential civil servants. These categories of members are appointed or promoted to "powerful" sacerdotal positions of authority such as pastorship, apostleship, prophethood, and bishophood or "Father's representatives" in and outside Nigeria.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the BCS is structurally divided up into over thirty administrative units called "Fellowships" (see section 10 of the next chapter), each with a "leader" or chairperson. Hence Obu

⁸⁸ See Peter M. Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life (New York: Wiley, 1964), pp. 314-21.

⁸⁹ See Father's Prediction for 1981, pp. 69ff.

⁹⁰ See the next chapter for a description of the functions of these various offices.

may, in some sense, be said to be sharing some of his power with these chairpersons and their "Fellowships." In this way, Obu has somewhat "decentralized" administrative power in the movement, although most of it remains within his breast, since the decisions taken by his "representatives" or by the "Fellowships" must be approved by him before they are implemented. In this connection, Obu has, in fact, explicitly and unequivocally stated: "No meeting has the right to do anything without prior approval by me..."⁹¹

Obu seems also to have "decentralized" spiritual power by infusing some of it in those of his followers engaged more directly in such spiritual activities as seeing visions and healing. He believes, for instance, that the visioners in the movement get their power from him and that, if he chose to do so, he could "close up the power of vision" and thereby make them spiritually impotent.⁹² This statement was made in the wake of increasing misuse of this power by some visioners within the movement. But Obu has decided not to take away the power of vision from them because, however some of the visioners may misuse it, it is still influential in winning new converts to the movement. In this connection, he says: "I allow it for the meantime in order to bring in new members."⁹³ Obu also claims that it is he who gives healing power to those of his followers engaged in spiritual healing. To such members he says:

⁹¹ SCC Minutes, December 22, 1973, p. 22.

⁹² SCC Minutes, April 28, 1979, p. 21.

⁹³ Ibid.

Even you who could not pray and fast, the Father tells you 'Go, I have given you power to heal' ... when you go to your stations and sick persons are brought to you, you pray over them and tell them to go that all is well with them and they go. ... not long after, they come back to testify that their sicknesses are gone and you become surprised.⁹⁴

Thus, while Obu himself does perform these activities, he has wisely "divided" the labour in order to make it possible for some of his "spiritually qualified" followers to exercise some measure of spiritual power in the seeing of visions and performing spiritual healing. Here again most of the spiritual power rests with Obu himself. But by somehow "decentralizing" administrative and spiritual power and sharing some of these with a few of his followers, Obu has shown tremendous leadership wisdom and insight in thus establishing a barrier against any possible resistance to his overall power. A leader who wants to have far-reaching and lasting influence upon his/her followers must show such wisdom and insight. He or she must somehow make his followers feel important, powerful and able to accomplish things on their own. With such feelings of importance, these followers in return give their leader maximum support and co-operate with him/her in his/her attempt to maintain his/her power and charisma. The way this works, as Roy Wallis has very clearly illustrated in the case of "Moses" David Berg, is that when a leader recognizes, respects, and shows affection to and reinforces the worth of his or her followers, the followers in return reciprocate to the leader the same or even greater recognition.

⁹⁴ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, Book 1, Nos. 1 & 2 (1981), p. 19.

affection, loyalty and reinforcement of his or her personal worth and charisma.⁹⁵ Thus, the relationship between the charismatic leader and his followers, as Wallis has concluded, is "an interactional process, in which each party secures status in an exchange of recognition, affection and reinforcement of worth."⁹⁶ This means that as the leader makes it possible for certain ones of his followers (especially his appointed officers) to be recognized as in some ways sharing the power and authority of their leader, these followers in return continue to boost the authority ego of their leader. In doing this, the officers are indirectly boosting their own power ego and significance as persons who are privileged to be so close to and work with such a leader.

Thus, one very effective way which Obu uses in influencing his followers and keeping them his friends is that he rarely gives them the impression that he is the "sole leader" in the dictatorial and domineering sense of being a leader. He treats them as people not as pawns, and encourages them to feel strong and powerful. He consults them through the different "Fellowships" and makes them feel that their opinions are important.

Yet Obu sometimes uses appropriate opportunities to impress upon his assistants that he himself is a leader with a difference, and that they can never really measure up to his unique leadership. Their "leadership" must remain but tributary and subservient to his unique divine leadership, and that their position can be recognized as

⁹⁵ See Wallis, "The Social Construction of Charisma," pp. 25-39.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

authoritative only as long as they remain obedient to his directives. Indeed, Obu was most unequivocal about this when he addressed a meeting of his "representatives" from all over the world. On that occasion he said in part:

Those who cannot obey me can go and build their own organizations--not Brotherhood. . . . the Representatives must be given all due respect, but he has no authority of his own. . . . All brethren (representatives) take their instructions from the Leader; no one is permitted to add thereto or subtract therefrom. . . . Brethren, you know that all B.C.S. work hangs on me. Your role is that of obedience and strict adherence to instructions; you are not to add or subtract from those instructions or apply your worldly wisdom to them.

In the same context he says again:

Note from now that a Leader's representative is merely a channel through whom I pass all instructions to the bethels and through whom all project ideas, plans, problems, achievements and all matters affecting the general well-being of the bethels flow as information to the Leader for approval and blessings. The Leader's representative has no power to do anything by himself; he only acts only on the basis of specific instructions from the Leader. This proviso covers representatives at all levels: bethel,⁹⁸ district, divisional, area and zonal levels.

As if all this were not clear enough, he says elsewhere: "Leader O.O.

Obu is the Sole Spiritual Head of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star in the whole world. You must take instructions from him."⁹⁹ He, in

⁹⁷ Extraordinary Meeting of Leader's Representatives, held June 26, 1976, pp. 10-11.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁹⁹ Prophets' Handbook, p. 5.

fact, maintains this stand when he makes the following remarks elsewhere:

No one in Brotherhood, be he who, has the right to suggest, dictate or advise the leader. . . . When you are blind, how then can you show me what to do? In fact this was the first advice and instruction that I received from my Father. That I must not receive any advice or instruction from any human being because they are all liars. Therefore do not get yourself worried, keep your pieces of advice to yourself for the wisdom that I use is not of man.¹⁰⁰

He says further: "I attach no importance to your advices and suggestions; I go only according to the Father's instructions."¹⁰¹ On another occasion he declares: "Those who would like to be leaders, chiefs, teachers, etc., should go to the kingdom of Satan, because in the Kingdom of God, there is already a Leader, a Teacher and a King."¹⁰²

One may wonder how his followers take such bold remarks which, to some, may sound dictatorial. But most of his followers take such remarks in good faith and without any question. For example, one of the most prominent of them once said:

. . . it is foolishness for a lower man to want to lead a being operating from the plane of higher nature. . . . No man can advise the Christ (Obu) because he is an embodiment of all life, knowledge and wisdom inclusive.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ The Light of the World, vol. XV (n.d.); p. 8.

¹⁰¹ SCC Minutes, March 22, 1975, p. 23.

¹⁰² SCC Minutes, December 22, 1973, p. 26.

¹⁰³ Akpan, Life After Death, pp. 115, 116.

Another respected member of the movement also said that their Leader "does not want any assistance or seek anybody's advice. He is all wisdom himself."¹⁰⁴ Yet another follower claimed that "none is fit to be his (Obu's) adviser nor is there anyone to be compared to him."¹⁰⁵ Such responses from a cross-section of Obu's followers to his apparent authoritarianism should, of course, not surprise anyone who knows the degree of godly awe and reverence with which these members regard their Leader. Indeed, how else would they be expected to react to the authoritarianism of a leader whom they regard as very God in human form? In fact, we only have to remember here the implications of Weber's definition of charisma and the charismatic leader to understand and appreciate why Obu's authoritarianism may go unchallenged for a long time, if indeed it ever will be challenged or questioned.

Having thus far attempted to reconstruct from the best available sources a brief biography of the founder, pilot and pivot of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, and concisely outlined the history of the movement's genesis, we now turn to a consideration of its structure and organization, the twin axis on which it moves and has its being.

¹⁰⁴ E.B. Eyo, The Truth Has Come, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ The Students' Handbook, p. 29.

CHAPTER II

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BCS

As the secular government is hierarchically arranged, so is the government in the Kingdom of God arranged. In the house of God the same system of government is adopted. . . . the church officers are hierarchically ranked.

-- Olumba Olumba Obu¹

I have arranged things orderly.

--Olumba Olumba Obu²

The government and administration of the BCS are loosely hierarchically structured. We say "loosely," because as will be pointed out in the present chapter, there is no official hierarchy of officers in the movement itself. The "hierarchical" arrangement

¹The Elders' Handbook, pp. 30, 31. But see a contradiction to this statement: "Brotherhood of the Cross and Star is the New Kingdom of God whose system of Government is completely different from that of the world, likewise the system of administration. . . . It is quite wrong and sinful for anybody to imagine and introduce the worldly system of doing things into Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. Those who practise such should know that they are fighting the will of God, and that they are quite far away from the knowledge of truth." --Obu, SCC Minutes, September 2, 1983, p. 30. These exact words were first spoken by Obu in 1979; see SCC Minutes, December 29, 1979, p. 38.

²SCC Minutes, April 28, 1979, p. 23.

followed here is strictly our own invention based on our overall impressions of what Obu himself has said, often conflictingly, about each category of office. Since the movement does not believe in constructing a fixed hierarchy of offices for reasons given later in this chapter, our "hierarchical" arrangement here is no doubt open to question and challenge by members of the movement. So be it. Of course, the pintle or pivot of this hierarchy is none other than charismatic Olumba Olumba Obu. Every policy and ideology of the movement either emanates directly from him or, if arrived at by his appointed "representatives," must be approved by him before implementation. He is, therefore, the abc of the movement--its apex, its base and its centre.

Within the framework of Obu's apical, basic and central position in the movement, however, he has developed an amazingly workable functional reticulate structure as far as the physical and spiritual administration of the movement is concerned. In this chapter, we describe the different roles that have been created for the effective administration of the movement, punctuating the chapter with a brief theoretical analysis of the sociological implications of BCS role structure.

In the first instance, the sacerdotal officers of the movement are classified into categories as described below. Each category of officers is identified by the colour of the girdle around their waist. The colours of the girdles have no expressed symbolic significance, however; they mainly serve as physical markers or identifiers of spiritual offices. It is these girdles that distinguish the ordained officers from the rest of the congregation. Otherwise all members wear

long-flowing white robes or soutanes, made to the same design or style to symbolize equality among the members. Also, as most members agree, this common uniform eliminates competition for fashion and the showing off of expensive fashionable attires by the well-to-do and the possible consequent feelings of inferiority on the part of the poor and lowly who could not afford to enter the "dressing contest" as in the mission churches, they say. Members also believe that at a time when Nigerians seem to be intoxicated with imported fads and fashions, this common simple uniform is in itself a lesson for all Nigerians to learn about thrift, modesty, sobriety, and the right priority of values.

All categories of officers in the movement are ordained once-and-for-all during the Easter Pentecostal of each year (see chapter four), to coincide, according to BCS teaching, with the time when Jesus Christ supposedly ordained his twelve apostles or disciples. The following, then, are the various "hierarchical" categories of officers in the BCS.

1. Leader's Representatives

A Leader's representative is someone either appointed by Obu himself or by individual bethels from any of the categories of officers discussed below to represent him. If a person is elected by a bethel to be a Leader's representative, that person's election must be approved by Obu prior to that person's assumption of that office. In many ways, a Leader's representative is Obu's chief confidant(e). He or she is

supposed to be "similar to the Leader in one form or another,"³ especially in terms of high morality, spirituality, self-discipline, and knowledgeability of the movement's teachings. He or she "must be a believer and must adhere to and practise the teachings of the Brotherhood."⁴ However, a Leader's representative "need not be a bishop, pastor, prophet, or elder, but any man (or woman) of truth of any rank, a perfect believer in God."⁵ In fact, a Leader's representative need not be an ordained officer at all; rather, "a brother or sister from the congregation can be a Leader's representative."⁶ A Leader's representative may be appointed to be in charge of a bethel, a district, a division, an area, or a zone. In all cases, all other officers in each of those territories are under the Leader's representative in that territory and are accountable to him or her. Of his or her specific role in relation to that of Obu, the latter makes the following clarification:

... a Leader's representative is merely a channel through whom I pass all instructions to the bethels and through whom all project ideas, plans, problems, achievements and all matters affecting the general well-being of the bethels flow as information to the Leader for approval and blessings. The Leader's representative has no power to do anything by himself; he acts only on the basis of specific instructions from the Leader.

³ SCC Minutes, June 26, 1976, p. 6.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

Thus, the Leader's representative in the BCS merely plays the role of Weber's "instructed representative," that is, of the representative whose powers of representation are strictly limited by, and subject to, the powers, authority and directives of the person(s) whom he or she represents.⁸ He or she is thus controlled absolutely by the Leader and through him or her the Leader controls the movement just as absolutely. In spite of his or her power limitations, however, the Leader's representative in the BCS is so important that Obu says of his or her role:

Whenever you gather together in any bethel, district, division or zone to do anything in the name of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, if my representative is not there the meeting is null and void. Any non-personal correspondence that comes to me from bethels, meetings, etc. that does not pass through him is tantamount to wasted effort.

He also says: "If any bethel is without (Leader's) representatives, I regard the bethel as not existing."¹⁰ The specific functions of the Leader's representative are summarized as follows in a BCS document:

(a) He is to act as Patron for all Brotherhood Fellowship Meetings in his area of jurisdiction. He therefore has right to attend all Fellowship Meetings and to give them all necessary physical and spiritual inspiration, matured (sic), fatherly advice and blessings; and not open confrontations with any of the Fellowship officials.

⁸On the various types of representation, see Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, pp. 416-23.

⁹SCC Minutes, June 26, 1976, p. 8. Obu adds, however: "You can, of course, still write directly to the Leader about your personal problems; this provision does not cover that category of correspondence" (*ibid.*).

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 22.

(b) All members within his area of jurisdiction must accord them full recognition and respect so as to enjoy the full benefit of Father's divine blessings for that particular Bethel, Area or Zone.

(c) As the Holy Father's physical Representatives in their various areas of jurisdiction, they must be seen to be giving full and adequate protection to all Brotherhood members, full-time workers, movable and immovable properties.

(d) Every Leader's Representative must be seen to be a true embodiment of the Holy Father to both members and non-members alike in all their actions and utterances.

(e) Every Leader's Representative must be seen to be a practical and active member in the Leader's Representative Fellowship Meeting. They are to discuss and to solve all their common problems and disputes during their zonal and national Leader's Representative Fellowship Meetings.

(f) The International Meetings of the Leader's Representatives held here in Calabar at the start of every Pentecostal Meetings must be attended by all duly appointed Leader's Representatives so as to be current with events and the Holy Father's directives and blessings both for you as a person and your Bethel in general.

2. Bishops

At the time of this writing, the BCS has only four ordained persons (all men) in this category throughout the entire world, two in the United States (Bishops James Ellerbe and Felix Meyer) and two in Nigeria (Bishops Roland Obu and Etuk). With the exception of Bishop

¹¹ SCC Minutes, September 2, 1983, p. 32.

Etuk who had been ordained in his former church before he joined the BCS, all these bishops were ordained in the United States. BCS bishops are identified by their purple girdles. Their territory of operation consists of a "diocese comprising ten pastoral districts."¹² Considering the infrequency with which people are appointed or ordained to this particular office, one might conclude, as indeed Amadi has done,¹³ that this is perhaps the highest of the sacerdotal offices in the movement after the office of Obu himself. However, both Obu himself and some members of the movement insist that this is not necessarily so, and that official titles are merely labels which do not necessarily imply superiority of one office over another. As Obu puts it, "the name (title) is mere semantics."¹⁴ He further says: "We are known in this kingdom as brothers or sisters. Other names like pastors, deaconesses, prophets or students are mere labels, like trade names."¹⁵

3. Elders

Each BCS bethel must have at least an elder, no matter how small its total membership. Elders are usually appointed by each local bethel, but such appointments must be approved by Obu before the appointed persons begin to act in that capacity and are recognized by

¹² Ibid., p. 31.

¹³ See Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 476.

¹⁴ The Elders' Handbook, p. 34.

¹⁵ SCC Minutes, January 3, 1981, p. 3.

members of that bethel. Upon the approval and confirmation of the appointment of the newly elected elder, Obu sends someone, usually his representative in charge of that territory, to go and ordain or "consecrate" the new elder. Only after this consecration may he or she begin to function as an elder. As the work of the local elder is primarily that of looking after the physical welfare and well-being of his or her bethel, he does not wear a girdle which, as mentioned before, is a physical marker of a spiritual office.

Yet, eldership is such an important office in BCS organizational structure that Obu refers to it as "the foundation of the church of God" and as "the greatest of all the positions in the house of God."¹⁶ He also says that "the name elder is a rank above all other ranks yet in the house of God."¹⁷ This, he explains, is so because if the elder of a local branch of the movement or bethel or station, as these branches are more commonly called, is spiritually weak, chances are that the other officers of that branch will be contaminated by his or her spiritual sickness and therefore become spiritually, morally and even physically incapacitated and inefficient, since it is the elder who is supposed to be the spiritual guide, moral example, and the physical support to all other categories of officers in that branch. Apart from this lone instance of alluding to one office or role as being superior to or more important than the rest, Obu generally sees all the roles in

¹⁶ The Elders' Handbook, pp. 9, 21.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 52; cf. p. 53.

his movement as being indispensable for the life, health and longevity of the movement.

One of the duties of the local elder is to visit the sick, pray for them and anoint them. As the local 'welfare officer,' he or she also visits the homes of members and where he or she comes across any misunderstanding among members of the family, he or she is entitled and authorized to try to settle such disputes. Furthermore, in the absence of any of the other categories of officers in a particular bethel, the local elder assumes their responsibilities, especially the responsibilities of preaching, baptizing, and child dedication or child blessing. In general, the local elder is a sort of liaison officer coordinating and overseeing the activities of the other officers assigned to his or her bethel. When these other officers, who are itinerant, arrive at his or her bethel, it is the duty of the local elder to see that these guest workers have suitable accommodations and to see that appropriate arrangements are made for their upkeep during the duration of their assignment at that bethel.

Of course, as also in the case of other categories of BCS officers, an elder must be a husband of one wife or wife of a monogamous husband. He or she must not be a drinker of any alcoholic beverages; must be a person of good report and his or her children must be known to be well-behaved and disciplined. Moreover, the local elder must not be involved in any aspects of African traditional religious practices, such as the pouring of libation, visiting traditional religious specialists or diviners for the purposes of utilizing their services; or getting involved in cultural fraternities and societies; or taking part in traditional funeral rites, etc. Furthermore, an elder must be a humble

person and not an angry person. In addition, he or she must be self-controlled, assiduous and faithful in work. But unlike the other categories of officers, elders may have regular employment and thus be in the position to help the needy in their bethels.

4. Senior Prophets/Prophetesses

This category of officers is identified easily by the colour of their girdle which is yellow. Otherwise, the only difference between them and ordinary prophets/prophetesses is the length of experience in the movement's service; but both categories share a common responsibility--itinerant evangelism. Officially, the officers in these two categories are expected to engage in full-time evangelism and to have no regular "secular" employment. However, the economic realities and constraints of modern life are at war against such official demands, and Obu understands.

5. Prophets/Prophetesses

This category is made up of prophets and prophetesses. These officers are not easy to identify by the colour of the girdle they wear, because they wear all colours (depending on the year of ordination) except yellow (reserved for senior prophets and senior prophetesses), red (reserved for apostles, evangelists, deacons and deaconesses), and black (reserved for pastors).

The titles "prophet" and "prophetesses" as used in the BCS should not, however, be confused with the meanings they have in the

Judaic-Christian and Islamic traditions or among the so-called millenarian or messianic movements where they are used (in the movements) simply to refer enthusiastically to the leaders of the movements. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Obu is not so much looked upon as a prophet in the senses in which these other traditions conceive of a prophet or a prophetess. Rather, he is regarded by his followers first and foremost as the leader par excellence, in the fullest sociological sense of the word.¹⁸ True, he is sometimes considered to be a prophet when he is seen as a seer of future events or as a spokesman for God.¹⁹ But his active role in the movement is that of leadership, not prophethood. However, if one follows Weber's sociological definition of "prophet" as "a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or command,"²⁰ then Obu may also in that sense be regarded as a prophet..

Neither are BCS prophets or prophetesses regarded as biblical or quranic prophets and prophetesses. BCS prophets and prophetesses do not have to possess the gift of "seeing" or "foreseeing" the future. That function is performed by another category of "spirituals" in the movement called visioners or "spirited children."

¹⁸ See the sociological definition of "leader" on page 70 above.

¹⁹ At least on two occasions Obu has referred to himself as the "mouthpiece" of God, which is also one of the names he gives to Jesus Christ, thus putting himself on par with Jesus. See, for instance, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Mouthpiece of God, especially pp. 17-18, for the implications of this title; cf. What Is Cross?, p. 3; The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 33.

²⁰ Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 46.

Once ordained, a BCS prophet/prophetess is always a prophet/prophetess and may function in that capacity within the movement anywhere he/she goes. In fact, except for the local elder, all ordained officers of the movement are itinerant, that is, they may be moved around from place to place. As Obu puts it, these ordained officers "are all for the whole universe and they are expected to operate around the globe."²¹ The main responsibility of this category of officers, as indeed of all categories of the movement's officers, is evangelism.

6. Senior Pastors/Pastors

The only difference between senior pastors and ordinary pastors is that the former have a much longer service experience than the latter. Pastors are identified by their black girdles. An apostle may be "promoted" to pastorship. Apart from his/her main task of "spreading the words of God," the duties of the pastor are in many ways similar to those of the local elder. Among other things, he or she superintends over the physical and material well-being of members of his/her congregation, takes charge of the movement's property in the area under his/her supervision, settles disputes between couples and among members, and draws up the programmes and plans of activities for their congregations. The pastor is also authorized to conduct marriages. The only main difference between the pastor and the local elder is that he/she is peripatetic while the local elder is not. But he or she is

²¹The Elders' Handbook, p. 27.

expected to work in close cooperation and collaboration with the local elder.

Pastors are again classified according to the expanse of the territory over which they superintend. Thus, some are "area pastors," who are in charge of a small area consisting of only a handful of bethels. There are also "district pastors" who are in charge of territories larger than an "area." Furthermore, there are "divisional pastors" who take charge of either a political division within a State or a "division" as defined by the movement. In either case, a division is naturally larger than both an "area" or a "district" and, as in the case of the latter, is determined by the number of bethels within that territory. Finally, there are "State pastors" who are responsible for the smooth-running of BCS activities within a given State, and to whom the area pastors, the district pastors and the divisional pastors in that State are accountable. In all cases, "the pastors are the administrators. They arrange the whole system of administration of the church to see that things are kept in their ship-shape order. They are or should be versed with the mechanics of management."²²

²²Ibid., p. 30.

Fig. 1: Pastoral Hierarchy

State Pastors

Divisional Pastors

District Pastors

Area or Zone Pastors

Local (Bethel) Pastors

7. Senior Apostles, Senior Deacons/Deaconesses, Senior Evangelists

The work of this category of officers is exactly as that of those in categories 6 and 8. The only difference between officers in this category and those in 6 and 8, like the difference between prophets/prophétesses and senior prophets/prophetesses, is mainly difference in longevity and experience in service.

8. Apostles, Deacons/Deaconesses, Evangelists

Each of the officers in this category wears a red girdle as a distinguishing mark of their office. Functionally, there is no strict difference among them. They are all supposed to be preachers of the gospel. Or, as Obu puts it, "they have no other occupation than to

preach the words of God and serve in His temple by day and by night."²³

Because there is no strict difference among the two, an evangelist may also function as an apostle.

Fig. 2: Hierarchy of Officers

Obu=Sole Spiritual Head=Leader

Leader's Representatives

Bishops

Elders

Senior Prophets/Senior Prophetesses

Prophets/Prophetesses

Senior Pastors

Pastors

Senior Apostles, Senior Deacons/Deaconesses, Senior Evangelists

Apostles, Deacons/Deaconesses, Evangelists

²³Ibid., p. 28.

9. Spiritual Council of Churches (SCC)

Inaugurated on December 24, 1966, this Council is the highest policy-making body in the BCS. Indeed, members refer to it variously as the movement's senate (as in a parliamentary setting) or as the movement's highest court of appeal. Obu himself calls it "the Supreme Court" that surpasses all others in the spirit."²⁴ It convenes on every second Friday of the month.

The Council is made up of chairpersons and secretaries of all the Fellowships and Associations in the movement (see below), and some ex-officio members appointed by Obu himself. All the Fellowships and Associations, whose finances it audits and controls, are under the supervision and direction of this body which itself is further regarded as "the father of all Fellowships,"²⁵ or "the head of all the Fellowships."²⁶ Or, as Obu further defines it, "the Spiritual Council of Churches Meeting is a very great and most important meeting in Brotherhood, and it controls all other meetings."²⁷ It is to this Council that problems which are too difficult to handle at the individual Fellowships and Associations are brought. As one member puts

²⁴ Prophets' Handbook, p. 2.

²⁵ SCC Minutes, April 22, 1983, p. 12.

²⁶ SCC Minutes, January 2, 1982, p. 5; cf. p. 13.

²⁷ SCC Minutes, December 22, 1973, p. 22; see also p. 23.

it, "it is the highest court in the Brotherhood where unsolved problems are finally dissolved."²⁸

One of the Council's specific responsibilities is to settle disputes among members, as they are forbidden to take their grievances to court. Members are taught that it is a shameful thing for them--saints--to take their problems to judges who are but unbelievers and sinners. Obu's specific instruction on this matter is unequivocal: "Take not the trouble between members to non-members. We have more intelligent people to settle matters."²⁹ From a sociological point of view, the Council is to be seen here not only as a conciliatory body but also as an organ for consolidating group cohesion and solidarity. It performs the latter function by encouraging members to resolve their differences and problems within the Brotherhood family without exposing themselves to outsiders (generally considered enemies) who might seize the opportunity to ridicule or blackmail them and the movement. The underlying philosophy here is that the family that tries and succeeds in settling its internal problems will always stay together. In many instances this philosophy has worked for them.

But the Council may also be called upon to settle disputes among non-members who take such disputes to them.³⁰ For example, ethnic groups and villages in the Cross River State who have differences among themselves are known to have brought their problems (usually land

²⁸ SCC Minutes, January 2, 1982, p. 5.

²⁹ SCC Minutes, August 19, 1972, p. 18.

³⁰ See SCC Minutes, April 25, 1981, p. 10.

problems) to this Council for peaceful resolution. An instance of this was the now famous 'Ambo accord' (so named after the BCS headquarters at 34 Ambo Street, Calabar) in 1979 when two fighting villages in the Obubra Local Government Area, Ebom and Usumutong, brought their problem to this Council for settlement. The two villages had been fighting for several years over a piece of land which each had claimed was its own. The hostility between them had been so intense that the inhabitants of either village could not pass through each other's village without being killed. Already several lives had reportedly been lost in the feud on both sides.

After the two villages had exhausted all avenues of finding a lasting solution to the dispute without success, they finally brought the matter to Obu and the SCC and it is said to have been resolved amicably to the satisfaction of both parties. After the resolution of the problem by the Council, a member of the movement proudly 'testified' as follows: 'Leader Olumba Olumba Obu has demonstrated in theory and in practice that the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star does not limit its activities to preaching, prayers and healing but seeks positive solution to the social problems of his country.'³¹ He was right. A similar incident of land dispute between the village of Mkpani and another village in the northern part of the Cross River State was also settled by Obu and the SCC a year later.³²

³¹ Anon., 'The Ambo Accord,' BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 33.

³² For a fuller account of this land struggle as narrated by Obu himself, see The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 87.

10. The Fellowships and the Associations

The membership of each Brotherhood bethel is divided up into a number of smaller units called "'Fellowships'" and "'Associations.'" Each Fellowship and Association is an autonomous body comprising its own set of officers and executive committees. The number of Fellowships and Associations in each bethel depends on the membership strength of that bethel. At the time of this writing, each of the larger bethels throughout the world has over thirty of such Fellowships and Associations in the BCS. (See Appendix C for some of the names of the Fellowships and Associations).

Officially, this organizational set-up aims at the effective co-ordination of the movement's activities. But as it turns out, each Fellowship or Association functions as a kind of guild socialism, participating with the others in a relatively healthy competition in which each one tries to "out-succeed" the other in the number of programmes and projects it plans to execute "for the Lord," and in the number of new converts it brings into the movement. The outcome of such competition includes a tremendously structured co-ordination of the movement's activities, increasing financial and material wealth for the movement, and rapid gains in membership.

More importantly, the Fellowships and Associations, because each of them is so much smaller than the total congregation of a given bethel, perform the crucial function of maintaining the original personal love, warmth and closeness which attracted most members to the movement in the

First instance. As most sociologists from Georg Simmel³³ down to our day know, when a social group becomes too large, it tends to lose sight and track of many of its members, because it can no longer keep up with the essential task of keeping personally in touch with them, and because the more people an organization has to provide a sense of identity for, the thinner its effectiveness to do so. In such a situation, the initial personal touch and care within the group are lost; the original tie of solidarity and community becomes weakened, and the group consequently faces the risk of losing many of its members. Obu has been quite insightful and foresightful in encouraging the formation of these Fellowships and Associations as a bulwark against the possible loss of those members who otherwise would no longer find the movement to be a viable place to feel at home--a place to be recognized, loved and appreciated.

We have in this chapter been considering the role differentiation in the BCS. The various roles which we have described are sociologically essential for maintaining the present smooth structure and organization of the movement. These roles, as we have observed, provide opportunities for the appointed officials of the movement to supervise rituals and administer sacraments in places where the Leader of the movement cannot (would not) be physically present (although, we will remember, he is believed to be spiritually omnipresent). The role structure also gives the various officers the opportunity to develop their leadership potentials.

³³ See, for instance, Kurt H. Wolff, The Sociology of Georg Simmel (New York: The Free Press, 1950), p. 90.

The present size and rapid expansion of the BCS make such role differentiation as we have described both necessary and mandatory. But the success of this role structuring is to be attributed, ultimately, to the original charisma of the founder/leader of the movement. In fact, role differentiation or role structure in the long run belongs to that general process which Weber called the "routinization of charisma."³⁴ That is to say, role structure is a dimension of that process whereby the unique powers of the charismatic leader become translated into organizational and bureaucratic structures which, in turn, deal with the nitty-gritty problems of everyday routine for which the various roles have been created to cater--for example, healing the sick by the visioners and healers, taking care of the physical property of the movement and caring for the poor and needy by the elders, handling the administrative matters and settling disputes among members by the Spiritual Council of Churches, and so on. Thus, in the different roles and offices of the BCS, Obu's charisma passes through, so that one sees not a particular officer or worker in these roles but Obu always. This seems, in fact, to be the intended meaning of the rather theologico-metaphysical answer "The Father does it" or "The Father is doing his work," when one asks a worker or an officer of the movement, "How's your work going?" One may say, therefore, that BCS role structure is but the routinization or bureaucratization of Obu's personal charisma; that is, the passing on of his leadership powers to his officers for the purposes of dealing with problems of administration.

³⁴ See Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, pp. 363-73.

and those that have to do with the economic and social realities of his followers' secular existence.

Obu's passing on of his leadership powers to his officers involves the twin process which Weber variously called the "'charisma of office'" (Amtscharisma) and the "'charisma of ritual."³⁵ -That is, when he bestows official authority or power on his officers or representatives, the "'charisma of ritual" involved or needed to authenticate or legitimize that authority or power, are his "'holy" orders or ordination. When the officers have thus undergone this rite of passage (ordination), they begin to enjoy the "'charisma of office" from that time on.

But the "'charisma of office" which the officers of the BCS enjoy must be distinguished from the original charisma which belongs to their Leader. Obu's charisma is what Weber called "'primary charisma" which cannot be handed down to another. This kind of charisma, according to Weber, belongs naturally to a unique person like a prophet, e.g. Jesus, Muhammed or other unique persons like Stalin. The charisma enjoyed by the officers of the BCS is of a different category and is subdivided by Weber into (a) "'secondary charisma" which, he said, can be artificially produced or attributed to a person or object; (b) "'hereditary charisma" (Erbcharisma) which may be handed down, by virtue of office, and becomes institutionalized or "'routinized," that

³⁵ Ibid.

is, this kind of charisma moves further away from that of the original founder or leader.³⁶

Samuel Eisenstadt has remarked that Weber's recognition of such standardized, organizationally controllable charisma

indicates that the test of any great charismatic leader lies not only in his ability to create a single event or great movement, but also in his ability to leave a continuous impact on an institutional structure--to transform any given institutional setting by infusing into it some of his charismatic vision, by investing the regular, orderly offices, or aspects of social organization, with some of his charismatic qualities and aura. Thus here the dichotomy between the charismatic and the orderly regular routine of social organization seems to be obliterated--to be revived again only in situations of extreme and intensive social disorganization and change.³⁷

It is to Obu's credit that he has been able to leave a continuous impact on the institutional structure of the BCS, so much so that the key officers of the movement, such as the Leader's representatives, pastors, apostles, visioners, etc., are able to exercise some degree of the original charisma of their Leader. Thus, when the generality of Brotherhood membership obey or carry out the instructions of these officers, they do so not simply from respect for the persons of the officers, but from respect for the person whom these officers represent.

We find, then, that in the structure and organization of the BCS there is a remarkably successful networking of charisma and authority

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Max Weber, Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building, ed. with an Introduction by S.N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. xxi.

(power of control), which makes one wonder about the validity of Weber's contention that charisma and authority or "institutional routines" do not mix. As he put it: "Charisma is opposed to all institutional routines, those of tradition and those subject to rational management."³⁸ To us, far from being at loggerheads, charisma and institution seem to complement one another in Brotherhood organizational structure.

Jim Kiernan has distinguished between two types of authority.³⁹ The first kind is "jurisdictional authority," which, according to him, is the authority that gives an individual legitimate right to make decisions on behalf of others, enables him to control all aspects of his followers' or subjects' lives, and to some degree places him in the position where he is responsible for the wellbeing and behaviour of those over whom the authority is exercised. Kiernan calls the second kind of authority "functional authority," which he defines as that type of authority entrusted to or thrust on an individual by a superior for the purpose of carrying out a specific function or a number of functions. The major difference between the two types of authority, he says, is that whereas the person with jurisdictional authority can make decisions that affect those under him, the person with functional authority may not make such decisions. The latter only implements

³⁸ Max Weber, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, 1946; trans. and ed. by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 52.

³⁹ See Jim Kiernan, "Authority and Enthusiasm: The Organization of Religious Experience in Zulu Zionist Churches," in Religious Organization and Religious Experience, ed. J. Davis (London: Academic Press, 1982), p. 177-79.

decisions already made by a higher authority. Kiernan further states that the powers of a functional authority "lack the continuity and all-purpose character of jurisdictional authority."⁴⁰ As we have seen from our discussion in this chapter, both types of authority are operational in the BCS. Obu has jurisdictional authority while his officers have functional authority.

The impression was unintentionally created both in the opening epigraph and in the very first sentence of this chapter that the offices of the BCS are "hierarchically" structured. As used there, that word "hierarchically" can be quite misleading and must therefore be read cautiously. The word was not intended to convey the impression of any progression of official superiority or importance; neither does it indicate any ascending or descending order of official or functional importance. Rather, the word was used there simply to indicate the variety of ecclesiastical responsibilities in the BCS, without implying, as we have said, that one office or role is hierarchically higher in importance. In other words, our definition of "hierarchy" is simply "role structure." We are guided in this definition by the fact that the founder and leader of the BCS himself does not, ultimately, see any role as being more important than the other. Instead, following the Pauline metaphor of the functions of the different parts of the human body (1 Corinthians 12), Obu sees all roles in the movement as being equally important for the proper and smooth functioning of the one body that is the BCS. In fact, he seems to be particularly suspicious of

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 178.

hierarchization of any sort. That is why he discourages his followers from thinking of their different offices or roles in terms of hierarchy.⁴¹ According to him, each role or office in the movement is important in its own right, and its importance cannot be logically compared with that of another role. Indeed, Obu prefers to think of all the various official titles as being merely classificatory and not as being indicative of any hierocratic authority.

However, there is at the present time a certain degree of confusion among the membership, even among the officers of the movement themselves, regarding this matter of official hierarchy. Some say that this or that office or role is more important than this or that one. Others say something completely different. Thus, at the moment members hold slightly different views as to the structure of the movement's sacerdotal or ecclesiastical "hierarchy." That Obu himself is not unaware of these differences of opinion among his followers on this matter, is evident when he remarks:

It is common . . . knowledge that members in Brotherhood struggle for supremacy over others. The members continue to inquire about the highest position in this Kingdom. Prophets claim to be in the highest hierarchy. The pastors claim they are the highest, and the Apostles also stake their claim to the headship of the hierarchical structure of the Kingdom. Others who claim to be the highest are the Christ's Students and the Christ's Servants.⁴²

Obviously, Obu does not see the matter as his followers do. Rather, he insists that "no one is greater than the other in the service of the

⁴¹See, for instance, Chastity and Celibacy, pp. 38, 39.

⁴²Ibid., p. 38.

Lord."⁴³ Indeed, for him the various titles of church offices are simply "trade names,"⁴⁴ or "mere semantics."⁴⁵ He says further that the only reason that he retains these "trade names" in the role structure of his movement, is because he wants to remain faithful to Apostolic tradition of the early Christian Church in which the names for the various church officers first appeared. He expresses his reasoning on this matter thus: "If we do not have these different names, the teachings of Christ which said, 'He appointed them as Apostles, Deaconesses, Evangelists,' etc., would not be fulfilled. B.C.S. has come to carry on the teachings of Christ from Genesis to Revelation."⁴⁶

Since the various titles of church offices are for him only "trade names" or "mere semantics," Obu has not taken the time and the trouble--because he does not consider the issue important enough--to explain once-and-for-all whether there is indeed any hierarchical difference among the various offices. Perhaps he does not want to say to one category of officers, "You are the highest on the hierarchy;" and to another, "You are the next highest;" and so on, until he would have to tell those at the base of the hierarchy, "You are the lowest on the hierarchy." Perhaps things might just as well be left as they are now, because a strict and rigid hierarchy might cause among the membership unnecessary petty jealousies, unhealthy competition and

⁴³Prophets' Handbook, p. 2.

⁴⁴SCC Minutes, January 3, 1981, p. 3.

⁴⁵The Elders' Handbook, p. 34.

⁴⁶SCC Minutes, January 3, 1981, p. 3.

eagerness for promotion on to higher rungs of the ladder, human beings being what they have always been--jealous beings. For that reason, Obu's unwillingness to spell out a rigidly-structured sacerdotal hierarchy may be seen as a wise and calculated strategy aimed at keeping at bay the consequences of human jealousy.

The organizational structure of the BCS described and analyzed in this chapter could not stand without some ideological foundation. Undergirding that foundation is the movement's system of beliefs and doctrines. It is to an examination of the content of that doctrino-belief system that we now turn.

CHAPTER III

BROTHERHOOD BELIEFS AND DOCTRINES

In particular, the sociological perspective is based on a recognition that the meaningful reality of the adherents to a particular set of religious beliefs forms an integral part of the field of study.

--Michael Hill¹

. . . the doctrine in Brotherhood is not derived from any other church or organization; it is got from heaven directly.

--Olumba Olumba Obu²

It is Obu's conviction that the messages of God to humankind have been corrupted down through the ages, prior to the physical establishment of the BCS. He says precisely:

From the time of Adam to the time of Christ the Gospel that people received was borrowed. This is the first time that mankind is receiving teaching directly from God Himself. The teaching of Moses was adulterated; that is why it includes the burning of candles and the counting of rosary beads. Our Lord Jesus Christ in His own (first)

¹Hill, p. 17.

²Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 67.

advent went to the Church,³ therefore His teachings were slightly adulterated.

According to Obu, the teachings in the BCS are new both in their source and content, consisting mainly of those "'many things'" Jesus Christ could not tell his first disciples because they were not spiritually ready then to bear them (John 16:12). Neither Moses nor Abraham, says Obu, had any knowledge of those "'many things'" of which Jesus spoke. He adds that the only person who should have known those things was Adam, but Adam committed fornication and consequently fell short of grasping the whole truth.⁴

In this chapter we shall attempt a descriptive analysis of selected beliefs and doctrines of the BCS, with a view to indicating the basis of its ideologies and practices, since the beliefs and doctrines of a movement are the blocks with which its worldviews (Weltanschauungen) are constructed, which worldviews, in turn, compel members of the movement to actions that may have significant consequences for the wider society.

In some cases Brotherhood beliefs and doctrines will be seen to be syncretistic and eclectic involving elements from many religious and cultural traditions. Some others will be shown to be obvious elaborations or extensions of familiar Judaic-Christian doctrines and beliefs; while others will be seen to be completely unique to or

³ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Spirit of God, (n.d.), p. 62. The same statement is reproduced verbatim in The Truth about the Christ's Servants, p. 59. Notice in this statement the reference to "'from God Himself.'" This might refer to Obu the God: We shall return to the question of his deity in section 7 below.

⁴ Personal interview with Obu, October 11, 1980.

original with the BCS. In regard to the first case, it will be obvious in some instances and specifically illustrated in others that where there seem to be in Obu's teachings doctrinal borrowings, reinterpretation and adaptation from other religious and cultural traditions, such borrowings have been possible mainly because Obu finds them to coincide with or support his own ingenious ideas. In other words, where and when his unique doctrines find some kind of "elective affinity" with those from outside sources, Obu never hesitates to invoke them to strengthen and, as it were, to re-legitimize or to re-validate his own unique position. But it will also be amply evident that some of the movement's doctrines differ so fundamentally from those of traditional Judaic-Christian and other religious traditions as to call into question some of the latter's basic assumptions about, for example, the very nature of God, Jesus, man, biblical inerrancy, the nature of sin, providence, redemption, destiny, and such other matters.

With that prefatory note, we now proceed to examine a selected number of BCS beliefs and doctrines.

1. BCS Teaching on Love

If some modern rich young ruler were to go to Obu and put to him the question: "Master, what must I do to be saved?" Obu would definitely answer: "Go and love one another." It is true that every ethical religion preaches brotherly love. But in the BCS, the emphasis on this particular doctrine overshadows others in BCS preaching, so much so that love and BCS are seen by members as being one and same thing. Indeed, they claim that "love one another" is the doctrine of

the movement and that the movement's raison d'être is to demonstrate to the world how the virtue of love can be made to work in practical terms in human affairs and relationships. That task, says Obu, is what God intends the BCS to accomplish in this loveless world.⁵ Members say that they have chosen to accomplish this noble goal through their healing ministry and extensive social programmes. Indeed, well over eighty-five percent of members interviewed said that it was the great demonstration of selfless love in the BCS that led them to join the movement. Obu himself confirms this when he says: "People will always be attracted to where there is love. This quality of love is what is bringing people to the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star."⁶ In fact, he himself is believed to be the very embodiment of this selfless and sacrificial love, and therefore to be the main magneticism that is attracting people to the movement. Of him one of his enthusiastic adepts says: "In this generation the Leader of Brotherhood of the Cross and Star . . . is the Sole Teacher of Love. This man is love in expression."⁷ Then this same disciple goes on to designate his Leader variously as "the greatest master of love," "the Sole benefactor of universal love," "the Sole Dispenser of Love," "the love incarnate," etc.⁸

⁵ Humility Is the Foundation of Greatness, (n.d.), p. 48.

⁶ BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 59.

⁷ K.A. Kevin, The Universal Love, pp. 30-31.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 101, 106, 118, 128.

So central and dominant in his teachings, in fact, is the subject of love that Obu defines it as the very essence of the movement. As he puts it: "In this fold, love is the only guiding principle and this is Brotherhood. . . . Brotherhood . . . means love one another."⁹ For Obu, "the aim and objective of Brotherhood is to love one another."¹⁰ He links love and Brotherhood so closely that he sees both as being synonymous, and insists that both are two sides of one reality and that one cannot exist in the absence of the other. He even goes on to suggest that "it were better if we were called LOVE,"¹¹ which suggestion reminds one of the name of an American new religious movement, "Moses" David Berg's Children of God which is more popularly known as the Family of Love.¹² The suggestion also reminds one of what Talcott Parsons partly means by "the new religion of love."¹³ Obu is of the strong conviction that it is only love which can heal this world of its many woes--hatred, racism, injustice, war, hunger, violence, sickness, and the like. His emphasis on bilateral love is an effort to impress upon his audience, that is, according to

⁹What Is Brotherhood?, p. 16; cf. SCC Minutes, June 26, 1976, pp. 19-20.

¹⁰The Supernatural Teacher, Book 1, (1979), p. 13.

¹¹What Is Brotherhood?, p. 15.

¹²On this new religious movement, see, for example, Wallis, "Yesterday's Children," in The Social Impact of New Religious Movements, Wilson, ed., pp. 97-133, and Roy Wallis, "Sex, Violence, and Religion," Update: A Quarterly Journal on New Religious Movements, 7, No. 4 (1983), 3-11.

¹³See Parsons, Action Theory and the Human Condition, p. 254, passim.

him, the whole world, that the ills in human society result from the pursuit of competitive self-interest at the expense of loving fellowship. In emphasizing this kind of selfless love, he is endeavouring to encourage altruism, understanding, co-operation, justice and harmony among the peoples of the world. His further conviction is that "if people were to stop discriminating and (begin instead) to love one another, there would be no more problems in our land."¹⁴ That is why the BCS places so much emphasis on the subject of love in its ideology to the extent that members would not recognize any piece of work on the movement as being about them if the theme of love were not mentioned, and mentioned first, in recognition of its centrality in the movement's teachings.

2. BCS Attitude towards the Old and New Testaments

According to Obu, the Old Testament (O.T.) contains mostly "primary doctrine about God" while the New Testament (N.T.) contains mostly "primary doctrine about Christ." Although both Testaments contain "primary doctrines," Obu prefers the N.T. because, he says, it is the only portion of the Bible that contains Christ's teachings, which are the sole concern of the BCS. He expresses this notion as follows: "The teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ are different from what is recorded in the Old Testament Bible. That is why all our

¹⁴ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 1, p. 19.

doings and our doctrines are derived from the New Testament Bible because Christ's teachings were for the new Kingdom.¹⁵

For Obu, however, this is not the time for "primary doctrines." We in this generation are no more under the tutelage of those primary doctrines, but under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit whose duty it is to lead this generation into all truth, that is, advanced truth. The time of the partial truth of both Testaments is over. We have gone beyond that period of primary doctrines. Now our responsibility is to pay attention to the teaching and leadership of the Holy Spirit personified in Olumba Olumba Obu. In this connection, he goes on to say, the only portion of the N.T. that should concern us is the book of Revelation because that is the part of the Bible for these times, the part that tells us about our present and future generations. This is the time when the things spoken about in Revelation are being fulfilled. Therefore, we should carefully study that portion of the Bible for it is it that mirrors our times. He emphasizes the importance of the book of Revelation as follows:

. . . our work in this new Kingdom is not found in the books of the old Testament; neither is it found in the New Testament from Matthew to Jude. Our duty is found in the books (sic) of the Revelation. Although you may look at the books (sic) of the Revelation as a very small pamphlet,¹⁶ our duty is essentially found therein.

¹⁵ December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, No. 4 (1980), p. 67; see also Our Lord Jesus Christ the Mouthpiece of God (n.d.), pp. 8, 14.

¹⁶ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 70; see also The Everlasting Gospel: Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World, vol. 1 (1980), p. 41; Sunday Concord (Lagos), January 1, 1984, p. 5.

Apart from the book of Revelation, says Obu, the rest of the N.T. is useless and closed. In his words: "From Acts of the Apostles to the book of Jude, (it) shows the works of the Apostles and that was closed. You cannot gain salvation from there."¹⁷ Elsewhere he elaborates on the obsolescence of the O.T. as follows:

As long as we continue to read the Old Testament Scriptures, that veil of Moses will continue to cover your eyes. You will not know anything about our Lord Jesus Christ and you will not know anything about the Holy Spirit. You will always remember those things which were in the time of Adam, Moses, Elijah and the old prophets because that veil had not been removed from your eyes.

Indeed, one of Obu's disciples claims that the entire Bible has been badly tampered with by other Christian believers who, he says, have conveniently suppressed some of its significant doctrines, because such doctrines do not happen to be in accord with their particular belief systems. According to this disciple, 'one of such suppressed truths is' the doctrine of reincarnation.¹⁹

Clearly, Brotherhood near-complete rejection of the O.T. is a bold departure from the way most orthodox Christians and most Nigerian new religious movements in particular regard the entire Bible as the inerrant word of God, "profitable for teaching, for reprove, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 2:16). In

¹⁷Obu, in Kevin, p. 71.

¹⁸The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 71; cf. p. 72. The same statement is plagiarized verbatim in Duke, p. 67.

¹⁹See O.E. Akpan, Life After Death and the Mastery of Life, pp. 47, 64, 65.

fact, the BCS is probably the only new religious movement in contemporary Nigeria that has this negative attitude toward the O.T. Usually, the other movements in the country feel very much at home in the message of the O.T., especially in its theology of Yahweh as the deliverer and liberator from the many undesirable life situations. Indeed, most of the other Nigerian new religious movements also find a certain amount of "elective affinity" with such O.T. teachings and practices as drumming and dancing at worship, the burning of incense, the practice of polygyny, etc. Such practices are condemned in Brotherhood teachings and therefore form part of the barrier to this movement's complete acceptance and use of the O.T.²⁰

3. BCS Doctrine of God (Theology)

Obu does not yet have a finished, systematic doctrine of God. But his ideas as to what constitutes the essential nature and characteristics of God can be culled from the whole gamut of his system of doctrines. In summary fashion, we present here what, in our view, represents, even provisionally, Obu's perception of the nature and characteristics of God.

²⁰ It should be noted, however, that BCS rejection of the O.T. is not total; one can find here and there passages from the O.T. in their literature carefully selected to buttress up their particular ideologies.

(a) The Nature of God:

To begin with, Obu's God, like the gods of many world religions, is at once transcendent and immanent. But in Obu's theology God's immanence is emphasized to the extent that he is immanent in everything--whether that thing be animate or inanimate, human or nonhuman, good or evil. Obu's emphasis on the immanence of God leads him into the doctrine of pantheism which orthodox monotheistic religions reject. Thus, for Obu everything in nature contains God either wholly or at least some aspects of God. In essence, for him all things contain the divine spark and are therefore divine. His favourite formulation of this notion which one hears in all his conversations or talks or reads in all his published sermons, runs like this: "God is in all and all is in Him;" or "God is all and all is God." He sums up this conception of God as follows:

. . . God is both human and spirit. He is in man, trees, animals, fish, in creeping things, and in all the creation of God. He can appear as a small child, an old woman or anyhow.

But Obu's pantheism is not to be mistaken for polytheism; for his God is not plural. As he puts it, "God is monotheistic."²² However, this monotheistic God may choose to manifest himself in many forms (hence his pluriformity) and through different persons or objects. In that case, pluriformity does not mean polytheism. Rather, the various

²¹ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 41.

²² Our Lord Jesus Christ the Mouthpiece of God, p. 28.

manifestations of God are simply emanations, diffusions or refractions of the one and the same ultimate reality. This is the same phenomenon which Professor E. Bolaji Idowu, speaking specifically about the relationship between the Supreme Being and the plethora of lesser divinities in Yoruba (Nigeria) religion, describes as "diffused monotheism,"²³ meaning that the lesser divinities are but spirit refractions or diffusions of the Supreme Being. Expressed more simply, this is to say that the lesser deities relate to the Supreme Being in much the same way that the various waves of the ocean relate to the ocean from which they originate and to which they return. Thus, like the waves to the ocean, the lesser divinities and the Supreme Being are essentially inseparable and indistinguishable.

Stressing the anthropomorphic nature of God, Obu declares: "If anyone says man is not God, it means he has not yet received the Holy Spirit."²⁴ A collateral of this notion of God is his view that God, like human beings, is bisexual. Elsewhere Obu goes on to elaborate on the omnipresence and pantheism of God as follows:

(God) is in the water we drink. . . . God is in the food we eat, the fire-wood we use in cooking, the air we breathe in. . . . God is everything and He is present in all things.

²³E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief (London: Longman, 1962), pp. 202ff; cf. E. Bolaji Idowu, African Traditional Religion: A Definition (London: SCM Press, 1973), p. 135. Compare similar conclusions about the Dinka of Sudan in G. Lienhardt, Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), esp. pp. 156ff; about the Nuer in E.E. Evans-Pritchard, "The Nuer Conception of Spirit and Its Relationship to the Social Order," American Anthropologist, 55 (1953), 201-14; see also E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

²⁴Your Word Is Truth, vol. 10 (n.d.), p. 7.

. . . God is Hell because He is the fire which burns for eternity. He is present in the ocean as well as on land. In the forest you see nothing (but) God. He is the animals found everywhere on the surface of the globe. . . . He is the clothes we put on. . . . He is the thoughts we have. He is the eyes and ears we use. He is every part of our body.²⁵

Related to God's omnipresence and pantheism, as we have said, is another attribute of God, namely his pluriformity. As Obu puts it, "God can take the form of any thing or person. . . . He can pass through (i.e. become) anything . . ."²⁶ Since God, according to this theology, can take both the form of humans (male and female) as well as the form of nonhuman objects, he can therefore be legitimately referred to both as "he" or "she" and also as "it."²⁷

Obu takes the eternity, omnipotence and omniscience of God as given in orthodox Judaic-Christian and Islamic traditions. But as far as the character and morality of God are concerned, Obu minces no words in declaring that God is both good and evil, light and darkness, creator and destroyer (killer). We shall explore more fully this dual nature of God when we later come to discuss Obu's philosophy of good and evil (see section 8 below).

²⁵ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, pp. 53-58; cf. The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 98.

²⁶ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 58.

²⁷ On the argument for the validity of using both "human" and "nonhuman" pronouns for God, see, for instance, O.E. Akpan, Destiny and Brotherhood of Life, p. 10.

(b) The Names of God

Obu teaches that God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence entitle him to polynymy. As if he were suggesting a book title for John Hick, Obu declares: "God has many names."²⁸ To one people and generation he may appear under one name; to another he comes under a different name. Thus, in one generation he came as Adam; then in the succeeding generations he came respectively as Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Moses, Elijah, Jesus, in that order. In this generation, he has revealed himself under the "new name" Olumba Olumba Obu. Obu goes on to teach that if one addresses God by a name that he had in a previous generation or dispensation, God will not hear such a person. In order to be heard by God, he says, one must always address God by the name he bears in the generation in which one lives. Obu emphasizes the point by saying:

Therefore, if you shout on Jehovah now, you will receive no help. God is not known by that name now. . . . Today, if you call him Adam, He will not answer you . . . God cannot make such a stupid mistake of coming to this mortal world with the same name, Adam, all the time. Therefore, today, if you called some of the names of God that you know and you do not have any answer, please know that it is out of date. For instance, this is no time for the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is no time for the God of Israel.²⁹

²⁸ What Is Brotherhood?, p. 18; cf. John Hick, God Has Many Names: Britain's New Religious Pluralism (London: Macmillan, 1980).

²⁹ Obu, in Kevin, pp. 21-22; see also V.E. Ekpenyong, "Authority (Footnote Continued)

Thus, for Obu and his followers, "Jesus is an old name."³⁰ The new name of God is now Olumba Olumba Obu. Indeed, Obu and his disciples say that they are not in the least surprised that this generation has not recognized the "new name" under which God has come to earth in the present generation. According to them, it is the very nature of theophany itself which makes it impossible for a given generation to identify God by the name he has chosen for himself in that generation. Thus, when God came to earth in the previous generations under the names of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Moses, Elijah, Jesus, he was not recognized as God by the people of those generations. It takes God's self-revelation, they say, to impress upon a particular generation that he is indeed God. Even then, God still has a hard time convincing people that he is God. Even Jesus, the last but one incarnation of God, had exactly the same problem that his predecessors had in trying to convince the people of his time that he was very God in human form. This also is exactly the same problem the present and final incarnation of God, Obu, has in these last days of earth's history. Only a few in this generation who are spiritually enlightened recognize Obu as God, and even then only when he has chosen to reveal himself to them as God.

So then God or Jesus incarnate is right here on earth, but the people of this world do not know this, affirm Brotherhood theology and

(Footnote Continued)

of the Current Name," unpublished ms. (n.d.), p. 5. Cf. Obu's sermon, "Is It a Name or Work that Identifies Man?" in The New World Magazine (1979?), pp. 15-18.

³⁰ Sunday Concord (Lagos), January 1, 1984, p. 8.

christology. Because of its ignorance of the fact that Jesus is right here on earth under a new name, all Christendom continues to look in vain for a second advent of Jesus. Obu's explicit advice to the Christian world is simple and clear: "I want to make it quite clear to you that if there is any person among you who is still looking at the sky to see someone descending down, he is wasting his time because until doomsday such a person will never come."³¹

But not only does God have one official name for each generation; he may also be called by many other honorific names and titles. That is why members of the BCS can refer to their Leader by more than ninety-nine other divine titles (see Appendix B). However, because of the hair-splitting problems that names, titles, and labels can cause, especially in matters religious and theological, and because he does not want to get involved in the problem of inventing ninety-nine names for God, as in Islam, Obu advises that his members address God by the name which Jesus used in addressing him, that is, "Father." This is the name all members of the BCS use in addressing their Leader when they are in his presence, reserving the other nearly one hundred divine-coated onomastic designations for their polemical literature or conversations with non-members. However, Obu has also chosen another

³¹ Ibid., p. 6; cf. Kevin, p. 23; Obu, December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, No. 4 (1980), p. 56; August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 46; The Everlasting Gospel: Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire, vol. 1 (1980), p. 57.

name for himself: 'I am a supernatural teacher. . . . The lessons I have brought to you are supernatural.'³²

4. Brotherhood Christology

In general terms, Obu's christology is similar to anything one may find in many strands of Christianity, especially vis-a-vis Jesus' soteriological role. Obu refers to Christ in one way or another in his teachings and sermons, in keeping with his claim that '... in Brotherhood there is no time that we don't preach about Jesus and the Cross.'³³ He believes, in fact, that 'anyone who does not preach about Jesus is not preaching the Gospel.'³⁴ Indeed, for Obu 'Gospel means nothing but Jesus and His sufferings, death and glory (resurrection).'³⁵ He says further that Christ's life

is the only pattern for us to emulate. That is why it is imperative that we should always preach about Him only. . . . The life of our Lord Jesus is like a plan for us to follow and build our life (on). It is like a mirror for us to look and redress ourselves.³⁶

³² Sunday Concord (Lagos), January 1, 1984, p. 6.

³³ What Is Cross?, p. 21.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

Obu also often gives credit to the part Christ's sacrificial, vicarious death plays in the whole divine plan of human redemption, although he teaches at the same time that in order for salvation to be fully realized, Christ's death, God's love and divine grace must be supplemented by human efforts (see section 9 below).

Like God the Father, Jesus Christ as God the Son is eternal and pre-existent. There was never a time when he was not. Also, like God the Father, God the Son is both human and spiritual. He is also pluriform: Says Obu:

It is possible to see Him in different forms. As you are sitting down here He can appear as seven persons in different forms, either as a child, an old woman, an old man, a young man or woman, a sick person or any³⁷ form which He chooses. They are all Christ.

(a) The Limitations and Failures of Jesus:

Obu departs drastically, however, from the traditional Christian conception of Christ when he begins to impute to him sinful propensities and moral weakness and failing. For instance, he can without compunction make the following remarks about Christ:

You have heard that he was taken to the desert to be tempted. There was no physical personality that took him there, but it was the sinful flesh in him as a human being. . . . Any person born of a woman must have the imperfect flesh, and

³⁷ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, pp. 34-35; cf. Our Lord Jesus Christ the Alpha et Omega (n.d.), p. 32.

similarly, Christ had to undergo the same process ...³⁸

Obu further says that "since (Jesus) drank the cup of the sins of the world He became a sinner"³⁹ and that "Christ is human like yourself. . . . (therefore) He suffers certain human frailties."⁴⁰ Obu does give Jesus some credit, however, because, he says, "he fought and conquered, setting a perfect example for us today."⁴¹

Furthermore, Obu condemns Jesus for having, according to Obu, shown racial discrimination toward the Syrophenician woman when she desperately needed his help. As if the discrimination was not enough, Obu recalls, Jesus went on to refer to the poor woman as a dog!⁴²

Brotherhood christology also points up the spatial limitation of Jesus' spiritual power. Jesus, they say, was not omnipresent. He only moved about and worked in few places around Palestine. Obu, in contrast, is completely omnipresent and may be seen and experienced physically and spiritually by the faithful in any part of the world. Thus, they argue, while Christ's work was limited by time and space, Obu's work transcends time and distance because he is omnipresent.⁴³ Indeed, Obu himself supports this view when he remarks;

³⁸ BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 52; emphasis added.

³⁹ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 33; emphasis added.

⁴⁰ The Everlasting Gospel, vol. 3: The Transcendent Teachings of the Holy Spirit (n.d.), p. 95; emphasis added.

⁴¹ BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), 52.

⁴² See the story in Matt. 15:22-28 or in Mark 7:25-30.

⁴³ See Duke, p. 35; cf. Eyo, The Truth about Olumba Olumba and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. 72.

Was Jesus Christ omnipresent? He did the work as a Son, only to be seen when he moved from place to place. But in my case, I am seen everywhere lavishly at the same second, while I am here.⁴⁴

Moreover, members of the BCS believe that Christ's power to perform miracles was his exclusive prerogative, while

Father Olumba Olumba Obu gives out His Divine Spirits to his servants to heal the sick, the blind and raise the dead. This Omnipotent Father does all miracles through his Christ servants, Apostles,⁴⁵ Pastors, Prophets and Prophetesses and Deacons.

Also, Obu believes that Jesus himself did not attain the pinnacle of spiritual enlightenment because he occasionally succumbed to fits of anger, as when, for instance, he angrily drove the money-changers out of the Temple. On Jesus' action on this occasion, Obu comments as follows:

I have told you that our Lord Jesus Christ did not attain the accurate knowledge of truth. That was why He became annoyed and drove out the people who were selling merchandise in the Temple⁴⁶

Obu, in fact, maintains this opinion of Jesus when he says unambiguously elsewhere: "Both John the Baptist and our Lord Jesus Christ came . . . and yet could not practise the Word of God."⁴⁷ As

⁴⁴The Supernatural Teacher, Book 1 (1979), p. 3; see also The Supernatural Teacher, Book, 3 p. 49.

⁴⁵Duke, p. 36.

⁴⁶"The Power in Brotherhood of the Cross and Star is the Word of God," unpublished sermon ms. (n.d.), p. 4; cf. The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, pp. 47-48.

⁴⁷August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Spirit of God, (n.d.), p. 46.

far as Obu is concerned, anyone who succumbs to anger is "out of the line of salvation."⁴⁸ He further teaches that he himself is spiritually superior to and more mature than Jesus, because he has never allowed himself to become angry over the actions of any human being. In fact, many of his followers have boasted that their "Father" has challenged the entire world since 1942 that any person who would cause him to be angry even for one fleeting second would be rewarded with a handsome amount of money. As far as these followers are concerned, Obu's patience is "of greater magnitude than that of Christ."⁴⁹

Besides, Obu believes that Jesus also missed the mark when he cursed the two cities of Bethsaida and Chorazin (Matt. 11:21), or when he called woe upon those who refused to listen to him. According to him, a truly spiritual person should curse no one or nothing. Comparing himself with Jesus, Obu self-righteously claims:

Have I ever suspended any member or have I ever cursed any person? Have I ever expelled you? . . . I only embrace you ever no matter what you commit, because the Word of God directs that I should embrace such. (a) person since I am enjoined not to resist an evil doer.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Obu, in Kevin, p. 71.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, E.B. Eyo, New Heaven and New Earth, (n.d.), p. 91.

⁵⁰ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Spirit of God, p. 47.

In addition, Obu criticizes Jesus for having turned water into wine and thereby causing people to commit the sin of drunkenness.⁵¹ Likewise, he condemns Jesus for having wept over Jerusalem and when his friend Lazarus died, adding that "to weep (or) mourn is contrary to the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Sadness, frowning of face, sighing, grudge, are condemned by the Holy Spirit."⁵²

In the final analysis, Obu sees Jesus as having fallen, as any other human being, during his existence as the first Adam. As the first Adam, Jesus had "caused the death of the world." In accordance with the law of karma, he had to come back as the second Adam "to hang on the tree to save the world," thereby paying for the sin he had committed in his previous life.⁵³ Having thus paid for his sin, argues Obu, Jesus then became a perfect theanthropic personality at the peak of spiritual enlightenment. That is why he could reincarnate this last time as the very epitome of spiritual perfection in the person of the Holy Spirit on earth, represented by the man of Biakpan, Olumba Olumba Obu.

This, then, is how one should understand Obu's insistence that "it is only our Lord Jesus Christ who has done the will of God. We are to follow his footstep."⁵⁴ But the Christ whom Obu instructs the entire world to follow is clearly not the "fallen" Christ that

⁵¹Obu, in Kevin, p. 75.

⁵²The Comforter Has Come (n.d.), p. 25.

⁵³The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 23.

⁵⁴December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, No. 4 (1980), p.

physically walked this earth some two thousand years ago, but the one incarnate in the person of Olumba Olumba Obu who alone has perfectly done the will of God.

(b) The Incarnations of Jesus:

In our discussion of the names of God, we indicated above that Obu teaches that Christ or God has reincarnated into human form up to a total number of eight times, each time coming under a different name. Thus, God or Christ has reincarnated as Adam, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Moses, Elijah, Jesus and, finally, as Olumba Olumba Obu (or the Holy Spirit), in that order.⁵⁵ According to this doctrine, in each incarnation Jesus had a particular assignment from the Father (i.e. himself) to accomplish on earth. After accomplishing that particular assignment, he went back to the Father. When the Father had another assignment for him to carry out, he would come back to earth under a new name. This process continued until the seventh time when he came under the name of Jesus the Christ. During this seventh time, his specific assignment was to purify polluted creation by his shed blood. That assignment completed, he went back to his Father. Nowadays that same personality has come back for the eighth and last time under the

⁵⁵ One cannot help being puzzled, however, by the following remarks by Obu: "Adam never saw God. Melchizedek never saw God. Noah never saw God. None of them saw God except our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who was with the Father, and who is the Father. It was He alone who saw God face to face. Christmas Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 76. If all the characters mentioned here were themselves incarnations of God, how does one understand these remarks?

"new name" (Rev. 3:12) of Comforter or Holy Spirit or Olumba Olumba Obu. Thus, in this last generation God in Obu is reconciling the world unto himself. Just as Jesus came as Word made flesh, through a woman, so has Obu come to earth, born of a woman, though that woman is "not a virgin this time."⁵⁶ Jesus (in Obu) has come this eighth time to bring to completion the work of human redemption where he left it off two thousand years ago.

But Obu as the last incarnation of God (Jesus), stress Brotherhood theology and christology, is unique in the sense that now God has come back to earth not as a single personality of the Godhead, but as the entire Trinity personified in Obu, so that he is at once God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit--the Trinity rolled into one.⁵⁷ Brotherhoods believe, too, that the eighth incarnation of Jesus in Obu is also unique in the sense that in him are spiritually represented all the previous incarnations of Jesus or all the other members of the "Melchizedekan Order"--Adam, Enoch, Melchizedek, Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.⁵⁸ According to this belief, there had never

⁵⁶ Sunday Concord (Lagos), January 1, 1984, p. 8. On the whole subject of reincarnation as taught in the BCS, especially with regard to the incarnations of God (Jesus), see Okon E. Akpan, The Gospel of Reincarnation (n.d.). Apart from Obu's and his disciples' frequent references to this theme in their sermons, bible lectures and writings, Akpan's booklet is so far the movement's most comprehensive articulation of the doctrine, and has won the membership's confidence as an authoritative reference material on the topic. See also, Akpan, Life After Death, pp. 60-69; Duke, pp. 57-58.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, E. Udoumoren, "The Profile of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star," in E.O. Bassey et al., Who Is This Man Olumba Olumba Obu? (n.d.), pp. 33, 38.

⁵⁸ See Akpan, Life After Death, p. 83.

before been in the history of Christ's incarnations a fuller or more complete manifestations of the divine.

Thus, Brotherhoods claim that orthodox Christians are wrong when they teach that Christ appeared on earth for the very first time only some two thousand years ago. For them, Jesus' first advent had occurred much earlier, in the person of Adam. The Bible passage which Brotherhoods invoke in support of this belief is Luke 3:38 which makes reference to Adam as "the son of God." Their interpretation of this passage is simply that since Adam was "the son of God," and since that title is also the title of Christ, therefore Adam was none other than Christ, in his (Christ's) first appearing. In other words, Brotherhoods, believe that Christ the son of God in his first advent came under the name of Adam the son of God. In point of fact, contends Brotherhood christology, Adam came not only as Christ, but as "God himself."⁵⁹ That is to say, God was Christ, who was Adam. God as Christ had always been, before and after physical Adam. That is why, argue Brotherhoods, God-in-Christ could say: "Before Abraham I am."

The presentation of Christ as God in Brotherhood theology and christology is itself not new, however, because this is the way biblical theology has traditionally presented him. For already in the Old Testament he is presented as the Messiah in Psalm 45 and elsewhere, which passages form the background to his being presented as very God in the New Testament. What seems to be new in Brotherhood christology, however, is the idea of God's (Christ's) eight different incarnations,

⁵⁹ See Obu, in Kevin, pp. 12-13, 14, 17, 19, 23; cf. The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 33.

culminating in the person of Olumba Olumba Obu who as Christ-incarnate is believed by his followers to have done in this generation greater works than he had done in his previous incarnations.

Those acquainted with Hindu religious thought, especially with its doctrine of the periodic incarnations of gods (Avatara), will probably conclude that Obu has "syncretized" this particular doctrine from Hinduism. For in Hinduism, Lord Krishna is said to be the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, or rather a direct manifestation of Vishnu,⁶⁰ which reincarnational position (i.e. the eighth position) Obu occupies in the Brotherhood Christian tradition. This (coincidental?) positional similarity between Krishna and Obu has led some members of the BCS to suggest, indirectly, that Obu and Krishna are one and the same personality. For instance, one of Obu's most ardent Indian devotees and mystic, P.C. Aggarwal (alias J.S. Bazie), has made this indirect suggestion by alluding to a supposed sonic similarity between the pronunciation of Krishna's birth place, Vrindaban, and Obu's birth place, Biakpan. On this Aggarwal writes: "You need not be surprised that Biakpane (sic) sounds something like Vrindaban, the birth place of Most Rev. God Krishna. . . . If a careful and minute study is made, there are many similarities between Biakpane (sic) and Vrindaban."⁶¹

⁶⁰ See John Dowson, A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion: Geography, History and Literature (Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1982), p. 160. Interestingly, the Urantia Book of the Urantia Brotherhood has something very similar to Brotherhood and Hindu doctrine of the incarnations of God. In the Urantia Book, there are seven successive Michaels, Jesus being the last, and five epochal revelations, Jesus being the fourth.

⁶¹ Personal correspondence dated December 7, 1984.

The obvious implication of this comparison is that Obu is probably a reincarnation of Krishna. This kind of indirect identification of Obu with Krishna is perhaps not only an attempt by Indian Brotherhoods or Indian admirers of the movement to enlarge Obu's divine image to cosmic proportions, but also, by seeing him as no other than Krishna, to make him (Obu) acceptable to them as God without any compunction for replacing their local ethnic god (Krishna) with a foreign one.

Granted, there is the probability that Brotherhood doctrine of incarnation of gods could have come from Hinduism. This probability becomes even stronger and more glaring when one remembers that there has been much physical contact between Indian and Nigerian members of the BCS. It is on the movement's records that its members or admirers from India have on several occasions visited Calabar, and that Nigerian members have also visited India. And we know that ideas and concepts diffuse easily and travel fast. Even then, one must note that Obu's doctrine of the incarnations of God is not an exact photocopy of its Hindu counterpart. For in the Hindu version of the doctrine there are ten Avataras whereas Obu has only eight in his version. This manner of following the doctrine of a religious tradition only so far (if indeed Obu is following the Hindu tradition here) and then departing from it and putting a unique stamp on the given doctrine is, as we shall continue to indicate in the present chapter, characteristic of Obu's doctrinizing.

However, when one remembers that the belief in reincarnation is not at all foreign to Nigerian (indeed African) traditional religious thought, one becomes more cautious in drawing any hasty conclusion regarding the possible source of Obu's doctrine of, not just

reincarnation, but multiple reincarnations, that is, the possibility of one person reincarnating many times. That the notion of multiple reincarnation is not alien to African traditional religious thought is evident from the fact that many African peoples do have names for those children who die many times and are reborn just as many times and are recognized as such by their parents and relatives. For example, the Bini of Mid-Western (now Bendel State) of Nigeria call such children Igbakhuan. According to the Bini, one of the reasons said to be responsible for the Igbakhuan's coming (birth), going (death) and coming-again (rebirth or reincarnation) is so that they might have opportunities to liquidate debts incurred in their previous existences.⁶² Obu, in fact, picks up this very African traditional thought when he says:

Your main problem is that you are still ignorant of the fact that to die is to be regenerated. Such ignorance induces you to steal and be indebted to others. When you come back, you will defray all your indebtedness before you can settle down to enjoy yourself.⁶³

Similarly, the Yoruba of West Nigeria call the "born-to-die" children abiku; the Ibo of East Nigeria call them obanje; while the Annang and Ibibio of the South-east of the country (Obu's region of origin) call them ndito essien emana. Thus, since the idea of multiple reincarnations is already present in Nigerian traditional religious

⁶²See S.G.A. Oribere, "Igbakhuan: A Study of the Concept of Born-to-die Children Among the Bini of South-western Nigeria," a paper presented at the XVth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Sydney (Australia), August 18-23, 1985.

⁶³The Mystery of Death, p. 40.

thought, it is not quite likely that Obu would have had to look for the same idea outside Nigeria; there would be no logical reason for doing so. —

5. Man and woman in the incarnation of God

Closely related to Brotherhood teaching on the identity of the first Adam is the question of the identity of the woman Eve. According to the biblical account, Eve came out of Adam. Brotherhood interpretation of this account is that "just as the woman is out of man, so also does the man come out of the woman."⁶⁴ This mystery is further explained as follows: "... Eve came out of Adam, the man, and Jesus the man came through the virgin Mary, the woman."⁶⁵ According to this explanation and interpretation, the virgin Mary "represented Eve and Christ represented Adam."⁶⁶ Indeed, in Brotherhood theology the virgin Mary not only "represented" Eve, but was really Eve come back. As Obu himself has put it, "Eve reincarnated as the virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus."⁶⁷ Brotherhoods further interpret this Adam-Eve-Christ incarnational relationship as follows: since Adam and Eve are one, and since Adam is Christ, then Christ and Eve are one personality; that is, Eve is but the feminine side of both the first

⁶⁴ Kevin, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.; cf. F.E. Ema, "Does God Ever Mary?" BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 94.

⁶⁷ The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 33; cf. Ema, p. 94.

Adam and the second Adam.⁶⁸ In the words of one of the most philosophical, mystical Brotherhood thinkers,

Adam, our first father, was the positive component of the Supreme being (God or Christ) while Eve was the negative component of the same (being). This mysterious combination resulted in the statement, 'Let us make man in our image and likeness'...Adam was the same Christ in masculine appearance while the same Christ also manifested as Eve...⁶⁹ Adam and Eve were Christ in multiform appearances.

The same notion is repeated elsewhere as follows: 'The first man was God in masculine manifestation while the first woman was Christ in feminine manifestation.'⁷⁰ In other words, the same Christ reincarnated simultaneously as Adam and Eve, as male and female. This interpretation is perfectly in agreement with Obu's teaching that Christ does indeed possess the capacity for multiple simultaneous incarnations. According to him, 'diversity of tongues refers us to the multiplicity of Christ. When one Christ died, He came back in large numbers, and it was these Spirits that rested upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost.'⁷¹ However, when Adam reincarnated under the new name Christ, he came back physically alone this time--without any physical Eve or wife--'because it was a wife that caused him to sin

⁶⁸ See Obu, Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 107.

⁶⁹ Akpan, Life After Death, pp. 54, 100.

⁷⁰ Ema, p. 94; see also Obu, Your Word is Truth, special ed. (1980), p. 2.

⁷¹ Obu, The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 66.

the first time."⁷² That was why, Obu continues, Christ resisted the temptation of his mother (Eve come back) on the occasion of the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee with the seemingly harsh words "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" She had asked him to perform a miracle prematurely--that is, outside the divine timetable. What Christ meant in his reply to his mother, says Obu, was simply this: "Woman, not you again! You are not going to cause me to act against God's will again."⁷³ Thus, Christ averted a second downfall since on this occasion and throughout his life on earth "he never allowed woman to deceive him again the second time as it happened when he was here as Adam."⁷⁴ Likewise, Eve has not come again with a physical husband so as not to fall again into sin as in her previous life in the garden of Eden. She is now a virgin in order to make good her former life of sin. Again, the virgin Christ in the analogy is none other than the now virgin Olumba Olumba Obu, while the now virgin Eve refers firstly to virgin Mary and secondly to Obu's wife Elizabeth, who, like her husband, is now considered to be a virgin because, Brotherhoods believe, she has forever abstained from any sexual activity. Thus, as defined in Brotherhoodism, virginity seems to be not only the condition of never having had the sexual experience but also subsequent total

⁷²Notes from Obu's sermon, May 2, 1982.

⁷³Incidentally, Obu says that when the spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted, one of the temptations to which he was exposed involved "pretty women with nice shape, assorted drinks, and money." August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 5. See similar remarks in The Truth about the Christ's Servants, p. 137.

⁷⁴Kevin, p. 139.

sexual abstinence. Hence, when Obu says he is looking for 144,000 virgins,⁷⁵ he means both categories of people.

An interesting corollary of Brotherhood doctrine of the male-female aspects of divine incarnation is the collateral doctrine of the deity of Elizabeth Obu.⁷⁶ According to the doctrine, just as Eve was but the female side of both the first Adam and the second Adam, so also is Obu's wife the female complement of both Jesus Christ and his eighth incarnation, Olumba Olumba Obu. As one of Obu's disciples puts it, 'Olumba Olumba Obu is the Leader in masculine manifestation while Sister Ibum Mba is the Leader in feminine manifestation through incarnation.'⁷⁷ In other words, Obu's wife is to Obu what Eve was to the first Adam and to Christ (the second Adam). Put in an abbreviated form, Elizabeth Obu is but a reincarnation of biblical Eve and virgin Mary. This doctrine is expressed in no uncertain terms by one of Obu's closest disciples as follows:

...a brief explanation shall be made as regards who Mother Olumba O. Obu is...If Christ wishes to accomplish a task on earth which would last for so many years, what happens is that he will incarnate becoming two different beings; then, later unite to form the Father and Mother God (human degree manifest). Therefore Avatara and Avatar, Olumba Olumba Obu is the Deity expressed in feminine and masculine forms respectively....If man is dual in sex, then Christ is dual in sex (that is when made manifest). He is hermaphroditic as well as

⁷⁵ See, for instance, Obu The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 67.

⁷⁶ See Ema, p. 94.

⁷⁷ Ema, p. 94. Ema is wrong here, however, in referring to Obu's wife as Ibum Mba instead of Elizabeth. Ibum Mba was the name of Obu's mother.

distinctly a male and female being. God is a very complex being and totally inexplicable.⁷⁸

According to the author of this passage, such a mysterious combination of male and female aspects in the divine necessarily precludes the notion of Obu's physical marriage to Elizabeth Obu: "Do you call this marriage? Now, you don't marry yourself."⁷⁹ It is not quite clear, however, whether both sides (the masculine and the feminine) of Obu are equal spiritually, in view of the fact that we are told that "Sister Olumba Olumba Obu is ... the Leader of the womanhood while the Sole Spiritual Head, Leader O.O. Obu, is the Sole Spiritual Head of the Universe."⁸⁰ Even in terms of the sex roles between Obu the God and his "sister"⁸¹ (wife) the Goddess, there are differences in

⁷⁸ Akpan, Life After Death, p. 124.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ema, p. 94; emphasis added. We are told that the title "Sole Spiritual Head of the Universe" means that Obu "controls and uses at will all spirits in the world," even including Lucifer; see Umoh, Faithful Witness, p. 85; emphasis added.

⁸¹ In the BCS a man's wife is often referred to as his "sister" and a woman's husband as her "brother." According to Obu, the implication of this manner of referring to spouses is that when they begin to see themselves not as husbands and wives but as biological brothers and sisters, they will "refrain from any sexual act" as he and his wife are believed to have done. See Obu, August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 14; cf. Obu, Father's Prediction for 1981: Farewell Address at the End of December Pentecostal Assembly (1981), p. 15, item 15. Elsewhere Obu says: "If you, out of ignorance, address the woman as 'my wife' and the woman calling the man 'my husband,' you have made the worst mistakes. Both of you are sister and brother, because man and woman come from each other, and put together with Christ at the Head, you become one whole." Revelation of the Holy Spirit, pp. 114-115. In another place he states: "... in the strict sense of the word no man should be called a husband. Christ alone is a husband, while husband and wife are Brother and Sister." Key to Successful Marriage (n.d.), p. 16.

function. We are told, for instance, that

Her specific and major assignment is to provide mundane things to her children. Therefore all those who desire wealth should not go to the Sole Spiritual Head for He gives all the godly virtues. It is lack of this wisdom that people mistakenly approach the Sole Spiritual Father for mundane things rather than the Mother God. Whatever is your secular problems no matter its gravity, once the Mother God offers prayers on you all your burdens will immediately disappear. She is administrator who sees about the carnal kingdom of God.⁸²

The point to note here is that the masculine side of God is identified with the spiritual while the feminine side is identified with the mundane. But this may simply be a matter of distinction without a difference and, therefore, does not necessarily raise the question of equality or inequality. There again, in the context of African traditional system of thought--which still influences the thought patterns of modern Africans to a good degree--the Western style of dichotomizing life into "sacred" and "secular" is seen at best as arbitrary, at worst as false. In African religious thought, indigenous or acquired, even "the carnal kingdom" was (is) created by God and belongs to God. Indeed, as Obu puts it, "the people of the flesh are also the children of God."⁸³

Furthermore, in Brotherhood theology woman or femininity symbolizes the negative side of a being. Hence, Eve, the virgin Mary,

⁸²Ema, p. 95; emphasis added.

⁸³Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 12.

and Elizabeth Obu represent the negative or evil side of deity.⁸⁴ Sometimes femininity is viewed as a symbol of 'flesh' as opposed to 'spirit' (masculinity). But when flesh and spirit combine, the outcome are human beings who come 'to exist in the image and likeness of God' possessing at once, as indeed God does, spirit and flesh or masculinity and femininity.⁸⁵ Moreover, Obu often images maleness positively as 'new heaven' which, according to him, refers to 'holy men,' and femaleness as 'new earth' (notice the conventional image of woman as 'mother earth'). 'New earth,' Obu says, refers to 'holy woman.'⁸⁶ At times, however, he turns the positive/negative imagery around and sees maleness as symbolizing destruction and femaleness as symbolizing peace. He states, for instance,

. . . man is naturally a destructive being. The womanfold is a symbol of peace. . . . The reason why we fail in our diverse undertakings is because we do not include women in our plans, hence there is nobody to play the role of peace. . . .⁸⁷

In either case, however, the basic symbolism of the dual nature of deity and humanity remains consistent: each deity is at once a god of peace and a god of war (destruction). Likewise is each human being: he

⁸⁴ See Akpan, Life After Death, p. 125.

⁸⁵ Ema, p. 94; cf. Obu, The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 60. See also Obu, Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 83, where he says 'Christ is flesh and He is Spirit.'

⁸⁶ The Everlasting Gospel: Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World, vol. 1 (1980), p. 43. Cf. Sunday Concord (Lagos), January 1, 1984, p. 6, where he says: 'Man is the heaven and woman is the earth.'

⁸⁷ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 91.

or she is bio-spiritually both male and female and possesses the dual capacity for peace and destruction.

The further implication of Brotherhood christology and doctrine of reincarnation is that since the first woman, Eve, came from man, Adam, and since the second Adam, Jesus, came from (the second?) woman, the virgin Mary, then there is, as we have already indicated, some femininity in every man and some masculinity in every woman. Or, in the words of Obu, 'no man is complete without a woman, and no woman is complete without a man.'⁸⁸ Or as he says elsewhere, 'A man should realise that he is only half; likewise a woman, and when two of them are joined together they become an entity. Minus a man, a woman is incomplete and minus a woman, a man is half.'⁸⁹ Carl Jung would agree à fond.⁹⁰ This will probably explain why one member of the movement, at the end of a Sunday morning service which Obu had just conducted, prayed addressing him thus: 'If we have you, we have all things. . . You are our Father; you are our Mother.'⁹¹

The above conception of the male-female relationship has implications beyond christology and theological anthropology in Brotherhood affairs. It seems to influence the way the movement conceives of the social responsibilities and relationships of its

⁸⁸Personal interview with Obu, February 17, 1984.

⁸⁹The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 91.

⁹⁰With no more than three years of primary school education, it is doubtful that Obu has ever read Jung.

⁹¹At a Sunday morning at the Brotherhood of the Cross and the Star headquarters, 34 Ambo Street, Calabar, 19 February, 1984.

members in terms of sex roles. For if a man is seen as carrying in himself some femininity and a woman as possessing some masculinity, then the perennial problem of male superiority versus female inferiority is toned down considerably. This is why the BCS has no difficulty in appointing and promoting its female members to positions of ecclesiastical responsibilities such as the positions of elders, apostles and prophets, a practice which most of the mission-established churches in Nigeria are either still debating about or have taken definite decisions against. Obu's comments on this practice in his movement are appurtenant in this connection:

Learn from what we practice here in Brotherhood. In any of the meetings or fellowships, if the president or chairman is a man, the vice-president will be a woman. If a woman is made the secretary, the assistant secretary will be a man, just like that throughout. There is no business which select(s) men only and it works well. It will be war altogether. And there is no business you will select only women and it works well. The two things (sexes) have to work hand-in-hand.

Thus, this conception of the bio-spiritual male-female relationship informs Brotherhood's doctrine of the equality of men and women. In Brotherhood teaching, this question seems to have been settled once and for all time. The settlement is articulated simply as follows: "God made man and woman equally. They have equal rights. . . . They have equal authority in all respects."⁹³ Or, as Obu says elsewhere:

⁹²The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 94. Cf. Obu, Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 115, where he repeats the same remarks almost verbatim.

⁹³Kevin, p. 18.

A majority of men in the world do not know that women have the same right as they before the Almighty God. . . . You do not have to deprive them of their own right. Each of you enjoys your privilege equally. . . . To prove to you that women have the same right as men, today if you are appointed a King, your wife will automatically become a Queen that same day. If you are made the Governor, she will become the governness. . . this clearly shows⁹⁴ you that whatever you are, your wife is the same.

Indeed, Obu insists that he himself has been the doer of the word that he preaches concerning the equality of men and women. Thus he says of the power relationship between himself and his wife:

Sister Obu has equal right as I have and so she is to be in every meeting. She is greater than I and even my teacher. . . . She. . . is a wonderful woman. She is a mother elected by God and she gives oil. If you need advice, go to her. If you don't respect her, you don't respect me because we are one.⁹⁵

Then with much pride and obvious self-justification he declares:

What will women use in judgment against me? I do not hate them. I do not create distinction between them and other people. I have jealously maintained the glory that was women's and even increase it in this kingdom. I have no trouble with women; and there is no difference between men and women. I treat both alike.⁹⁶

Having said that, he might as well have told the world, as indeed he often does in other contexts: "Follow my example." It should be added, however, that in his preaching about the equality of men and

⁹⁴The Everlasting Gospel: The Transcendent Teachings of the Holy Spirit, vol. 2, (n.d.), pp. 14-15.

⁹⁵Prophet's Handbook, (1965), p. 12.

⁹⁶The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, (1980), p. 34.

women, Obu emphasizes that this equality must be nourished by mutual and reciprocal "submission" among men and women.

Obu's argument that whatever a husband is, so is his wife, is important to bear in mind when one comes to consider the role and designation of his own wife in the BCS. Because members of the movement regard their leader as God in human form, they have also come to regard his wife as Goddess. In that capacity, she is one and equipollent with her husband. This very belief is demonstrated in concrete terms in the movement's practice of allowing the red soutane--"the red garment dipped in blood,"⁹⁷--to be worn only by the holy pair. No other member, no matter his or her rank on the sacerdotal hierarchy, may ever wear a red soutane.

Die-hard feminists may find some bones to pick in Obu's somewhat forced, patronizing and paternalistic feminism. But when they consider closely the cultural background out of which he has spoken, perhaps they will temper their reactions with some admiration for his courage to speak out the way he has done. And if Obu's doctrine of the equality of men and women can bring about some degree of improved relationship between the two, shall we not be happier ever after?

Before concluding this section of our discussion, we should perhaps point out that Obu is also a believer in the concept of the interconnectedness or fundamental unity of all existence, that is, in

⁹⁷ Ema, p. 95; see also section 7, pp. 50-2 below. The colour red is said to symbolize the blood of Jesus; see Eyo, The Truth About Olumba Olumba Obu and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. 46. Cf. Apostle Efiang Orok, Mysteries in Brotherhood, (n.d.), p. 31, where he says that "red embodies strength and mastery."

all life as a great chain of being. Thus, he teaches that God, woman, man, and creatures and elements of the physical as well as the invisible cosmoses are inherently related. God, Obu teaches, does indeed manifest himself/herself in and through these natural and supernatural phenomena. For instance, God may appear to human beings in the form of storm or thunder, or in the form of animals. So convinced about this he is, in fact, that he tells his followers never to drive away any animals or birds should such animals happen to stray into their houses or places of worship. He believes that such creatures might indeed be totems of human beings visiting and worshipping with them and should therefore be welcomed cordially.⁹⁸

Specifically he asserts:

Do not be surprised that wherever you are, animals, lizards, cockroaches, snakes and rats are found. They also come to listen to the Word of God. Have you not known that animals have sent a letter to the Father (Obu) reporting that you are still killing and eating them? Everywhere you find them, they are listening to the Word of God and they know this fact more than some of you. Reports about you have constantly been sent to the Father. If you kill a hen, she will report you to Me. If you kill a lizard, he will also report you that their brothers are still killing them. . . . Do not doubt seeing animals wherever you go to. As soon as you settle in a place the lizard will begin to visit; rats, goats, dogs, sheep, snakes will also visit. Do not drive them away, for they are coming to receive the Word of God and to glorify God in your house. . . .⁹⁹

⁹⁸ See, for instance, The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 150.

⁹⁹ The Return of the First Begotten of God to the World (1983), pp. 17-18.

Human beings, Obu says, have multiple sources of origin: for example, some human beings have their origin from the sun, others from the moon; still others from animals, fishes, trees, water, heavenly bodies, and so on. According to this doctrine, a person's physical behaviour in this life invariably reflects his or her biological origin. Thus, a person who originates from the animal kingdom tends to behave just like the particular species of animal from which he or she takes origin.¹⁰⁰

As an attempt to buttress this particular doctrine, Obu even draws on a metaphor once used by Jesus when he referred to the Jewish people of his time as a "generation of vipers" (Matt. 3:7). In this remark of Jesus, explains Obu, Jesus was referring to the bestial origin of the people addressed therein. Similarly, Obu uses in support of this doctrine Paul's statement (in Eph. 6:12) that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world. . . ." According to Obu, some human beings take their origin from these elementary spirits and consequently behave wickedly in this world.

Obu's doctrine of the unity between human beings and the natural world is less Western and closer to traditional African and Indian thought, especially Indian thought as expressed by the Indian thinker, Rabindranath Tagore. In an essay entitled "The Religion of the Forest," Tagore argues that much of Western civilization is built

¹⁰⁰ See Obu, Father's Prediction for 1981, pp. 88ff; cf. The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, pp. 150-51; The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, pp. 77-78; What Is Brotherhood?, especially pp. 10-12.

around the assumption that there is a dichotomy between man and the natural world, a dichotomy which frequently results in hostility and antipathy on man's part towards the things of nature. According to this assumption, the technological man is seen as being the master and conqueror of the natural world and its creatures, which he selfishly harnesses for the promotion of his own well-being and for minimizing the undesirable in nature--diseases, poverty, the upheavals in nature--which tend to thwart his cherished hopes and aspirations and frequently threatens his happiness. Tagore further argues that while the West seeks to dominate nature, the East tries to live in oneness with it, demonstrating the divinely-designed metaphysical unity of man and the rest of creation, which is a way of expressing love for all persons and all things. If sufficiently accomplished, this unity of man and the world of nature, says Tagore, makes it possible for man to live in the infinite realm of infinite joy. Tagore calls this state of being Realization in Action and Realization in Love which, according to him, are essentially one and the same thing. This state of being, Tagore further observes, consequently lifts man out of his ego into the path wherein he comes to realize most fully the Infinite.¹⁰¹

Obu declares that all creation--animate and inanimate--is part and parcel of the Creator: "... you are part and parcel of God. ... Animals, birds, fishes, trees are all part and parcel of God. ... He is the Almighty God and we are gods. We form parts, the small nuts of

¹⁰¹ Rabindranath Tagore, "The Religion of the Forest," in Creative Unity (London: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 55-56.

the Almighty God.'',¹⁰² This teaching is no doubt a combination of Hindu thought and the biblical affirmation: "'Ye are gods'" (Ps. 82:6; John 10:34). Obu obviously takes this biblical statement seriously and literally. Affirming this belief further, he says elsewhere: "If five people are approaching you--a young girl, an old man, a baby, a woman, and a boy--they are all gods. . . . you must recognize all creatures around you as gods.'',¹⁰³

In the context of the images of God, man, and woman, Obu's teaching that "everything that is created has some connection with something else,'',¹⁰⁴ and that all things in nature--animate and inanimate--belong connaturally to the great brotherhood of existence under the fatherhood of God, is certainly capable of having some crucial implications. For one thing, if God and human beings are seen to be in some way related to the things of nature, perhaps this knowledge will stimulate in people greater reverence and respect for both nature and human life. Moreover, if we know that imago dei may be found in the same proportions in woman and man, and that God, woman, man, and the cosmos are bio-spiritually fundamentally interconnected, this new awareness will no doubt influence the languages and images we use in talking about God, ourselves and nature. This new awareness and understanding will also have an impact on the way we treat God, nature, and our fellow human beings. For when each man and each woman comes to

¹⁰² Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 91.

¹⁰³ Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 89.

¹⁰⁴ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, pp. 88.

be convinced that he or she is part of the other sex, and both become aware that they are indeed part of the divine--true images of God--then humanity will see the dawn of a new spirituality and a new and more cordial basis for human relationships in which men and women will simultaneously see each other not only as the image of God but as very god, and also a little bit of each other in themselves. When that happens, men and women will be able to love that God and that little bit of themselves in each other. Moreover, when men and women come to know that they are not only part of each other and of the divine but also part of the physical as well as the spiritual macrocosm--that human beings, the divine, and these macrocosms are essentially and largely undifferentiated--then this earth of ours will become a much better place to make our homes. For such an awareness will deter human beings from carrying out acts of violence against themselves and nature. As David McClelland puts it, "the divinity in all human beings or indeed all living things makes violence against them violence against God and the union with God."¹⁰⁵

Obu's theology and christology will no doubt cause some Christian believers to raise their eye-brows. That is probably the way it should be, if Harvey Cox is correct in stating that "the sociological problem of speaking about God is that the roles of the people who try to do so places them immediately in a perceptual context where what they say can be safely ignored."¹⁰⁶ Obu obviously faces this "perceptual

¹⁰⁵David C. McClelland, Power: The Inner Experience (New York: Irvington Press, 1975), p. 359.

context'' or precarious situation. As we have shown, many aspects of his doctrine of God (theology) and doctrine of Christ (christology) will certainly be ignored by most orthodox believers both in the Judaic-Christian and other religious traditions. Indeed, many of these believers will have a hard time recognizing in certain crucial places the God and the Christ portrayed by Obu. But if Obu has succeeded in re-painting the traditional picture of God and Christ to the satisfaction and acceptance of over a million Christians all over the world, perhaps one should give him some credit for his originality and ingenuity in constructing a theology and a christology that are acceptable to such a large proportion of the world's Christian population.

6. The Holy Spirit

In Brotherhood pneumatology, there is a difference between the Holy Spirit and the Holy Ghost. The former, they believe, is the Promised Comforter now on earth under the new name of Olumba Olumba Obu. The latter, on the other hand, which is said to have descended on the apostles of Christ on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-7), ''was the spirit of the patriarch Fathers which our Lord Jesus released from

(Footnote Continued)

¹⁸⁶Harvey Cox, The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p. 216.

bondage during His three days and three nights in the grave."¹⁰⁷ At times, the Holy Ghost is also interpreted by Obu to be an emanation of the protean spirits of the incarnated Christ which manifest physically in those humans "who can always listen to the words of God. These children of God can be referred to as the Holy Ghost. These are the people who can listen to the word of God and put it into practice."¹⁰⁸ In other words, according to Obu, humans who are known to have a deep love for the word of God and put this word into practice in their daily lives are the spirits of the incarnated Christ, and can therefore be called or referred to individually as the Holy Ghost.

But, as is often the case with Obu's theology in general, one finds in his doctrine of the Holy Spirit some contradictions. For while the Holy Spirit or the Comforter and the Holy Ghost are presented as two different realities, one may also find the two presented as though they were one and the same reality. For instance, Obu says: "If Christ had not died, He would not have returned in the form of the Holy Spirit."¹⁰⁹ Then commenting on the "tongues as of fire" (Acts 2:3), he states: "Diversity of tongues refers us to the multiplicity of Christ. When Christ died He came back in large numbers, and it was these Spirits that rested upon the disciples on the day of

¹⁰⁷ Kevin, p. 4. See similar remarks by Obu in The Truth about the Christ's Servants, p. 169.

¹⁰⁸ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 70.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

Pentecost.¹¹⁰ Thus, while we were told just a few moments ago that it was the spirits of "the patriarch Fathers" which rested on the disciples on Pentecost, we are told here that what actually rested on them were the incarnated spirits of Christ.

These BCS ideas about the Holy Spirit are secondary, however, to their main conception of the third Person of the Trinity. That main conception is that the Holy Spirit is now on earth in the person of Olumba Olumba Obu.

7. The Deity of Obu

Of those members of the BCS interviewed in the course of this research, over eighty-five percent believed that Obu was God in human form. The remaining fifteen percent or so (mostly newcomers) did not say he was not God, but were just not yet sure and so did not want to commit themselves either way. But more than ninety percent of those who had left the movement claimed that they left because they could not "swallow" the idea that a human being was God. Indeed, not only do members believe that their leader is God, they actually address him by divine appellations (see Appendix B).

In spite of this fact, Obu continues to deny publicly that he is God and that he has encouraged his followers to call him God. In pursuit of such denials, he has, in fact, written a booklet entitled

¹¹⁰ Ibid.,

"I am Not God but Olumba Olumba Obu." In one of such denials, he declared: "I am not Jesus Christ or God. Who am I to be known as such ... My name is Olumba Olumba Obu."¹¹¹ Yet for all these denials, he is not known to have at any time publicly reprimanded his followers for deifying or apotheosizing him and calling him divine names. In fact, this writer once asked him why he had not publicly advised his members not to refer to him as God. His answer was:

"Why should I stop them? Have I stopped those who call me devilish names such as 'Satan,' 'Lucifer,' 'Belzeebub,' 'Ekpinoi' ¹¹² and all the rest? My members call me what I am to each of them. How can I stop that? What I am to them, what they see in me, that's exactly what they call me. That is part of their religious experience and I cannot interfere with anybody's religious experience."¹¹³

¹¹¹ BCS Journal, No. 2 (January 1983), p. 58.

¹¹² Ekpinoi is an indigenous mystico-religious cult among the peoples of the Cross River State of Nigeria, involving water deities believed to be used by their worshippers or devotees for the accumulation of material wealth. These deities are believed to cause accidents for those travelling by water, and then to take whatever money was carried by the victims to their worshippers. Also, the souls of the victims are said to be later used by the worshippers as spirit messengers who work for them in bringing them money from banks and from other rich people. The water spirits (deities), it is further believed, may also be used to destroy less powerful evil spirits such as the spirits of witchcraft and sorcery. The devotees for their part are expected to sacrifice human lives to these water deities, and this expectation is usually met, it is claimed, by the devotees' metaphysically causing, annually, the death of a given number of their loved ones or, in the case of a leader of a group, of some of his or her favourite followers, whose souls will ultimately also be used by the deities as spirit messengers to work for the enrichment of the devotees. It is within the context of this belief that many Nigerians, especially those living in the Cross River State, regard Obu as an active and powerful ekpinoi chief priest.

¹¹³ Personal interview with Obu, October 11, 1980.

Having said that, Obu went on to narrate how John the Baptist had once sent his disciples to find out from Jesus whether he (Jesus) were the Christ, the Messiah; and how Jesus, instead of directly affirming his messiahship on this particular occasion, sent back John's disciples to their master with the words "Go and tell your master what you have seen." Then Obu reasoned:

It was up to John and his disciples to decide for themselves whether or not Jesus was indeed the Messiah, on the basis of what they had seen, that is, on the basis of their religious experience. Similarly, let my members call me what they like, on the basis of what they have seen and experienced. Therefore, I will not stop them.¹¹⁴

Amadi lends support to this argument by suggesting that "... what Obu is to an individual member is determined by his religious background and emotion."¹¹⁵

This kind of calculated silence on Obu's part on a major theological question is very common in his theology, and amounts to what Amadi refers to as "seeming ambiguity" in the light of "the apparent clear note of Christocentricity evident in his statements and sermons."¹¹⁶ Indeed, the question of the real relationship between Christ and Obu, is even more puzzling when one considers the fact, according to Amadi, that in 1976 or so Obu had openly encouraged his members to use the three initials of his name (O.O.O.) for the purposes of healing and protection. On this Amadi writes as follows:

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 383.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.231.

The eagerness to use the three initials of the Leader for healing and protection reached its height in 1976 or so, when he himself removed all restraints to it. Members were from then on given authority by him to use them as much as they could, providing they were used alongside that of Christ. This was the nearest he went at this stage in identifying himself as a member of the Trinity, and in endorsing the belief in his deity.¹¹⁷

How, then, are we to explain Obu's persistent denial of his deity during the period of his ministry prior to 1976? One of Obu's closest disciples explains it this way:

Well, you remember that the Jews told Jesus: 'For good works you are o.k. But because you call yourself God, you must die for that.' So it is today. The Jews were not spiritually developed to recognize the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ; that was why they wanted to kill him when He finally revealed Himself as God. And, remember, all along Jesus, like Leader Obu, had deliberately refrained from referring to Himself as God during His ministry. He knew very well what the reaction of the Jews would be if He had made such a claim. And He did not want them to tamper with His life before the appointed time. But when that appointed time came, He revealed Himself as God to the Jews, and you know what happened. They killed Him. But the time had come for that. So it is with the Father (Obu). If He should publicly declare His divinity today, what do you think the reaction of the people would be? Exactly as it was in the case of Jesus.¹¹⁸

Another devotee of the movement has this to say:

If . . . Olumba says he is NOT GOD, it is not because he does not know who he is, but because, out of a sense of modesty and divine humility characteristic of Christ, it would be flippant to a level of naivety for him to proclaim himself as the Christ.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 234-35; cf. pp. 360-61, 374ff. But Amadi's remarks here have not completely solved the problem caused by Obu's persistent denials of his alleged deity.

¹¹⁸ Personal interview with Pastor Kenneth E. Bassey, February 21, 1984.

What this means, then, is that Obu's constant denials of his supposed deity during the early days of his ministry were a calculated strategy to guard against public provocation,¹²⁰ though not against his being "crucified," for the belief of the movement is that he is beyond human destruction and that he, indeed, is immortal. As a calculated technique against any public provocation, therefore, Obu's denials of his alleged deity might also be seen as an evangelistic method, in the sense that if he does not publicly announce that he is God, he will keep on attracting rather than repelling Christians from the older churches. Indeed, that clearly was the motive behind his writing the tactically titled booklet, "I am Not God But Olumba Olumba Obu." He, in fact, revealed this motive to members of the movement's highest Council (the Spiritual Council of Churches) in 1981 when he told them

à huis clos:

The words we speak do not bring in as many converts as our behaviour. Someone who does not shout that Leader O.O. Obu is God but shows love, convinces me more than the one who proclaims his deity but steals and fornicates and of course these very people finally call the Leader a devil. (The booklet) 'I am not God but Olumba Olumba Obu' has opened the way to many people to come in. Those who swore that they would never come in to worship read this booklet, saw the truth in it and have come in to worship God...¹²¹

(Footnote Continued)

¹¹⁹ Jacob Odugbe, "Biakpan: Cradle of a New Jerusalem," The New World Magazine, 1, No. 2 (1978), p. 15.

¹²⁰ Amadi, too, has reached this conclusion; see his "Power and Purity," pp. 250, 261, 350, 380, 385.

¹²¹ SCC Minutes, April 25, 1981, p. 7.

It is, therefore, in this context that one must understand Obu's persistent protestations¹²² and the protestations of some members of the movement against giving any divine appellations to their leader.

An example of such protestations is that given here by Sam Umoh:

All those who go about telling people that the Leader is God or Christ . . . are anti-Christ and false witnesses. . . . Whenever such claims are made, there must be endless disputations and splitting of hairs.¹²³

But there must be noted a drastic change in Obu's attitude about this matter of his divinity. It is to be noted that from the late 1970's, he has begun to unmask his divinity in unequivocal terms. Perhaps the most revealing public declaration of his deity is to be found in the text of a bible class he was conducting in 1979 under the title "The Secret Name and the Garment Dipped in Blood," which was later published in the volume The Supernatural Teacher, Book 1 (1979). According to Amadi, this was "the first and probably the most outright" declaration Obu ever made claiming self-divinity. An insider in the movement, Amadi states that copies of the text of this particular bible class "were initially impounded by him (Obu), on grounds that its contents were too controversial, and that the time was not yet propitious for its circulation. In April 1980, however, they were released for circulation within the movement."¹²⁴

¹²²See, for instance, SCC Minutes, December 29, 1979, pp. 13ff.

¹²³Umoh, Faithful Witness, p. 15.

¹²⁴Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 261; emphasis added.

In his usual convenient and selective manner, Obu carefully selected highly symbolic, little-understood Old Testament passages for the said 1979 bible class, and exegeted these passages in such a way that the central figure of the passages, the one "clothed in a vesture dipped in blood," was made to refer to himself. Pointing his class first to Genesis 49:8-11, he specifically drew their attention to the central character of the passage who "washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes" (v. 11). Then, in his usual Socratic method, he asked the class: "To whom does this portion of the Bible refer? Was the garment of our Lord Jesus Christ dipped in blood?" Then he answered his own question as follows:

This portion proves beyond all reasonable doubts that the revelation of Leader O.O. Obu was foretold before the foundation of the world. Christ was not clothed in a garment dipped in blood. When the people of the world ask you where the name of Leader O.O. Obu is written in the Bible, refer them to this prophetic statement.¹²⁵

Again, he conveniently selects another passage in the Old Testament (Isaiah 63:1-5) which also speaks figuratively of one coming from Edom "with dyed garments" or with "red apparel . . . like him that treadeth in the winefat" who is "glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength," and speaking "in righteousness, mighty to save." Obu further cites Rev. 19:12-13 where reference is made to a character whose name "no man knew, but he himself" and who "was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood and his name is called 'the Word of God.' According to Obu, this character dressed in red is

¹²⁵ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 1, p. 1.

but a prophetic reference to himself, the omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient God. His exegetical summary of those biblical passages dealing with a man dressed in red runs as follows: "With that red garment on me, I am omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient."¹²⁶ On the basis of Rev. 19:12, Obu teaches that no one on the face of the earth, not even his closest disciples, knows the fullest spiritual meaning and implications of the name Olumba Olumba Obu--"the name no man knew, but he himself."¹²⁷

Indeed, Obu could not be more unequivocal about his deity than when he declares "'from high heaven':

My garment reveals my deity . . . One that is 'mighty to save' and . . . clothed in red garment . . . is no other than Leader O.O. Obu. Having known about this new name and the truth surrounding it, why do you continue to express doubts? In the whole world, it is the name of Leader O.O. Obu alone that is mighty to save. It is the only name that all God's creation, including angels, spirits, demons, mermaids, thunder, air, fishes, animals, trees, etc. bow to. . . . Leader Olumba Olumba Obu had existed before the world was formed.¹²⁸

He continues to make such divine claims elsewhere as follows:

Anybody who doubts the deity of the Leader, let him practise the teachings that are in the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, then he will realize whether the Word is from man or from God. . . . I am the sole and ultimate controller and it is for this cause that I came so that I will show the wisdom of truth in practice.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

¹²⁷ See Obu's sermon, "Is It A Name or Work That Identifies Man?" in The New World Magazine (1979?), pp. 15-18.

¹²⁸ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 1, pp. 4, 11.

(Footnote Continued)

As we have said, in Brotherhood theology Obu's name is synonymous with the Comforter or the Holy Spirit. For both Obu and his followers, the Comforter is the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is Olumba Olumba Obu. The Comforter which Jesus promised in John 15:26 is now on earth in the person of this man of Biakpan. Olumba Olumba Obu is Christ come back in the person of the Paraclete. His specific work on earth is to lead the entire universe into all knowledge and all truth, to rule the universe in righteousness, and to give everlasting life to all who heed his pleading.¹³⁰ That is why members of the BCS refer to this age as the age of the Holy Spirit's rule. And, as we have said, the Holy Spirit in question is none other than Olumba Olumba Obu. That is why a visitor to the movement's central bethel in Calabar where Obu preaches daily, will be greeted by a large sign in block letters: "The Comforter has come."

Obu himself says of his presence on earth as the Holy Spirit:

... when God as the Word wants to become flesh, He takes water, blood and spirit and dwells among his creation as a human being. The Holy Spirit now in you consists of water, blood and spirit. That is why you have the senses to see him as a human being. . . . This is why in Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, we do not worship any man except Jehovah God and His Christ who has come back into the world as the Word with His new name, the Holy Spirit.¹³¹

(Footnote Continued)

¹²⁹ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), pp. 76, 102; cf. BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 58.

¹³⁰ See Kevin, p. 27.

¹³¹ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 1, pp. 15, 17; emphasis added. In Obu's theology the expression "water, blood and spirit" stands for

(Footnote Continued)

The return of Christ to earth in the form of the Holy Spirit, according to this doctrine, is a necessary prelude to the ushering in of the new age (see section 13 below). It is the specific work of the Holy Spirit to "quicken" or hasten the earthly manifestation of this new age. By his very nature, the Holy Spirit will work harder and cover all the world in the shortest possible time and thereby hasten the day of the Lord. In his previous fleshly existence as Jesus Christ, he could not accomplish what he is now accomplishing in his role as the Holy Spirit. The reason, as postulated in Brotherhood theology, is clear: "When Christ was on earth he was unable to cover a large area in his ministry, but now that the Holy Spirit has come, where do you not hear of his mighty work everywhere in the world?"¹³²

As pointed out previously, there is no doubt in the minds of most members of the movement that their Leader is indeed Jesus Christ back on earth in the form of the Holy Spirit. There may be a few doubting Thomases in whose minds this whole question is still dubious, however. But the majority of them accept, tout court, Obu as the human representative of the promised Comforter on earth.

One may ask what specific aspects of the movement's teachings convince members of the BCS so strongly about the deity of their Leader. The answers one often receives from enthusiastic members are legion. For instance, one votary gave this rather philosophic answer:

(Footnote Continued)

"human being(s) or 'flesh;' thus when God or the Holy Spirit takes on the form of water, blood and spirit, it means that God or the Holy Spirit has become human or flesh.

¹³² Kevin, p. 28.

"When the fulness of the powers and virtues of God are seen practically in a human being the conclusion is that He is God in human form."¹³³ Other members maintain that they believe that Obu is theanthropic (God in human form) because of the great spiritual powers he possesses, which powers enable him to cause events to take place just by mere spoken words. For example, they testify, he may bring about the healing of a person who was hitherto declared incurable by others, just by merely saying to the sick person "Go, all is well" or "Go, I have solved your problems." Indeed, there are hundreds of testimonies from members claiming that barren women have become fertile, difficult court cases have been miraculously dismissed or decided in favour of members, wealth suddenly obtained, miraculous deliverance from fatal situations experienced, the blind have received their sight, the lame have walked, the lunatic have regained their sanity, and the like--simply because Obu pronounced the simple words, "Go, all is well." Thus, to members of the movement, the efficacy of Obu's words is an evidence of his omnipotence and divinity, because only God can simply speak events into or out of existence (Ps. 33:9).

Other members have testified of Obu's deity by narrating instances of his appearances to them physically and in dreams and visions with specific messages, even though, some of them claim, they lived thousands of miles away from Calabar and may indeed never before had seen him who himself is believed never to have travelled out of

¹³³ Sidney I.U. Etuk, Revelation of the Great World Leader (1982), p. 30.

Calabar. To such members, such theophanic appearances are a proof of Obu's divine omnipresence and omnipotence.

Because members of the movement so strongly believe in the deity of their Leader, they feel obligated to tell the whole world about it, even at the risk of persecution, as in the 1977 incident in Calabar,¹³⁴ or of appearing weird and ludicrous. Indeed, most of them would feel as if they had committed some unpardonable sin if they failed to confess and publicize the reality of this God-man of Biakpan. One zealous member expressed this feeling as follows:

The Father having revealed himself to his children, it will be a sin to hide it from those who have not yet revelation . . . to hide what the Great Leader is, will amount to disservice to the human race. . . . because he who sees a good thing and fails to do it commits sin. It does not matter the number of believers and unbelievers, the duty of revealing him to the world rests squarely upon the shoulders of¹³⁵ those who have received the divine revelation.

Other members give as proof of their Leader's deity the fact that he works tirelessly nearly twenty-four hours daily throughout the entire year, without ever complaining of being even a little weak or tired or sick. On this point, the same member quoted above says:

We have never heard of any man of God serving his Father night and day all the days of his life except the Great Olumba Olumba Obu. If you study facts carefully, they will enable you to realise the truth that He is God.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ On this incident, see chapter seven below.

¹³⁵ Etuk, p. 32.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

Also related to the question of Obu's divinity is the movement's doctrine of his supposed omnipresence. If he is God he must naturally be omnipresent, so the argument goes. Obu himself relentlessly stresses the point in such claims as the following:

As I am standing here with you in the flesh, I am also seen lavishly in flesh all over the world at the same time. . . . As I am lecturing you now physically, I am giving this lecture in all planes, in hades and both the living and the dead have received this lecture equally as you have received. I am standing in the highest heaven giving this lecture to all of you. . . . People of the world sometimes confront you with the question that your leader does not travel outside; he is stationary. There is no need of my going out since I know that I am omnipresent. That's why you all see me in your different houses, farms, offices physically and spiritually. Wherever a Brotherhood of the Cross and Star is, whether they are as many as the sand at the sea-shore, I am always before and behind all of them at the same time.¹³⁷

This doctrine or belief is demonstrated practically in the lives of most members of the movement who go about barefoot to show that they are always in the holy presence of an omnipresent God. Indeed, Obu teaches them that not only is he with them physically externally, but that he is also with them spiritually internally: "I am not only in your houses and offices and in flesh but dwell inside all of you."¹³⁸ Obu often asks members who visit him such questions as "Didn't you see me in your dream on so and so day or night?" or "Did you not see me with your eyes wide open on such and such a day?" Or he would continue such divine claims publicly as when he said:

¹³⁷The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, pp. 138-39.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 139.

Is there among the members of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star and the public anyone who has not seen me spiritually and physically in their houses and everywhere? Yet you continue to doubt (my deity). Even though you see me in your dreams you are still doubting. One person whom millions and thousands of people see spiritually and physically at the same time, and hear His voice distinctly. Here is a person who can appear to millions of people at the same time. Sometimes when you doze off you see Him. There is no place where you cannot see Him. This is why people conclude that He is not an ordinary man. They say that He ¹³⁹has been a member of several secret societies.

What makes this particular statement so significant is the fact that it was made this time not in the privacy of his living room or in the exclusive setting of his bible class or congregation, but publicly in one of the leading newspapers published in Nigeria's national capital, thus making the doctrine of his deity no longer restricted to Brotherhood audiences but now something intended for national, even transnational, consumption. Indeed, only someone so unreservedly convinced beyond any doubt about his deity could be so bold. In any case, we are to bear in mind, as we pointed out earlier, that hundreds of Obu's followers have testified to having actually seen him in their dreams, and some of them have also claimed even to have seen him in bright daylight with their eyes wide open, even in places outside Nigeria. As we also pointed out in discussing Obu's charisma, such testimonies from his followers are crucial both for his self-image as a charismatic leader, for his public image, and for the maintenance of his charisma.

One other reason why members of the BCS believe that their leader is God, is his alleged great patience and tolerance with people. Apparently they got the idea that patience and tolerance are marks of divinity from Obu himself, perhaps when he told them: "If you can endure false allegations and put up bright countenance both within and without, don't you think people will call you Jesus?"¹⁴⁰ The implications of that rhetorical question are quite clear.

Other members claim that their leader is God because, they say, in him are manifested and demonstrated all the divine virtues or fruits of the Spirit such as love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, humility, etc. Conversely, these members believe, none of the "works of flesh" are found in him such as fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, envy, drunkenness, carousing, etc. Since he is filled with all the good, godly virtues and not with any of the works of flesh, these members argue, Obu cannot be anything else but the very Good and very God. Obu himself admits these claims by affirming: "I am a practical leader, for all Godly virtues manifest in my life. . . ."¹⁴¹

A final demonstration of the strong belief in Obu's deity is to be seen in many of the hymns in the movement's official hymnary, The Sure Foundation Hymnary, in which most of the hymns refer to Obu variously as God, Lord, Jesus, Redeemer, Father, Saviour, King of kings, Holy Spirit,

¹⁴⁰ What Is Brotherhood?, p. 10.

¹⁴¹ BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 58.

etc. Indeed, wherever these divine names and titles are used in the hymnbook, they invariably refer to none other than Olumba Olumba Obu. A few random examples from the hymnbook will suffice to elucidate our point:

Come ye now with shouts of joy,
Praise mighty Olumba Obu,
The King who is on the throne;
He is worthy to be praised,
Songs of praises shall we raise;
Worship Him on bended knees.

(Hymn No. 25, stanza 2)

To Thee Olumba give we thanks
Thou Holy and our righteous God;
Thy glory and power throughout the world
Have been revealed to men.

(Hymn No. 30, stanza 1)

Behold a child is born unto us,
In the Town of Biakpan
His name is call'd Olumba Obu

Biakpan in Nigeria not too small
For Saviour to emanate,
As Gov'nor to rule the New Israel.

Who could have believed that a King
Could come from Africa
The world with iron rod to rule.

(Hymn No. 66, stanzas 1-3)

Let glory be to our most high God--
Olumba Obu;
In our lives, our daily duties
Help Thou us to do
Thou wilt not let us go astray
Thou wilt never leave us helpless
Save us O Lord.

(Hymn No. 68, stanza 2)

There's not a friend so good and patient like
Olumba Obu
There's not a friend as righteous on earth like
Olumba Obu.

He leaveth us not like the orphans but with
 Us He dwell
 He is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter long
 promised.

(Hymn No. 82, stanzas 2 and 3)

Olumba Obu is the King
 Great Saviour and a helper
 King of Kings, Lord redeemer is on
 Earth among men to dwell.

No more are there tears in our eyes
 Olumba wiped them away
 No more sorrows on our way; old things
 Have been done away with.

(Hymn No. 92, stanzas 3 and 4)

It is probably worthy of note to indicate here that the hymnbook from which the above stanzas have been taken was first published in 1977, just about the same time Obu began to declare his deity publicly. Prior to that date, although members had known most of the hymns by heart and sang them in their congregations, no published copies were available in the movement's bookstores, perhaps for the same reasons Obu had for initially impounding the controversial Bible class lecture on "The Secret Name and the Garment Dipped in Blood" (see pp. 162ff. above). But since the release of that epoch-making Bible class lecture in 1980, it seems that Obu no longer has any reason to continue to hide his divinity. In fact, nowadays he seems to enjoy hearing his divine names and titles being sung. For instance, he recently especially requested of his congregation that a particular song in which he was referred to as the King of kings be repeated for his appreciation and enjoyment. That special request went as follows: "I have heard you singing one chorus 'The wonderful name which is written at the hem of

His Garment, Leader Olumba, King of Kings'. I would like to hear it once more.¹⁴² Obu must enjoy being God and having his praises sung!

8. Good and Evil

The problem of the co-existence of good and evil is one that has taxed the minds of great theologians and religious thinkers from time immemorial. The problem was formulated by St. Augustine in terms of a puzzling dilemma: either God cannot abolish evil or he will not; if he cannot then he is not all-powerful; and if he will not then he is not all-good.¹⁴³ This dilemma goes back to the Greeks. It is said to have been first formulated apparently by Epicurus (341-270 B.C.), and is quoted as follows by Lactantius (c. A.D. 260-c.340):

God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source, then are evils? or why does He not remove them?¹⁴⁴

¹⁴²O.O. Obu; 'You Are Apostles of God,' The New Kingdom Deaconess: A Journal of the Deaconesses' Fellowship (1985), p. 25.

¹⁴³See, for instance, Augustine, De Natura Boni; cf. Gillian Evans, Augustine On Evil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

¹⁴⁴Lactantius, On the Anger of God, chapter 13, trans. by William Fletcher, The Writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. VII. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmann, 1951).

Lactantius' argument here could not be more provokingly and more trenchantly expressed. The underlying difficulty in this dilemma is how to reconcile the supposed infinite goodness, benevolence, justice and power of God and the existence of crippling evil in the world.

For Obu, however, there is no irreconcilable conflict between the goodness and power of God and the fact of evil, or between good as such and evil qua-evil. Both realities, he affirms, are but two complementary sides of existence, "one cannot exist without the other."¹⁴⁵ Here Obu's teaching is strikingly similar to Hindu, Buddhist or Taoist philosophies on the matter. He stresses further that "there is nothing like evil, for behind such a thing which we call evil lies good."¹⁴⁶ In a manner that reminds one of Oriental dualistic philosophy or of dialectic idealism, Obu says profoundly: "The existence of positive and negative can be compared with the existence of man and woman or weakness and strength. One cannot exist without the other."¹⁴⁷ These remarks seem to echo what William Blake probably had in mind two hundred years ago when he wrote:

Without Contraries is no progression.
Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love
and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

From these contraries spring what the
religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive
that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing
from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Obu, in Kevin, p. 87.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ William Blake. "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," Plate 3.
(Footnote Continued)

To know this fact of life, says Obu, is to have wisdom and insight. Having said that, he goes on to point out that the problem with humankind is that it has wandered away from God, the giver of this kind of wisdom and insight about life, and consequently has not availed itself of such a great source of wisdom about the mystery called life. Because humankind lacks such understanding about life, it tends to "rejoice only when the positive first presents itself and lament when the negative comes up to stabilize the imbalance."¹⁴⁹ There could be no more profound philosophy of life than this. Good alone, asserts Obu, constitutes imbalance in life. In order for good to be meaningful and appreciated, it needs evil "to stabilize the imbalance"! Indeed, Obu further points out that even God, the Ultimate Good, cannot be complete without that which we, in our limited knowledge and language, call evil. "God," Obu maintains, "is both positive and negative (in) appearance. He created both (the positive and the negative)."¹⁵⁰ He quotes from Isaiah 45:7, one of the instances of his irregular, selective and convenient references to the Old Testament, to buttress this particular belief: "I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe, I am the Lord, who do all these things." Another biblical passage which Obu usually quotes and takes literally in this connection is 1 Samuel 2:6 which says: "The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up." But in keeping with his

(Footnote Continued)

lines 7-13, in William Blake: The Complete Poems, ed., Alicia Ostriker (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 181.

¹⁴⁹ Obu, in Kevin, p. 87.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 88; cf. The Students' Handbook, p. 23.

usual theological inconsistency, he would on other occasions assert the ipse dixit: "God does not kill."¹⁵¹ Having quoted these biblical passages, he punctuates them with the rhetorical question: "If we should accept God when he appears as positive, why should we not accept Him when He appears as negative?"¹⁵²

Elsewhere Obu states:

God is not only the God of peace, but the God of confusion. . . . The different spirits are from God. The spirit of sickness, death, spirit of life, spirit of trouble, spirit of fighting, of quarrelling and other spirits are all from God. As God needs them, He brings them to function. . . . Have you not heard that God is a spirit? He is the spirit of fornication, spirit of drunkenness, of falsehood, of confusion,¹⁵³ of blindness, of leprosy, of life and sickness.

The same theological exposition of the dual nature of God is reiterated by one of his well-informed members as follows:

The Supreme Spirit (God) is never a positive force alone but the combination of the positive and negative forces at the state of equilibrium. To be very simple the Supreme Spirit can kill, cause blindness, degrade, exalt, curse, punish, promote, forgive, bless, bestow life, death, pains and agony. But then men call this negative side of God 'Satan'. There is nothing good or evil in the higher esoteric analysis. This is due to the fact that all things happen to the glory of the universal God and through his will.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ See, for instance, Christmas Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels vol. 1: The Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 69.

¹⁵² Obu, in Kevin, p. 88.

¹⁵³ December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, No. 4 (1980), pp. 6, 8.

¹⁵⁴ Akpan, Life After Death, p. 7.

Brotherhood theology here is strikingly similar to what we find in the Bhagavad Gita where the Hindu incarnation of God, Krishna, describes himself as follows:

I am immortality and death
What is and what is not . . . (9:19)

I am the source of all.
All things come forth from me (10:8)

I am the beginning and the end
And the middle of all creations
I am the knowledge of the soul.
I am the discourse of those who speak (10:32)

I am the gambling of the cheat
The sharp edge of the brilliant.
I am victory. I am effort.
I am courage to the stout-hearted (10:36)

Understanding, knowledge, non-delusion
Patience, restraint, truth, serenity,
Courage and fear, joy and sorrow,
Rising up and passing away,
Harmlessness, equanimity, content,
Austerity, open-handedness
Fame, ill-fame, however various,
These states of being arise from me alone (10:4,5)

And whatever is the seed of all beings
That I am . . .
No creature that moves or does not move
Could exist without me. (10:39)¹⁵⁵

It is easy to see from the above passage that Obu's God is almost a photocopy of the Hindu Krishna: he is "the source of all"--of creation, destruction, fame, ill-fame, love, and hate. He is at once "what is and what is not."

One cannot but recall here that in the Judaic-Christian as well as the Islamic traditions, God is portrayed mostly in positive terms: he

¹⁵⁵The Bhagavad Gita, trans. Ann Stanford (New York: The Seabury Press, 1970).

is a God of love, justice, light, truth and peace. On the other hand, the devil or satan is presented as the very opposite of God--the very embodiment of all that is evil--hate, injustice, falsehood, sin; in other words, the devil is the very antithesis of all that God stands for. In these religious traditions, one has a choice between God, symbol of good, and the devil, representing evil. One either goes God's way or the devil's. The choice is good or evil, God or the devil (see, for instance, Joshua 24:15; Jeremiah 8:3). In Hinduism, on the other hand, ultimate reality is both and rather than either or: The ONE is both good and evil, both God and the devil. Both creation and destruction are part and parcel of the ONE. Thus, in this context, Obu ~~seems to find~~ the Hindu conception of the nature of God to be more appealing to him than that of the three religions of Semitic extraction.

However, Obu's theology of 'good' and evil raises an ethical question: if God is all these 'negative' influences and forces and uses human beings to demonstrate the same, where lies human responsibility in this life or in reincarnated lives? This question, unfortunately, is not clearly answered in Brotherhood doctrinal or theological formulations. But, as if to vindicate God in the way he deals with humankind, Obu treats us to a dose of theological defence of God by saying:

We are the cause of His will in presenting us with negative aspect of his being. Once we believe in the power of leaves, trees, mermaid, rings, and other pieces of metal, or in doctors in hospitals, or join secret societies or claim any form of protection to our lives, then He turns negative toward us. ~~The negative appearance may take any~~ form according to His wish. He can use human being, animals, water, trees, stone, fire, wind,

thunder and in fact anything, for His is
everything and is in everything.¹⁵⁶

Thus, as far as Obu is concerned, the so-called negative experiences in life are but the workings of God, not of the devil as is usually assumed in orthodox Christian circles. According to him, when we attribute the dark side of life--the negative in life--to Satan, we by that very attitude 'give glory to 'Satan' as the author of disastrous events; whereas 'Satan' has no atom of power at all and can do nothing since he created nothing.'¹⁵⁷

The further implication of this teaching is that no enemy, human or non-human, can harm one except as such harm is willed and permitted by God who then uses as his instrument what the victim will humanly call his or her 'enemy.' If mankind had understood something of these mysterious workings of God, it would not habitually resort to searching for 'scape-goat' causes for its woes. As Obu puts it, if we had understood the ways of God with humankind, we would stop blaming our troubles on ghosts, mermaids, the devil, witches, sorcerers, our friends or relatives 'whom we think to be our enemies of

¹⁵⁶ Obu, in Kevin, p. 88. In this statement, one begins to see Obu's disapproval and condemnation of aspects of African traditional religious practices; we shall deal with his attitude towards these religious practices later. The last sentence of the quotation echoes the pantheistic philosophy of Oriental religions. For a similar statement made elsewhere by Obu, see, for instance, December Pentecostal Assembly Gospels, No. 4 (1980), pp. 1, 3.

¹⁵⁷ Obu, in Kevin, p. 88; cf. The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, pp. 108-109.

progress."¹⁵⁸ More explicitly, Obu comments as follows on the source of human weals or woes:

If we should come to the understanding, we should not hate anybody or attribute any disastrous happening to the power of any human being or anything at all. Everything including human being is like a doll which cannot act except through the will of God. We are like a machine which cannot operate itself unless a human being is appointed as its operator. So it is that God operates all machinery of life since He is life. As he passes through human being to bring about a positive happening or anything, so He does in bringing about a negative happening, hence it is written in the scriptures, 'Without me ye can do nothing'.¹⁵⁹

This passage is of interest to us because, besides stressing the point that God usually "passes through" human as well as non-human agents to bring about our good or ill, it also underscores two of the cardinal doctrines in Brotherhoodism. The first one, which is accentuated by the imagery of human beings as "dolls" and "machines" or robots, is the doctrine of predestination or fatalism, according to which humankind has no choice about or control over whatever happens to it. Indeed, according to Obu, "God regards (humankind) as a toy, a model to play with as He likes."¹⁶⁰ Elsewhere he says that God "is playing with you just exactly as cats do with rats."¹⁶¹ One hears here undertones of that familiar imagery of the potter and the pot, the

¹⁵⁸ Obu, in Kevin, p. 88; cf. The Light of the World, vol. XVI, p. 31 (n.d.).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁶⁰ December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, No. 4 (1980), p. 9.

¹⁶¹ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 53.

implication of which is that human beings are choiceless robots in the mighty hands of a deterministic potter (God).¹⁶² The second Brotherhood doctrine of which this passage reminds us is Obu's persistent denial of the existence or reality of such powers as witchcraft, sorcery, ghosts, juju, mermaids, fetishes, talismans, magic, etc.¹⁶³

One should not suppose, however, that Obu has always been completely consistent in his proclamations and claims. For one can find in his sermons references to these powers as realities with which his members have to contend. For example, while on the one hand he says that nothing should be blamed on Satan, he can sometimes, on the other hand, attribute the negative public response toward himself and his movement as the result of the machinations of Satan. He states, for instance: "Nobody hates Brotherhood. All those who murmur and speak blasphemous words against Brotherhood, were directed by Satan or the devil."¹⁶⁴ Moreover, Obu sometimes blames on Satan the devious actions of some of his members, as when he says that it is Satan that leads some of his (Obu's) visioners to unlawfully charge those to whom they minister.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² See Obu's specific usage of this imagery in this sense in December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, No. 4 (1980), p. 6.

¹⁶³ See, for instance, The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 136. We shall have more to say later, in chapter five, on Obu's denial of the reality of these constants of African traditional religions.

¹⁶⁴ Father's Prediction for 1981, p. 31.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

The crucial point in the above passage, however, according to Obu's teaching, is that we are to take whatever comes our way as coming directly from God or at least being allowed or approved by him.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, Obu goes so far as even to suggest that God may sometimes see it necessary, in his great wisdom, to "consent" to Satan and allow him to carry out his (Satan's) "evil" machinations against humanity. In such cases, God is seen as the indirect cause of those Satanic machinations, for God, Obu implies, may be said to be the cause of what he does not prevent.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, Obu tells us that God can attack people indirectly through other human beings. He puts this assertion this way:

For instance, if a person suddenly attacked you; it is God who has done the attack through the person. He does this by infusing into the person the spirit of darkness and the person will become wild and repulsive. If you therefore hate the person you are directing your action (hatred) against God. . . . if you react against the attacker you are in direct rebellion against God who is the power that directed the attack. Instead of withdrawing His action He will increase it through diverse agents unless you withdraw your own action against the supposed offender and you do that with due apology.¹⁶⁸

He reiterates the same notion elsewhere when he says:

Do not worry yourself in any way. If an enemy knocks you down and breaks your legs, he is not the person doing that, God is responsible for

¹⁶⁶ See The Light of the World, vol. XVI (n.d.), pp. 29-33; cf. Obu, Chastity and Celibacy, (1982), pp. 4, 7.

¹⁶⁷ See Obu, in Kevin, p. 89.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 89-90.

every happening. He knows the reason why each occurrence comes to pass at every instance.¹⁶⁹

Hence, because all things happen to human beings according to God's will, wisdom and pre-determined plans and for the ultimate good of human beings, "there is no need for you to sympathise with anybody in whatever condition of life you find him,"¹⁷⁰ Obu teaches.

Christians from traditions that emphasize the love, grace, and benevolence of God will certainly find it difficult to recognize this "attacker" God of Obu's theology as the same God whom they themselves worship. But Obu will not hesitate to direct such Christians to biblical passages such as 1 Peter 4:11 and Hebrew 12:5-10, in the hope that they may find there a message to calm their puzzlement. Clearly, Obu does not see any contradiction in the same God being at once an "attacker" and a God of love. According to him, God attacks in love and in order to show love. Indeed, he believes that if the believer never faces the so-called ugly or bad situations in life, it might mean that such a believer is out of favour with God. Expressed in biblical language, this means that "the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Hebrew 12:6; cf. Revelation 3:19). As Obu sees it, "it may please Him to do this chastisement through human beings, animals, insects, rain, sun, wind, thunder, trees, etc., since He is all those creation and forces"--all "for our

¹⁶⁹ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 58.

¹⁷⁰ August Pentecostal Assembly Gospel, 3 & 4, (1981), p. 54.

own good."¹⁷¹ What we see here is Obu's attempt to reconstruct meaning out of that which, to human minds, may seem to be meaningless. Out of the darkness, sadness and pain of God's chastisement, Obu sees God's love. Out of the night of human experience with "evil," he sees "our own good." But according to him, only those who have "spiritual eyes" may see through and understand this "mystery of Godliness."¹⁷²

Accepting the biblical story of Job as given, Obu states that in all the history of humanity, only this man Job had the correct insight into the purposes of God and understood the problem of evil and human suffering. That was why, Obu asserts, Job was able to accept his lot as measured to him by God. Hence, he advises, we should emulate Job's example of unshaking and unshakable faith: "You are to follow the example of Job who, when he was tempted, did not murmur against God but said that he came naked into the world and would go away naked."¹⁷³

One may conclude from all this, therefore, that for Obu the "evilness" of God is only relative, not absolute. Relative evil serves a good end: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."¹⁷⁴ Absolute evil, on the other hand, does not serve any good end.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹Obu, in Kevin, p. 91.

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 34; cf. Kevin, pp. 94-96.

¹⁷⁴Romans 8:28; emphasis added.

But the whole question of attributing to divine causation everything that happens to humankind, is ~~not~~ without serious philosophical problems. For example, if God and man are mystically and bio-spiritually united, as Obu teaches, the notion of a separate God who "attacks" or punishes wrong-doing and wrong-doers is difficult to grasp, let alone accept. E.W. Russell expresses this difficulty as follows: "It is contrary to logic and psychological feeling for God to utterly reject and punish Himself, as He would do if He were an essential part of man."¹⁷⁶ Moreover, this doctrine also raises immediately the old ethical question of human responsibility and of humans as free moral agents. This ethical question, in fact, is not unconnected with the larger issue of predestination which comes up again and again in Obu's teachings. Indeed, one often sees inherent conflicts, even blatant contradictions, as one tries to reconcile Obu's doctrine of predestination, which glosses over the question of human responsibility, and the doctrine of repentance from sin, which stresses human responsibility. And how is one to interpret the following remarks of his: "Do you know that you are the architect of your own fortune? Wherever you are, you had placed yourself there?"¹⁷⁷

(Footnote Continued)

¹⁷⁵ On this distinction between "relative evil" and "absolute evil," see John A. Sanford, Evil: The Shadow of Reality (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 126-28; 143-46;

¹⁷⁶ E.W. Russell, "Christianity and Militarism," Peace Research Reviews, 4, No. 3 (1971), p. 65.

¹⁷⁷ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 138; cf. The Everlasting Gospel: The Transcendent Teachings of the Holy Spirit, vol. 2, pp. 29-33.

Furthermore, if all that happens to human beings are predestined by God and should therefore be accepted without any questioning or murmuring, why then does Obu, by offering healing and material relief to his members and non-members who are sick or experiencing some difficulties in life, try to disrupt divine predetermined plans for those individuals? Or, if it is true, as he says elsewhere, that "each and everyone of us behaves as he was created,"¹⁷⁸ then why does Obu bother to preach moral reformation or that one should act well in this life if one is to live happily in one's reincarnated lives? Obu's answer to these questions is that God creates what human beings consider to be ugly and undesirable circumstances so that when he (God) turns around to resolve those circumstances, for example by healing the sick, freeing people from difficult court cases, enriching the poor, giving children to the barren, changing sinners into saints, he might make his power and glory manifest. "If God did not create these things (circumstances or situations)," asks Obu, "how would you appreciate His knowledge, His power, His beauty, His strength and including His virtues?"¹⁷⁹ He sustains this argument in the following remarks:

. . . God made Pharaoh a king and He hardened his heart against the children of Israel, so that He might reveal His glory. . . . Why do you ask questions about what you see daily in your life? Do you not know that He can demote you to the lowest position so that at any time when He promotes you, He might be glorified. He makes you to go sickly so that when you are healed of your

¹⁷⁸ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 65.

¹⁷⁹ The Supernatural Teacher, Book-3, p. 71; cf. The Light of the World, XVI, pp. 14-15.

sickness you might glorify Him and the world would believe in Him as the living God now dwelling amidst men.¹⁸⁰

The theology here is similar to that suggested by Jesus' answer to his disciples' question as to who it was that had sinned--the man born blind or his parents. Jesus' answer on that occasion was: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him" (John 9:2). Indeed, Obu sees most of the ailments with which he has had to deal in the light of these remarks of Jesus concerning the illness of Lazarus of Bethany: "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it" (John 11:4).

Does this kind of theology explain why Obu may be seen to be morally justified when he, as is often testified by members, uses his spiritual powers to pull criminals out of the grip of justice, as when he reportedly intervenes spiritually in court cases in favour of those criminals? Perhaps. Indeed, if one takes seriously Obu's doctrine of predestination and divine causation and responsibility for everything human beings are and do, then one can probably see God's act of deliverance through Obu as being consistent with the principles of moral justice. For if it is true, as Obu teaches, that God can indeed cause a person to steal or embezzle public funds or to fornicate, for instance,¹⁸¹ or that "God is responsible for the behaviour of all the

¹⁸⁰ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 81.

¹⁸¹ See, for instance, December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, No. 4 (1980), pp. 6, 8, 48; cf. The Everlasting Gospel: Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World, vol. 1 (n.d.), pp. 2-10.

people in the world,¹⁸² then justice demands that God (in and through Obu?) should stand by to help that person out when he or she is in trouble with the law of the land. Similarly, if it is true, as Obu further claims, that God indeed causes a person to do everything, including carrying illegally on his or her person some contraband items or commodities while on a trip, then one can understand why God, this partner in crime, would intervene in the person's favour when he or she is caught by the law enforcement agents of the land, as Obu's illustration below seems to imply:

Sometimes you are travelling and you are exposed to checking on a road block and because of certain articles in your possession, they refuse to allow you go but immediately any superior officer appears and questions to know what is going on, he, mindless of the reports from the junior officers, orders your immediate release. Brethren, who is this superior officer? He is our Lord Jesus Christ. You and those who arrested you may never¹⁸³ know that the superior officer is Christ.

But Obu has not settled convincingly this whole question as to who is ultimately responsible for human woes and afflictions--God or humankind. He is very ambivalent and inconsistent about the whole matter. As we have so far observed, on the one hand he attributes directly to God everything --good or bad--that happens to human beings. On the other hand, he stresses human responsibility, as when he rhetorically asks:

Do you not know that all the afflictions, tribulations, anguish and lack that come your way are as a result of your evil practices? Do

¹⁸²The Light of the World, vol. XVI, p. 39.

¹⁸³August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 24.

not associate them with ¹⁸⁴juju, witch, wizard,
mermaid and charm . . .

The "'evil practices'" to which Obu refers here may be those committed in this life--in the here and now--or those committed in the previous life. But in either case, one remains puzzled still about who it is that is the real cause of these "'evil practices'"--is it God or humankind? This question arises because Obu at the same time teaches, as we have seen, that God is ultimately responsible for all that human beings do and for the way they behave. In other words, it is one of Obu's basic teachings that God, indeed does cause human beings to behave in the way they do and to do all the things they do.

Another problem related to this question as to who is responsible for human actions, is the moral question of how to exonerate the human agents whom, as Obu teaches, God might choose to use in "'attacking'" other human beings. Suppose, for instance, such human instruments of the attacker God are caught and punished by the law of the land for carrying out such divine assignments, will God be justified for causing his apparently innocent human agents to suffer thus? Perhaps if the law enforcement agents of the land knew that a particular human being was being used by God to accomplish a particular divine purpose, they might exonerate the individual who was thus used by God. But how will the law enforcement agents ever know this "'mystery of Godliness'"? Even if they knew it, would justice permit them to exonerate this "'agent of God'" from punishment for an offence for which other

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 104.

citizens would be brought to account? And since they do not know about the secret ways of God and then go ahead and castigate the offender, will God in turn punish the law enforcement agents for punishing his "chosen vessel"? These are only a few of the multitude of philosophical questions unavoidably raised by Obu's theological explanation of the problem of evil in human existence.

Besides, how does one reconcile Obu's analysis of the problem of good and evil with his constant emphasis on moral reform? If, indeed, nothing is inherently evil, why all his preaching against societal corruption and depravity, and the corresponding appeal to mankind to amend its ways?

Granted, the doctrine of predestination may have some psychological benefit for those who believe it. For instance, if one is convinced that one's wretched position in life is not of one's making but of God's making, such a person may be saved the burden of guilt feelings that usually accompany personal failure, especially if that person is told that he or she was placed in that position by divine will in order to fulfil some divine purpose. Thus, a barren woman who is told that her barrenness is the outcome neither of her sins nor of witchcraft, but that "she was born so in order that the glory of God might be revealed,"¹⁸⁵ or that "He (God) is the one who sealed your womb that you bear no child . . . God might design that you have no child in your life-time . . ."¹⁸⁶ that woman might find some

¹⁸⁵ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, (1980), p. 70.

¹⁸⁶ August Pentecost Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 82:

consolation in such words. Indeed, many a faithful will allay his or her anxiety and grief over his or her difficult position in life when Obu tells him or her:

Whatever circumstance that you find yourself, do not ask any question. Accept your position as you find yourself. That is the divine plan of God, just accept it. Do not blame yourself, do not be angry or annoyed, do not complain nor murmur, just give thanks to God for creating you in that way, because you are a vessel which God has created for his own purpose on earth.¹⁸⁷

Or when he says: "The fact is that if you had been contented with whatever situation God places you, you could have no problem."¹⁸⁸ Such consolation may be seen as a further evidence of religion's capacity to help individuals not to give up, not to capitulate when they face life's storms. In other words, what we see here is one of the latent functions of religion.

But the doctrine of predestination is not without negative consequences. For instance, it may make individuals to become apathetic and resigned toward life as a whole. True, such apathy and resignation may help them to be somewhat anxiety-free. But we also know that, psychologically, anxiety-free existence may be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on the particular circumstances of the individual concerned. For example, while it may help an individual to live without worries, emotional upset and stress, it may also kill in

¹⁸⁷ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, (1980), p. 71; cf. Obu, The Everlasting Gospel: Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World, Vol. 1 (1980), pp. 2ff., August Pentecostal Assembly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), pp. 53-54.

¹⁸⁸ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 82.

the same individual foresight, creativity, and the capacity to plan intelligently for the rainy day.

In the final analysis, if one finds unsatisfactory Obu's doctrine of good and evil and his ambiguity concerning their exact cause(s), one should not feel too disappointed, for the difficulty lies not in the one who attempts to philosophize or theologize about good and evil in the conditio humana, but precisely in the very ungraspable, elusive nature of good and evil as such. Unless one understands fully what good is and what evil is (and no one has ever laid claim to such understanding!), one can discuss them only partially. And any partial discussion of these realities will always remain unsatisfactory to those who have experienced them both.

9. Obu's Soteriology

Different social experiences or circumstances give rise to different sorts of suffering from which people seek salvation. Anyone acquainted with the literally hundreds of written and oral testimonies that come from members of the BCS, with Obu's sermons, with the movement's abundant literature, will be convinced that the notion of salvation as taught in the movement, is not limited only to spiritual, other-worldly dimensions. Rather, Brotherhood soteriology also has its this-worldly dimensions. The this-worldly level of salvation constitutes what Wilson refers to as a "particularistic" conception of salvation, in the sense that it deals with particular or specific existential concerns, such as physical well-being, poverty, childlessness, problems of love and hate, family problems, joblessness,

difficult court cases, and the like.¹⁸⁹ To be delivered from these undesirable conditions in life constitutes an essential aspect of what is understood in the BCS as salvation. Indeed, as far as members of this movement are concerned, salvation begins right here in our terrestrial existence. Thus, for them salvation is not merely an eschatological event; rather, it is first and foremost a possibility realizable now, and has to do with present realities and reassurances in regard to such matters as healing, temporal well-being, and material comfort in the here and now. For them, salvation is therefore necessarily influenced by their social experiences of just what constitutes conditions of well-being. That is to say, the movement's notion of well-being is unavoidably socially conditioned in terms of what members experience or learn in their immediate existential situation. It is their present environment or situation which dictates to them what constitutes conditions of well-being or the contrary, when they see and compare the way other people in that environment live, move, and have their being. It is clearly this understanding of salvation which Obu has in mind when he remarks: "Brotherhood is known to the worldly people to (the) extent that whoever is confronted with problems, sickness, poverty and tribulations is advised to go to Brotherhood to gain salvation."¹⁹⁰ Such a concept of salvation consorts with the sociological definition of the term which Wilson has proposed elsewhere:

¹⁸⁹ See Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 29.

¹⁹⁰ The Powerful Ambo Sermons, p. 227.

. . . sociologically, salvation is, in-essence, present reassurance of the possibility of overcoming evil, in whatever way evil is theologically or culturally defined. Salvation is the commodity in which all religions deal, whether it is release from witches, illness, disgrace, bad luck, early death, punishment after death, or damnation to recurrent lives of misery.¹⁹¹

A further example of how the term salvation is frequently used in the BCS doctrinal vocabulary to mean freedom from that which affects one's physical well-being now may be illustrated by reference to a remark once made by the late elderly member of the movement, Rev. O. Mkpanam. Speaking about how West African mosquitoes killed early White missionaries in large numbers, this former minister of the Presbyterian church wrote: "Salvation came to them (the White missionaries) when the drug quinine was discovered to be a powerful antidote against 'operation-wipe-out' of the mosquitoes' malignancy."¹⁹² The same notion of salvation as protection against bodily or physical harm is also articulated by another prominent member of the movement who, speaking specifically here of the methods his colleagues used in searching for "salvation" before they became members of the BCS, states:

Before now, some used to sacrifice cows, goats and fowls and perform all sorts of awkward manipulations for their lives' protection, but did

¹⁹¹ Bryan R. Wilson, "The New Religions: Preliminary Considerations," in Eileen Barker, ed., New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), p. 17; cf. Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, pp. 29-32.

¹⁹² O. Mkpanam, "The Dawn in Africa," in Bassey et al. Who Is This Man Olumba Olumba Obu, p. 25.

not get any peace of mind or salvation. Now they are indeed free, free of charge!¹⁹³

Such a conception or definition of salvation in the BCS is, of course, not original with or peculiar to the movement, however. We see it already in African traditional religions and then in Judaism. Indeed, as Geoffrey Parrinder rightly says, "... the African's religion is this-worldly, and seeks the enrichment of all the powers of this present mortal being."¹⁹⁴ Also, this notion of salvation is typical of most African/Nigerian new religious movements at large.¹⁹⁵ In fact, the concept of physical healing as salvation is so basic to Nigerian new religious movements that Enang has typonymized these movements, if reductionistically, simply as "prophet-healing-liturgy" type, where prophet refers to revelations from the Spirit, healing to soteriology and liturgy (to) the intensive prayer life marked by music and dancing."¹⁹⁶ In the Old Testament, this conception of salvation as the condition of well-being in the here and now is clearly articulated, especially in the so-called Complaint Psalms.¹⁹⁷ Clearly, it would appear that the basic goal of every religious behaviour and performance

¹⁹³ Eyo, The Truth Has Come (1975), p. 36.

¹⁹⁴ G. Parrinder, West African Psychology: A Comparative Study of Psychological and Religious Thought (London: Lutterworth Press, 1976), p. 219.

¹⁹⁵ See, for example, Kenneth Enang, Salvation in a Nigerian Background: Its Concept and Articulation in the Annang Independent Churches (Berlin: Verlag von Dietrich Reimer, 1979), p. 191.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p. ix; emphasis added.

¹⁹⁷ See Friday M. Mbon, "'Deliverance in the Complaint Psalms: Religious Claim or Religious Experience?'" Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies, 14, No. 2 (1982), 120-31.

is precisely, in the words of Deutronomy 4:40, ". . . that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth . . ." Much the same idea is echoed in 3 John 2: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." With such a notion of salvation strongly held in the BCS, it is difficult to see what is new in this matter or the kind of change about which Amadi speaks when he makes the following claim:

The B.C.S. ideology . . . reflects a new dimension of religious change--from the narrow materialistic view of salvation typical of the Nigerian Prophetic Movements of the first half of the century to a broader, loftier moralist one.¹⁹⁸

No doubt Obu would whole-heartedly endorse the above notion of this-worldly or "earthly" salvation. But he would also go on to admonish his followers that that kind of salvation will not ultimately amount to much if it is not followed by "heavenly" or spiritual salvation. He would tell them, for instance:

The qualified children of God (who) are followers of Christ are those whose main purpose of coming here (is) to receive the gospel and (to) carry them out practically . . . but as for those who come here to pray for children, good health, money, and all the carnal wealth of this world--rejecting the main theme--will go with nothing.¹⁹⁹

In Brotherhood soteriology, "heavenly" salvation is obtained through moral purity, through loving one another, through speaking the truth

¹⁹⁸ Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 618.

¹⁹⁹ The Powerful Ambo Sermons, p. 228.

always, through refraining from adultery, fornication, stealing, drinking alcoholic beverages, and other "ungodly acts."²⁰⁰

These means of obtaining spiritual salvation will seem to many Christian groups, especially the "born-again" groups, as means of gaining salvation through human efforts or works. However, Obu is, in fact, very ambivalent, as usual, about this matter of the means of salvation. The issue at stake here is: are people saved by human efforts (works) or by the grace of God? On the one hand, Obu sometimes gives the impression that the former is the only means of salvation, as when he says: "He who relies on the saying that man is saved by grace and not by works is of the flesh, for he cannot practise the word of God."²⁰¹ Or when he says:

If the people in the olden days paid their tithes and subjected themselves to fasting and yet were not saved, you should know that you have to work harder than they did in order to win the kingdom of God.²⁰²

As a further expression of this doctrine of salvation by works, one of the popular BCS songs says:

Sin idem nam utom,
Eda ubok utom owo enyana owo.

Work dilligently,
For man is saved by his works.²⁰³

Elsewhere Obu asserts:

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 227.

²⁰¹ April Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 101.

²⁰² SCC Minutes, April 2, 1977, p. 12; emphasis added.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 23.

The church (and) denominations preach to their members that they are saved by grace; and because they are saved by grace they should continue to fornicate and commit adultery, tell lies or commit murder. In this new kingdom (i.e. the BCS), fornication is forbidden. You are saved by the amount of instructions that you can keep, and by practising the words of God, not by grace.²⁰⁴

But having said all that, he goes on to contradict himself as usual by declaring as follows:

Brethren, we all are saved by grace, not by works or by any acts of righteousness; for it is according to what God had pre-ordained. . . . there is no other way to see the Father²⁰⁵ unless you pass through Christ the Son of God.

Then he refers to Jesus Christ as the author and finisher of humankind's salvation:

He has come to save the world as well as you and me. If He had not come in human form, died on the cross and had ascended into heaven, there could have been no salvation for mankind. . . . Now that we all have turned to Him we have to seek salvation from Him for He liveth forever; there is not other source of salvation. . . . There is no other way of salvation than listening to God.²⁰⁶

Unless logical consistency is not so important for popular religion, such conflicting, inconsistent views of the source and means of spiritual or "heavenly" salvation are likely to leave members of the BCS more confused about this matter than may be those Christians who opt for one or the other means of salvation-- works or grace.

²⁰⁴ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 145; emphasis added.

²⁰⁵ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 23.

²⁰⁶ Revelation of the Holy Spirit: Special Release for Christ's Week (1981), pp. 99, 104, 127; see also The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 59.

Unless Obu resolves this conflict in his doctrinal system soon, the day may come when his followers will be so confused by this particular aspect of the movement's soteriology that they will throw it to the wind, and concentrate on the aspects of the doctrine which they understand and allegedly now experience, that is, the 'earthly' or this-worldly aspects of salvation, which, according to Obu himself, will not amount to much. Also, Obu should remember that confused believers, especially in a matter of such religious importance, often make very poor and weak believers.

10. Brotherhood Thanatology

The following observation on African traditional concept of death and dying summarizes trenchantly Brotherhood thanatology:

In Africa the problem of life and death constitutes the basis for religious feeling and is the unconscious foundation of philosophical reflection. Life and death are both 'given' to man by the creator; they are the fundamental terms of existence and are so closely linked that one cannot be conceived without the other. Death, however, enjoys the incontestable advantage over life in that it is necessary, for it was not inevitable that life be given, but as soon as it appeared death had to follow. It is fair to say that death²⁰⁷ seems to be the unavoidable consequence of life.

Brotherhoods see death as a messenger in God's hand which only acts at God's command. Death, they further believe, strikes only when it is the appointed, predestined time for the individual concerned.

²⁰⁷ Zahan, p. 36.

According to this belief, a person dies precisely in the way and on the very day he or she had been preordained to die. Thus, "if it were written that you would be matcheted to death, so you will pass away."²⁰⁸ Since this is so, they argue, lamenting over a person's death is "fighting against God's will."²⁰⁹ For that reason, members of the movement are taught not even to attend the funeral service of their relatives or to carry out any funeral rites on their behalf. Obu is unequivocal in his condemnation of the practice of crying over the dead and attending funerals when he declares:

To cry is the work of flesh. All those who attend funerals and shed tears have scored zero. Do you know where a man comes from or where he goes when he dies? Man is the property of God and whatever it pleases Him to do with human beings, He is entitled to do. You have no right to question Him.²¹⁰

This particular statement is, in fact, a departure from Nigerian cultural belief and practice according to which anyone who goes to a funeral home and shows no sign of sorrow over the dead, is considered to be inhumanly hard-hearted. In fact, in certain cases, such a person might even be suspected of possibly being in some way responsible for or at least aware of the cause of the death. For it is believed among the ethnic groups of the Cross River State of Nigeria that if someone had used evil powers to take away the life of another and later turned

²⁰⁸ BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 87; cf. Akpan, Life After Death, p. 14.

²⁰⁹ BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 88.

²¹⁰ "The Power in Brotherhood of the Cross and Star is the Word of God," unpublished ms. (n.d.), p. 7; cf. Revelation of the Holy Spirit, pp. 19-28.

around to mourn the death of that very person, the evil powers will get angry and attack the person who had used them.

Members of the movement are told to "let the dead bury the dead," which, according to their interpretation, means that the sinful and worldly should take care of the corpse which is itself, they say, a symbol of sin and corruption. But death itself comes from God and as such is no evil, for nothing evil, in the sense that word is commonly understood, ever comes from God.

According to Obu, Jesus, for example, did not care or mourn when his earthly father died. Obu, in fact, claims that Jesus was in India when his biological father died. When his mother wrote to him about his father's death, Obu tells us, Jesus is said to have written back to say that his father had finished his work on earth and so that chapter of his life was closed, and that no one should mourn for him. "He did not rush home to attend his father's funeral as some of you faithless ones might have done today. It was not necessary for him to do so," says Obu.²¹¹ The reference here to Jesus' supposed visit to India and to his alleged letter to his mother on the occasion of his father's death is of course not original with Obu. The myth may be found in other religious traditions. For example, we find the same story in the Aquarian Gospel²¹² and in the Indian Achmadiyya movement founded by Mirza Ghulam. The myth itself is said to have originated in

²¹¹Obu, in a Sunday morning sermon, September 18, 1983.

²¹²See The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ: The Philosophic and Practical Basis of the Religion of the Aquarian Age of the World, transcribed from the Akashic Records by Levi H. Dowling (Marina del Rey, CA.: De Vorss & Co., 1907), chapter 30.

1894 with the Russian war journalist, Nicolas Notovitch, whose book La vie inconnue de Jésus-Christ, is said to contain, inter alia, a translation of a text found in a Tibetan monastery. In the Tibetan manuscript it is conjectured that Jesus as a young man had travelled to India and Tibet before he began his ministry in Palestine. But this postulate was later found to be highly dubious, and even Notovitch himself is reported to have admitted that the alleged Tibetan text did not exist at all.²¹³ What is of interest to us here, however, is how Obu can borrow ideas freely from other sources to support his particular viewpoints or teachings. Furthermore, Obu also argues that when the death of John the Baptist was reported to Jesus, he expressed neither sympathy nor concern over the incident; instead, says Obu, he "took up His Bible (!) and went about preaching the words of God."²¹⁴ Having said that, Obu stresses that we must always follow the example of Jesus. It is possible that Obu's teaching regarding mourning the dead has been influenced by Hindu religious practice which also teaches the same thing. The basic idea in this teaching is that it serves no purpose to mourn the dead since they are coming back through the processes of reincarnation.²¹⁵

²¹³ See Levi Geir Eidhamar, "Rajneesh's Understanding of Jesus," Update: A Quarterly Journal on New Religious Movements, 9, No. 2 (June 1985), p. 23.

²¹⁴ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), pp. 72-73; see also Revelation of the Holy Spirit, pp. 21-22; December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, No. 3 (1980), p. 3.

²¹⁵ Due to their abhorrence of anything magical, Protestants also did not generally mourn the dead in the beginning.

For Obu death is a natural necessity and should not be feared. Indeed, he sees death even as a biological and procreational necessity. According to him, "if somebody does not go into the spiritual transfer into the greater beyond, you cannot have infants born into this world."²¹⁶ In other words, death is a necessary prelude to birth. In agreement with this view, one of his ardent members once said: "All children born into this world are but the dead resurrected--the death come alive through natural birth, through women. In worldly vocabulary, this process is called reincarnation. Without death there would be no birth."²¹⁷ In the same vein another member of the movement writes: "The children we have are souls incarnate and reincarnate."²¹⁸

Indeed, not only does Obu see death as a biological and procreational necessity, but also as a moral necessity. As a moral necessity, death is a prelude to the many incarnations through which each person must go in order to make good his or her failings of the previous life. The argument here is that if human beings are expected, ultimately, to live morally perfect lives in order to be saved, then it would take more than just one existence to accomplish such perfection; hence the necessity of the coming and going process of reincarnation, a process, implies Obu's thanatology, divinely ordained to give human beings more opportunities to perfect themselves to the point where no

²¹⁶ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 67; cf. The Mystery of Death, pp. 2-4, 15.

²¹⁷ Personal interview with Apostle E.K. Ukpai, March 16, 1982.

²¹⁸ Akpan, Life After Death, p. 52.

more incarnations will be necessary. Indeed, a preface to Obu's series of sermons on the subject of death expresses this thought unambiguously as follows: "... Death is necessary if man must achieve perfection. He must be regenerated. Each death removes physical infirmities and produces an offshoot better than one previous."²¹⁹ Thus, only in the light of the availability of such recurring opportunities for constant moral transformation and eventual perfection may God's love, grace and justice become indisputable in the economy of divine reward and punishment.

Furthermore, from the standpoint of the moral necessity of reincarnation, Obu goes on to argue that it is morally necessary for a person who, having lived a good moral life and done some good deeds that benefited fellow humans, but was prematurely cut off by death, to reincarnate in order to reap the fruits of his good life and deeds here in this life. Similarly, Obu argues further, it is also a matter of poetic justice and morality for those who had in their previous lives lived carelessly and selfishly to reincarnate to reap in this life the fruits of their careless and selfish living. Obu does not mince his words about this belief when he says:

Whatever you were in your first incarnation will repeat itself in your subsequent incarnations. That is why your works follow after you, all the good things you do follow after you, and all the vices and evil things also follow after you in all your incarnations.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Preface to Obu, The Mystery of Death, p. iii.

²²⁰ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 57.

This notion that the dead return to live through reincarnation in order to reap the fruits of the work they did in their previous existence, contrasts sharply with the view of those Christians who believe that retribution takes place either in heaven or in hell after death, and with the idea held among some African peoples that one receives one's reward or punishment in the spirit world after death. For Obu, on the contrary, reward and punishment take place this side of the grave.

Clearly, the concept of the moral necessity of reincarnation is not without social ramifications. People who seriously believe in this law of karma will tend to comport themselves and direct their social actions in accordance with that belief. Thus, the doctrine can serve as a catalyst for social justice and reform. If our assumption here is true, one would hope that Obu's doctrine of reincarnation may provide a kind of training in moral principles for his followers which will be conducive to good citizenship. Indeed, as he himself has said,

If we had believed that to die is to resurrect, and (that) if one does not die he cannot resurrect, we would have diligently and devotedly engaged ourselves in well-doing, and do that which is good unto ourselves, so that when we return we enjoy the fruits of our labour . . . Your main problem is that you are still ignorant of the fact that to die is to be regenerated. Such ignorance induces you to steal and be indebted to others. When you come back, you will defray all your indebtedness before you can settle down to enjoy yourself. Some people immediately they are born, things are very good with them, everything runs smoothly with them. It is the result of what they did that they begin to reap the fruits of their labour.²²¹

²²¹ The Mystery of Death, pp. 23, 40.

This passage is glaringly similar to Hindu teaching on death and rebirth according to which death is but a point on the great span of endless time. According to Hindu metempsychosis, an individual may die but his or her death is not the end of his or her story. This, obviously, is the same idea in the above passage and in the following statement by a member of the BCS:

Since God created man, not even one soul has died. Till today Adam is still living. Life is God and God is life. Life does not die. It only runs out from something that has it, and that process of life temporarily running out is what people mistakenly call death. What people call resurrection of the dead is that life coming back to what originally had it.²²²

Hinduism teaches, as also does Brotherhoodism: "For sure is the death of all that is born, sure is the birth of all that dies: so in a matter that no one can prevent you have no cause to grieve."²²³ Thus, according to Hindu and Brotherhood teachings, human beings in their reincarnated lives live according to their acts in their former lives. For both religious traditions, therefore, reincarnation is more than a belief; rather, it is the very certainty on which all life is based.

As in the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Brotherhood statements quoted above help to explain, at least partially, the problem of good and evil and the seeming unfairness and partiality in life. The various fortunes and misfortunes, blessings and curses, health and sickness, wealth and penury, which human beings experience in life, are

²²² Interview with Apostle E.K. Ukpai, March 16, 1982.

²²³ The Bhagavad-Gita 2:27; trans. R.C. Zaehner (London:Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 50.

explained in terms of the law of karma (read law of causality)—that is, in terms of what particular individuals had done in their previous lives. As Obu puts it, "it is the result of what they did that they begin to reap the fruits of their labour." For that reason, Obu does not subscribe to the Judaic-Christian doctrine of the Fall as the cause of all the evil and suffering in this world, a belief which goes as far back as to Augustine in the fifth century A.D. Indeed, in the light of the doctrine of karma and reincarnation, the Judaic-Christian concept of original sin is, for Obu, nothing more than sins originally committed by individuals in their previous lives. Thus, according to Obu, the principle of the law of karma may also be illustrated from the lives of Adam and Eve. Because the first Adam, he says, "caused the death of the world," he had to come back in the person of Jesus Christ, the second Adam, "to hang on the tree to save the world," thereby paying for the sin committed by him in his previous life. In the same manner, the first Eve who had caused the fall of man "came back as Mary to resuscitate men to eternal life."²²⁴

From a purely philosophical standpoint, the above view of reincarnation is probably more consoling than the Christian doctrines of the creation and of the Fall. Of course, such consolation is possible only if one believes that one's present life situation is a consequence of the way one lived in the previous life. In that case, there is no question of arbitrariness, randomness, or injustice on the

²²⁴ The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 33.

part of some assumed spiritual power or creator, but only a matter of cause and effect, the reaping now of what one sowed in the past. It would seem more consoling, therefore, for individuals to know that their present condition in life is the consequence of the way they had lived in their previous lives, than to know that their present life situations are totally the will of God and ordained by him. For if one believed the latter (Christian) view, one, even the fortunate one, but more so the unfortunate one, who has the slightest sense of justice and morality, would be so disheartened about his (God's) impartiality that one would probably follow the suggestion of Job's wife and curse God and die. Obu's doctrine of reincarnation, like its Hindu version, seems to deter the disconsolate of the earth from committing suicide, but rather helps them to live patiently with their present lot, with a determination to lead morally better and more altruistic lives, thus laying up better treasures now for better and happier lives in their subsequent incarnations.

Obu's doctrine of reincarnation as an explanation for the disparities in the human situation brings to one's mind this important statement by the Indian scholar, R.K. Tripathi:

The law of karma along with the doctrine of rebirth has the merit of solving one great problem of philosophy and religion, a problem which is a headache to the western religions and which finds no satisfactory solution in them. The problem is: How is it that different persons are born with an infinite diversity regarding their fortunes in spite of the fact that God is equally good to all? It would be nothing short of denying God to say that He is whimsical. If God is all-Goodness and also All-Powerful, how is it that there is so much evil and inequality in the world? Indian

religions relieve God of this responsibility and make our karmas responsible.²²⁵

It may be true that the doctrine of karma does seem to offer at least a partial explanation for the problem of good and evil, but that explanation can only be just that--partial. Even then, Tripathi's remarks give the impression that it is impossible for one to believe simultaneously in the doctrines of karma and of divine responsibility. Obu does not, as we have shown, see such impossibility, however. For him, God and human beings are both responsible for whatever situations the latter find themselves in. According to Obu, it is God who is ultimately responsible for what each person does and how each individual behaves in this life, and, ipso facto, responsible for each person's condition in his or her incarnated life. One might say, then, that, according to Obu, God is the cause of all causes. Therefore, for Obu the doctrine of karma does not necessarily 'relieve' God of the responsibility of evil in human existence. Indeed, as we have shown earlier, Obu minces no words in stating categorically and with no ambiguity that God is both good and evil or that both good and evil come from God.²²⁶ As such, for Obu the existence of evil is not necessarily a threat to or at odds with the concept of a good, loving God. In fact, it would seem that such a threat is to be found only in theologies which see God as absolutely and infinitely good and perfect from whom no evil can come.

²²⁵ R.K. Tripathi, Problems of Philosophy and Religion (Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University, 1971), pp. 108-109.

²²⁶ See section 8 of this chapter.

However, Brotherhood thanatology and doctrine of reincarnation constitute, in the long run, at least a partial denial of death as such, and in that sense function potentially as what Arthur Schopenhauer calls "the antidote to the certainty of death."²²⁷ One possible psychological consequence of this attitude towards death is that members would be willing to face death, even death by persecution or martyrdom, with great composure. But would they really do this in real life? If they would, how does one explain their perennial efforts to escape the clutches or even the threat of sickness and witchcraft, for instance? Why do those who go into the movement in order to find protection against these incubi continue to remain in the movement even after they have been taught not to fear death which, according to the teaching, does not really exist? To ask such questions is somehow to assume that faith (belief) and practice are always reconcilable. But we know that this is not always the case. Perhaps one could attempt a partial answer to the questions just raised by saying, with William F. May: "Death may not be ultimate, but its sting nevertheless hurts."²²⁸ Perhaps it is that temporary "hurt" that members of the BCS are scared of, just as most people are scared of the temporary "hurt" of the injection needle, and not its permanent "hurt." Or it could be argued that it is untimely, premature death, that is, death

²²⁷ See Richard Taylor, ed., The Will to Live: Selected Writings of Arthur Schopenhauer (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1967), p. 117.

²²⁸ William F. May, "Why Theology and Religious Studies Need Each Other," Journal of American Academy of Religion, 52, No. 4 (1984), p. 757.

caused by the machinations of evil men and women, and not "natural" death, of which members of the BCS are afraid and seek protection against.

Moreover, Obu even suggests that the state of death is one that should be gleefully anticipated, because in that state the dead become a multitude, omnipresent, spiritually more powerful and consequently "can carry out impossible assignments."²²⁹ He illustrates his meaning as follows with the example of Christ who, he says, could carry out "all the marvelous assignments" only after his death and resurrection. Of this experience of Christ he writes:

If Christ had not died, He would not have returned in the form of the Holy Spirit. It was due to the fact that He died that was why the Holy Spirit came down. . . . When one Christ died, He came back in large numbers, and it was these Spirits that rested upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost. This is why I tell you that unless somebody dies you cannot have a new spirit coming out. If you are one thousand people and continue to remain here, if nobody dies, you cannot increase that number, but if somebody dies out, you will increase that number.²³⁰

Obu has not explained, however, the how or the actual process of duplication and multiplication during reincarnation. All that one can say here is that this is indeed a new notion in the doctrine of reincarnation. It differs from versions of the doctrine in most religious traditions according to which a person is believed to reincarnate singly, one at a time, although the same person may reincarnate many times.

²²⁹ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 66.

²³⁰ Ibid.

The purpose of death, according to Obu, is to be reborn in a new, changed body, in order to carry out a new assignment. Each person, he says, was born into this world to carry out a specific assignment. When that assignment is completed, the individual concerned "passes out" of this life temporarily, but must return via reincarnation or rebirth, to undertake a new assignment or, where the previous assignment had not been completed, to continue it. No one, he asserts, can take on a new assignment unless he or she dies first and is reborn.²³¹ Thus, as he sees it, death is but a temporary but necessary exeat. He argues further that in order for one to attain the highest spiritual plane and therefore be able to accomplish fully God's intentions and purposes for one, it is necessary for one to die and be reborn. That is why he states: "If you are afraid of death, the glory of God cannot be manifested. If you run away from death while it pursues you from one corner to another and you shout out of fear, tell me how the glory of God would be manifested."²³²

The necessity of death becomes accentuated, Obu teaches, if one desires to be counted among the unique 144,000 virgins who must needs rid themselves of the shackles of this life of which wives and husbands form a part. Speaking ex cathedra as God on earth, Obu declares:

I am looking for 144,000 virgins, but now some of you have wives, husbands, you are so engaged in the affairs of this world in such a way that it is impossible for you to become a virgin. Before you can become a virgin, you have to die and reborn. . . these things have tied you down; you cannot go to do the word of God. And so the best thing for

²³¹ Ibid., p. 67.

²³² Ibid., p. 110

you to do is to return to your maker, so that He will recreate you, and send you back to take up that assignment. At the moment God wants 144,000 virgins to rule with Him and you are so polluted that you are good for nothing. You can remain in this new kingdom for one thousand years; in as much as you are not a virgin, you do not serve any useful purpose. And so the best thing for you to do is to return and come back a virgin.²³³

In concluding this section of the present chapter, we wish to point out that Obu's thmatology and doctrine of reincarnation are, ultimately, not unrelated to the concept of the unity of time in African traditional thought. For in African traditional metaphysics, past life, present life, and future life are one life--a single undisrupted existence. As Zahan puts it, the African

can only conceive of a future situation with reference to the past. 'Tomorrow' is made up of elements of 'yesterday' and 'long ago.' . . . In the light of this conception, can we not claim that for the African 'what-will-be' blends into 'what-already-was,' that the future is in a certain sense the past, and that man is and will be only what he was?²³⁴

Thus, the continuity of life is maintained throughout, despite periods of temporary change from the past to the present and vice versa in the recurring processes called death and rebirth (life). But in the final analysis, existence is a continuum consisting of coming (birth) and going (death) and coming-again (rebirth or reincarnation). The process continues ad infinitum on the great wheel of cyclical time-in-eternity, death being but the latent period in that continuum of existence.

²³³ Ibid., p. 67.

²³⁴ Zahan, p. 89.

11. Brotherhood Ethics

We saw in the last section that Brotherhood doctrine of predestination has moral or ethical implications. In the present section we wish to explore further the ethical implications of this doctrine. In the first instance, Obu teaches that one should not attempt, abortively and fruitlessly, to change whatever situation one finds oneself in or try to change what one is. For instance, if one is a liar or a prostitute, one should be happy and thankful for that, for God has made him or her to be that for a particular divine purpose. Thus, if one could lie in order to save oneself or anybody else, Obu sees nothing wrong with that. Recounting the biblical story of the prostitute Rahab whose lie saved the lives of the two Israelite spies (see Joshua 2), Obu, in shameless approval of the prostitute's lie, asks rhetorically: "If a prostitute is capable of doing that type of thing, what is bad in prostitution? It was through her protection to the spies that the children of Israel could gain entry into the promised land."²³⁵ In his opinion, this prostitute/liar did well in not trying to change what she was or her particular situation in life, but instead used what she was and the particular situation to do good, the good that saved not only the two spies but an entire nation!

In fact, in spite of all the obsession in his preaching against sexual immorality, Obu goes as far as saying that even adultery and fornication are moral if they are used as a tool to draw men and women

²³⁵ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 82.

into his movement, that is, if these acts are used as an evangelistic tool. He says, for instance:

Most of the men who come to Brotherhood are brought by beautiful women. These men are entreated by these women to come here, the same thing applies with women. You who regard yourself as a responsible (chaste) woman, how many men have you brought into the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star?²³⁶

That such statements from Obu are no slip of tongue is evident when in another context he remarks as follows:

Even if a woman is a fornicator, that does not prevent her from serving God. The other person is a rogue, that does not prevent him from doing something for God. . . . Everybody has a purpose, a sister who fornicates will be able to entice plenty of men into Brotherhood. The same thing is applicable to a man who is a fornicator. You who say that you are good, how many people have you brought in here?²³⁷

He, in fact, maintains this opinion when he says elsewhere: "God passes through the thief and the fornicator . . . to wrought His wonderful works."²³⁸ This allowance for sexual generosity as a method of recruitment resembles, rather curiously, the same method used by David Berg ("Moses") in his new religious movement, The Children of God, in the United States.²³⁹

Similarly, Obu approves of the lie which the patriarch Abraham and his beautiful wife told Pharaoh to the effect that Sarah was his

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 89.

²³⁷ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 100.

²³⁸ SCC Minutes, April 28, 1979, p. 32.

²³⁹ See footnote 12 above.

(Abraham's) sister and not his wife (see Genesis 12). According to this biblical story, Abraham had connived with his wife to tell the lie so that no one would kill him in a plot to take her away from him. Obu does not see anything wrong with Abraham and Sarah's strategy here. Again he asks: "What was wrong in telling lies there?" Then he adds: "If she did not tell the lies, then Abraham could have been killed. Afterward, you would say, telling lies is not good. Paul himself said that he was a cunning man. If you do not apply it (lying or 'cunning') appropriately, that is where it becomes sin."²⁴⁰ In fact, Obu's understanding of this particular incident is that it was so intended by God who wanted to use Abraham and Sarah's lie as an instrument by which he (God) revealed himself to Pharaoh.²⁴¹ What seems somewhat ironic here is that someone who rejects the essence and substance of the teachings of the Old Testament should turn around and use stories from there as the basis of his ethical teachings.

Obu goes on to give other instances when it would be perfectly all right to lie. For example, if one knew that one's boss at work would not ordinarily permit one to take a work day off to attend a Brotherhood or other fasting session at church, one could lie that one was sick, and to request to go home on that ground. Then one could go to church to fast! Again, Obu asks in connection with this particular instance: "Is there anything wrong in his telling lies to his head of

²⁴⁰ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 83.

²⁴¹ See What Is Cross?, pp. 9-10.

department? You must know how to apply it (a lie).'²⁴² Maintaining this ethical position, Obu says elsewhere:

All of us know that it is not expedient to do certain things, but in the circumstances we find ourselves, what else can we do? There is no other alternative than for us to flout the expediency of the act. . . .²⁴³

Indeed, Obu believes that since ours is not a perfect, lie-free world, it is all right for one to lie in order to have one's way, providing, of course, one knows when and how to do so "appropriately." He once gave his Bible class a lecture on the subject of lying or telling the truth, stressing that whether one lied or told the truth should depend on the particular situation in which one found oneself. The following is part of what he told the class:

Right in your office, the worldly people like people who tell lies. In your office you are issued a query for what you have not known; (you feel) you have got to tell the truth, because as a child of God you must live in truth. (But) if you tell the truth they are going to take disciplinary action against (you), or dismiss you. Then you say let me tell all sorts of lies. These lies will bring promotion, increment and will even change (your) position and so you tell lies. They would immediately accept it and could promote you. What is bad in telling lies there? This is so because if you had told them the truth, they would have dismissed you. Therefore, for those who want the truth, tell them the truth. Those worldly people who do not like the truth, and do not like people telling them the truth, tell them a lie. You should know exactly

²⁴² The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 83.

²⁴³ Christmas Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. I: The Revelation of the Holy Spirit, (n.d.) p. 18.

when to apply lies or truth appropriately. When you go to Rome, you do as the Romans do.²⁴⁴

It would appear that Obu himself practises his own ethical teachings. For example, he claims that his movement had once established a post-primary (secondary) school for the handicapped, without fulfilling government conditions for the establishment of such a school. According to him, one of the conditions that had to be fulfilled before starting such a school was to deposit with the State Government the sum of fifty thousand naira (about seventy-five thousand U.S. dollars). When the Cross River State Government found out that the movement had started a school without fulfilling any of the requirements, "it was the view of the Ministry of Education that we had violated the rules of establishing secondary schools. And what they should have done would be to close down the place."²⁴⁵ We are told that the Government, in fact, "had already issued a letter to that effect."

When the movement received the order that the school be closed down, it cooked up a strategy to get around the order. They now claimed that it was not they who had established the school but "a lame man," and that all they were doing was "to help the handicapped person." In order to play on the sympathy of the Government, the alleged handicapped person was one day wheeled into the office of the State Commissioner of Education. There in the Commissioner's office,

Obu reports,

²⁴⁴ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 83; emphasis in source.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

we told him: 'Look at the man who established the school and not ourselves.' We told him that the lame person started the school and we only went to help. ²⁴⁶ The Commissioner did not know what to do.

Why did the BCS use the handicapped person this way? Simply because, answers Obu, "it would (otherwise have) cost us very dear."

By that strategy, however, the said Commissioner of Education was wheedled into granting "the handicapped person"-the permission to go ahead with the operation of the school! Now, was it really the handicapped person who had established the school or was it the BCS that was lying "appropriately"? We find the answer in Obu's victorious remarks at the end of the story:

Now the school has been converted to a Comprehensive Secondary School. Have you seen the usefulness of the lame person? Some of you would have condemned him (for allowing himself to be thus used). God actually created him for a purpose. If he was not created we would not have got that school. ²⁴⁷

Obu has told the story, with no compunction whatsoever, to illustrate what he means by lying "appropriately," that is, situationally. He sees nothing ethically or morally wrong with such cunning, providing it is done "appropriately." He tells his members in no uncertain terms: "You have to be as crafty as the serpent." ²⁴⁸ After all, he avers, "If our Lord Jesus Christ did not apply this (sic) tactics, what do you think could have happened? ... If God were not to be crafty and

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 85.

cunning, what do you think would have happened? People could have plotted and planned to cast Him aside from where He is ...²⁴⁹

It is clear, then, that Obu's ethics is situational ethics, based on the principle that the end justifies the means, and on the predestinationist doctrine that human beings are not responsible for what they are or do or how they behave. But we know from the work of Joseph Fletcher and his school that this kind of ethics is not original with, or peculiar to, Obu. What comes as a surprise to us in Brotherhood ethics, however, is the fact that Obu can combine situation ethics with his Christian fundamentalism. One would have thought that this kind of ethics belonged more appropriately to liberal Christianity which the BCS is not. This kind of ethics is obviously a further indication of Obu's usual bold departure from traditional Christian ethics and the ethics of other religious traditions. But it also places Obu in a very difficult position should he try to reconcile this kind of ethics with his emphasis on moral reform.²⁵⁰

To say the least, Obu's situation ethics or ethics of the-end-justifies-the-means, is a very dangerous ethics for his particular Nigerian society known by both Nigerians themselves and

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Incidentally, Obu's ethics of the-end-justifies-the-means casts serious doubts on the validity of Amadi's whole thesis that the raison d'être of the BCS is to call "for the building of a new kind of morally oriented society, based on transformed priorities and values," and that "the Movements's ideology has a strong moral message to the society." See Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 617; see also the entire Conclusion of his thesis, pp. 581-618.

outsiders to be already morally bankrupt and wanting in moral rectitude. Indeed, this kind of ethics is already creating moral problems even among the rank and file of the membership of his movement among whom he himself has detected "thieves" who even steal the movement's tithes²⁵¹ boxes, not to mention fornicators and adulterers who seem to be the focus of almost all his sermons. Even in the immediate context of the movement's operations, Obu's ethics of the situation is therefore counterproductive already. It backfires. Indeed, it would appear that the backfiring is often so unnerving to him that he is pushed to the position where he says, in apparent disappointment and desperation, specifically concerning the handling of the movement's funds at the different bethels (stations): "I do not trust anyone, so send all funds to Calabar for safe keeping. The unfaithful ones are too many in our midst."²⁵² If, indeed, Obu does not trust "anyone" of his more than one million members all over the world in terms of ethics or morality, one wonders whether the societies in which these members live would.

²⁵¹ See, for instance, SCC Minutes, August 19, 1972, pp. 18-19; December 22, 1973, pp. 27-28; see also The Elders' Handbook, pp. 37-38.

²⁵² SCC Minutes, August 19, 1972, p. 20.

12. Obu on Marriage

Obu's teaching on marriage and family life is scattered throughout his published sermons and Bible class lectures.²⁵³ But what is perhaps his most eloquent statement on the subject is to be found in one of the collections of his August 1981 Pentecostal Assembly sermons.²⁵⁴ On the whole, his teaching on this subject is at best ambiguous and ambivalent, at worst contradictory. On the one hand, he believes and teaches that "marriage on its own is ordained by God, it is not a bad thing at all."²⁵⁵ On the other hand, he believes that "... 99% of the troubles in the world emanate from marriages."²⁵⁶ As such, paraphrasing Luke 20:35 and 1 Cor. 7:29, he warns that

those who will be counted worthy to obtain this world and the resurrection shall not marry nor give . . . their children to marriage. Therefore if you are married you will not see His salvation nor be His follower. . . . For you to be saved, let the married couple remain as when they were single. You and your wife have to, accordingly, surrender yourselves to God.²⁵⁷

For married couples to "remain as when they were single" and to "surrender" themselves to God, according to Obu, means that they may

²⁵³ See, for example, SCC Minutes, August 11, 1973, pp. 11-12.

²⁵⁴ See August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, '3 & 4: Marriage is Honourable and the Bed Undeified, Book 2 (1981), pp. 1-15; 112-26; reproduced in Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins and Father's Farewell Address (n.d.), pp. 1-17.

²⁵⁵ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 3.

²⁵⁶ Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 117.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 1, 6; see also p. 4.

live together as married partners . . . sleep together and walk together BUT without any sexual relations. . . . Continue staying together, share conversation, go into the ministry work together and (share) in your secular work, BUT do not defile yourselves by having sex.²⁵⁸

Indeed, as late as 1982 Obu could still say: "If you marry, you are no longer holy. You are very much aware that from the day you go to ask a woman's hand in marriage, you have fallen short of the expectation of God."²⁵⁹ In fact, he believes further that "those who are destined to go to heaven will be separated from their husbands or wives to get themselves prepared before the trumpet sounds."²⁶⁰

The contradiction in Obu's two opposing attitudes to marriage is all the more pronounced when he goes so far as stating that it was not God's intention for human beings to be married in the first instance. In his words,

. . . a man was not created for a woman or vice versa but . . . God created both of them for Himself. Therefore it was the plan of God that the Holy Spirit should overshadow women in the same way that it overshadowed Mary and she conceived a holy child. It was not the plan of God for a man to touch a woman. When human beings began to defile themselves under the auspices of marriage, the Holy Spirit deserted them and that is why suffering, sickness and death came into the world.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Gospels for the Destined, 144,000 Virgins, p. 21.

²⁵⁹ Chastity and Celibacy (1982), p. 8.

²⁶⁰ Those Who Will Go to Heaven (n.d.), p. 8.

²⁶¹ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1.: The Spirit of God (n.d.), p. 64. This same statement is repeated elsewhere in another context: see Christmas Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels vol. 1: The Revelation of the Holy Spirit (n.d.), p. 34; and The Truth about the Christ's Servants, p. 63.

He re-emphasizes this position on the matter as follows:

Are you married? Do you have a husband or wife living with you? If you do, do not seek for God because you will not find Him. For any man who is married and given . . . in marriage can never see God. If you are married you automatically become the enemy of the Holy Spirit. . . . do you now see that by marrying you have signed a contract with the demon?²⁶²

For Obu, therefore, to be celibate is a condition of spiritual cleanliness and acceptability before God. According to him, both men and women are the brides of the Holy Spirit or God. That is why, he says, God becomes jealous when men and women marry themselves. As a result, the Holy Spirit cannot abide in married men and women because "the Holy Spirit would not like to share His bride with any other."²⁶³ Sexual involvement, even between husband and wife, Obu tells us, is a hindrance to the reception of the Holy Spirit.²⁶⁴ For that reason, he reluctantly recommends that even marital sex should not be engaged in all the time--and certainly not for hours each time--but only for a "few minutes." Indeed, husbands and wives are admonished that "they should always meet for a very short time--few minutes--and separate, occasionally, for they should remember that their bodies are not theirs but Christ's, since God is inside them."²⁶⁵ Even then, Obu

²⁶² August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, 3 & 4 (1981), pp. 8, 14.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁶⁵ Eyo, The Truth About Olumba Olumba Obu and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. 65; see also Obu, Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 12.

still considers marital coitus to be such a cumber to spirituality that he recommends dry fasting for three days after each sexual act, in order for the couple concerned to be clean enough for God to come and dwell with them again.²⁶⁶

As far as Obu is concerned, "any time you have sexual relation with your wife, you have become unclean and your wife is not also clean."²⁶⁷

For him, what makes even marital sex such a terrible sin, worse yet for non-marital sex, is that, because men and women are married to Christ, whenever they engage in it they

have committed fornication or adultery. As he puts it, ". . . once you have been joined together and Christ being the bridegroom, at any time you touch your wife you have committed adultery."²⁶⁸

In fact, he even intimates that the raison d' être for the institution of the weekly all-day fasting on Thursdays (see section 6 (a) in the next chapter), is "because you continue in sinfulness all the time by committing fornication and adultery. Because of this you must fast and pray in order to be cleansed."²⁶⁹

Such a conception of sexuality as a hindrance to spirituality goes back to the early practitioners of African autochthonous religions as well, of course, as to the early Church fathers. The former, for

²⁶⁶ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, 3 & 4, pp. 11, 124; see also Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 26; Revelation of the Holy Spirit, pp. 37, 120; Eyo, The Truth About Olumba Olumba Obu, p. 65.

²⁶⁷ Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 20.

²⁶⁸ Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 118.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 120. Cf. The Truth about the Christ's Servants, p. 180.

instance, interpreted and still interpret sexual abstinence as "a guarantee of the integrity of the diviner's knowledge, since carnal relations, even with his own wife, are believed to create a void in the knowledge of the seer."²⁷⁰ Playing the role of the traditional diviner and seer,²⁷¹ Obu seems to have been influenced here by this African traditional belief. That is why, perhaps, he no longer lives with wife and is therefore believed by his followers to have abstained completely forever from any sexual contact with her. Thus, for Obu, "sexual surrender has religious meritoriousness," to use Max Weber's expression.²⁷² This also, as we shall see, is the reason behind the Brotherhood institution of Studentship (see section 10 of the next chapter). But such an attitude towards sex is neither new nor peculiar to the BCS; for as Weber has pointed out, antipathy or hostility toward sexuality is a common feature of all religions of salvation of which the BCS is no doubt one.²⁷³

No doubt, Obu's doctrine of celibacy for all is a departure from the traditional Judeo-Christian position according to which marriage is believed to be an institution established and sanctified by God himself. So much regard does mainstream Judeo-Christianity have for this institution, in fact, that it is often referred to honorifically

²⁷⁰Zahan, pp. 88-89.

²⁷¹One of Obu's closest devotees testifies that he (Obu) foretells the future "with alacrity." See, Eyo, The Truth About Olumba Olumba Obu, p. 54.

²⁷²Weber, The Sociology of Religion, p. 237.

²⁷³Ibid., pp. 236-42.

as 'holy matrimony' within that tradition, an honorific designation with which Obu himself consorts when he says elsewhere that 'marriage is a holy institution headed by Christ.'²⁷⁴ Indeed, Obu's doctrine of celibacy for all is also a contradiction of Jesus' clear approval of marriage and instruction that whom God has joined (in marriage), no one should put asunder (Matt. 19:6). But not only is Obu's doctrine of celibacy for all contrary to the belief and practice of most world religions, it is also a radical departure from his own particular African traditional religio-cultural philosophy of marriage and the family according to which marriage is looked upon as an insurance against the extermination of the tribe or community, and celibacy frowned upon, except when practised for ritual purposes by a called few. Otherwise, in traditional as well as modern Africa celibacy is considered to be 'an incomprehensible upsetting of the social and religious order,'²⁷⁵ and, from the sociologist's point of view, a potential destroyer of the family as a social unit. Alternatively, in view of the many strains and stresses on modern marriages, Obu's prohibition on marriage may perhaps be seen positively as an effort to save Nigerians and the world as a whole the pains of broken marriages, especially if one believes with Obu that of all the married couples the world over, 'only 1% is fit to marry; the rest are just wasting their time.'²⁷⁶ For those who may ask how Obu's followers would reproduce

²⁷⁴ Key to a Successful Marriage Life, p. 1.

²⁷⁵ Zahan, p. 10.

²⁷⁶ The Everlasting Gospel, vol. 2: The Transcendent Teachings of the Holy Spirit, p. 9.

their kind if they followed strictly their leader's teaching on celibacy for all, Obu has this answer: "I . . . put before you the case of Mary, the mother of Jesus. If it is the will of God that people should multiply, then He will send the Holy Spirit to operate on women and they will conceive and bring forth holy children of God."²⁷⁷

Apart from his emphasis on celibacy for all, however, Obu's teaching on marriage follows closely St. Paul's teaching on the subject, as found in 1 Corinthians 7, according to which celibacy is the preferable state. But for those who cannot bear it, in order to avoid "the temptation to immorality," (because celibacy is not their "special gift from God"), "it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion," says St. Paul in 1 Cor. 7:9. St. Paul also says in 1 Cor. 7:1,2: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband." Obu's commentary on this Pauline passage runs thus:

That conjunction 'BUT' makes room for concession which is not authoritative. The first sentence was the order: IT IS NOT GOOD FOR A MAN TO TOUCH A WOMAN, because when you touch a woman you have become unholy.²⁷⁸

However, Paul's reluctant allowance for marriage is punctuated with this caveat in 1 Cor. 7:28: "But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a girl marries she does not sin. Yet those who marry will have worldly

²⁷⁷ Gospels for Destined 144, 000 Virgins, p. 21.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

troubles, and I would spare you that.'" Obu has paraphrased, if even more reluctantly than Paul, Paul's statement as follows:

If you marry, you commit no crime. But the problem there is that you will suffer untold hardship, disgrace and you may be made to face other odd conditions. And the painful thing there is that you do this at loss because this suffering cannot carry you to the Kingdom of God. . . . It is not completely a bad thing to marry. But when you do so how will you be clean both in flesh and in spirit? . . . The Holy Spirit being holy, dwells in a clean house. He does not want any filthy environment. How will He dwell with you if you are married? . . . all those²⁷⁹ who are married love themselves and not Christ.

Having said that, Obu goes on to warn men who are contemplating marriage to the effect that a married woman is a burden to her husband: "She is (a) life-time cross that the man has to carry till death separates them."²⁸⁰ He continues to speak disparagingly about marriage when he says: ". . . one of the intricacies of marriage is suffering. Marriage involves carrying the 'cross' and once you are married, you have to endure all situations without budging."²⁸¹

Thus, for both St. Paul and Obu, marriage seems to be the better of two evils, the worse evil being unwed sexual passion and intercourse. But while Obu appears to make the celibate state a condition for salvation, St. Paul does not. The latter merely says, and Obu agrees with him completely, that in the celibate state, without the trammels of family routine, one is more able to devote one's time

²⁷⁹ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), pp. 7, 11, 15.

²⁸⁰ Key to Successful Marriage Life, p. 6.

²⁸¹ Humility is the Foundation of Greatness (1982), pp. 28-29.

and energy to God and thus serve him better and more faithfully. Indeed, it could be argued that Obu's emphasis on celibacy for all is an attempt on his part to ensure that there will be no cases of conflicting loyalties on the part of his followers between complete devotion to the affairs of the movement and devotion to the welfare of their families. Family bonds, we know, can challenge, threaten, and detract from total devotion to a group and the authority of its leader.

In concluding this section of the chapter, one should perhaps point out that the BCS, in its very-reluctant allowance for marriage, preaches and tolerates only absolute monogamy which, incidentally, must also be endogamous, that is, within the movement. We point out this fact here so that one does not confuse this movement with other Nigerian new religious movements which approve of and even encourage polygyny (for example, the Celestial Church of Christ, the Aladura group of churches, God's Kingdom Society, to mention only a few). Brotherhood monogamy is clearly an adaptation of the Western, orthodox Christian marriage pattern and therefore a departure from traditional African and co-existent Islamic marriage patterns which are generally polygynous. As far as Obu is concerned, to be monogamous is bad enough; to be polygynous is intolerably worse--probably close to being the first of the deadly sins.

13. Dated Eschatology and Utopian Vision

Obu sees as his main assignment on earth the transformation of human immorality and resultant mortality into morality and consequent

immortality. The centre of this moral and spiritual transformation and reformation is no other place than the BCS.²⁸² It is in this sense that one should understand the Brotherhood claim that "the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star is today the last hope for mankind."²⁸³ The task of reforming the world, says Obu, is one which the Holy Spirit, personified in himself, must accomplish in the present dispensation. This special task, he further claims, "is his sole responsibility and pre-occupation in this end-time. According to him, this task could not have been carried out by any other being but himself. In his words, "no angel, prophet or even our Lord Jesus Christ can succeed in this assignment since it is the sole responsibility of the Father."²⁸⁴ As far as Obu is concerned, not even Jesus Christ could have transformed sinners to the same degree that he is currently engaged in doing. He further claims that this very task could not have been done in any other period of human history. It had to wait until the fullness of time--the end-time--to be carried out by the most able spiritual leader of the universe, Olumba Olumba Obu. It is in recognition of this unique role of Obu as the reformer and transformer of mankind's morality that the BCS makes the following assertion: "Lucifer, Satan, demon, men, angels and the entire world bear testimony to the fact that once a sinner comes into Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, he is

²⁸² See, for instance, The Supernatural Teacher, Book, 2, pp. iii-iv; cf. p. 129.

²⁸³ Sunday Concord (Lagos), January 1, 1984, p. 10.

²⁸⁴ The Everlasting Gospel : Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World, vol. 1., p. 12.

completely transformed from his former vices. And this is the duty of the Holy Spirit personified in Leader O.O. Obu.²⁸⁵

One of the most ardent defenders of Brotherhood faith concurs with the above description of Obu's unique role as the transformer of human character, adding that he (Obu) "is now on earth to effect a complete universal change, that is, leading all the creations back to their first home."²⁸⁶ Obu himself further spells out his mission on earth more concretely, as follows:

All the members of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star and the entire world should be informed that my mission on earth is to lead the whole world to the accurate knowledge of truth. . . . The major assignment that I have come to do has never been done before nor will it ever be done again. It is to reform a sinner and return him to the standard required by God, so that he may live according to the expectations of God. . . . My mission is to establish the new Kingdom of God on earth, so that the will of God may be done on earth as it is done in heaven.²⁸⁷

This supreme task is so prominent in Obu's mind that he is said to spend nearly twenty-four hours each day of the year teaching, exhorting, preaching, praying, blessing, healing and caring, all in an effort "to change human beings from mortality to immortality" and to make them truly happy, healthy and holy. So obsessed he is with the idea of the spiritual betterment of mankind that he sometimes becomes disappointed and disheartened when his followers tend to emphasize and

²⁸⁵ Anon., Preface to The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. iii.

²⁸⁶ Akpan, Life After Death, p. 63.

²⁸⁷ "The Power in Brotherhood of the Cross and Star is the Word of God," unpublished sermon ms. (n.d.), pp. 3-4, 6; cf. Obu, The Comforter Has Come, p. 35.

ask him for material things. On such disappointing occasions, he would openly tell them:

Brethren, the work of the Holy Spirit in-dwelling in our midst is quite different from the work of prophets and that of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is because we do not know His assignment that is why we request Him to give us husband, wife, son, wealth, and all the material things of this world. The Holy Spirit is not concerned with that; rather, He is to change the sinful flesh to the spiritual flesh which is everlasting life. . . . To change a sinner to practise righteousness is what the Holy Spirit has come to do at this last time.²⁸⁸

This task, says Obu, is the greatest assignment "ever undertaken since the foundations of the world were laid."²⁸⁹ But how is Obu going to accomplish such a colossal task? According to him, he is going to do so by daily preaching to the whole world the only saving name there is--the name of Jesus Christ--and encouraging the human race to accept that name. In his words, "My mission on earth is solely to reveal Christ's glory and to make him known by His name throughout the world."²⁹⁰

When the entire human race has thus been morally transformed, then will be ushered in the Kingdom of God for which Jesus had prayed nearly two thousand years ago, affirms Brotherhood eschatology. This new heaven and new earth, according to this eschatology, will be the fulfillment of the prophecy in 2 Peter 3: 13 which states: "But

²⁸⁸The Everlasting Gospel: Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World, vol. 1, p. 12.

²⁸⁹The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 129.

²⁹⁰The Everlasting Gospel: Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World, vol. 1, p. 65; cf. pp. 60-61.

according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." In this new kingdom, humanity will be restored to its original Edenic glory. Thus the last age will correspond to the first. Also, in it all races will be united into one huge, happy, and harmonious family. Indeed, Obu sees as one of his major responsibilities on earth the unification of all peoples of the world. He expresses this hope as follows: "... the first job I have to do is to unite all the human beings inhabiting this globe. Be it the black, white or coloured, man, woman or child, all of them have to be brought together."²⁹¹ He elaborates on this hope thus:

... my main assignment is to bring all the scattered children of God together into one fold. . . . what I have come to do is to unite the whole world into one entity. . . . What we are doing here is not raising the dead, giving visions, but to see about uniting every person in the world . . . to bring them into that indivisible whole. . . . We are working towards uniting all the children (of God).²⁹²

But as Obu sees it, the work of moral and spiritual transformation of the human race must necessarily precede that of uniting the peoples of the world. For only when men and women are morally and spiritually transformed and enlightened will they be able to see themselves as brothers and sisters and thereby be willing to live together in love and peace as members of one family--the world family. Obu points to the fact that already the membership of his movement comprises people of all races, as an indication that this goal of one unified and

²⁹¹ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 94.

²⁹² Ibid., pp. 90, 97, 98.

harmonious world is now in the process of being achieved. Thus, for Obu transformed human moral perfection and divine intervention in the present social order are both necessary prerequisites for the kingdom of God to be realized on earth.

In Brotherhood utopian vision and dated eschatology, the stage for that transformed world is already set now that the Holy Spirit is here on earth in the person of Olumba Olumba Obu. In fact, BCS members believe that those of them who are spiritually and morally in tune with this Holy Spirit-in-human-form are already foretasting in the here and now a little bit of that heavenly bliss the fullest realization of which is yet a future reality.

But that future is not a long one, they say. It is just around the corner. The end of the present age and the beginning of the new one will usher it in, 'in all its beauty and splendour, 'as a bride adorned for her husband'' (Rev. 21:2). The precise date for this grand event, that is, for the beginning of the new age, according to BCS eschatological calculations, will be between the end of 1999 and the beginning of 2001. By the former date, says Obu in the true spirit of a sectarian suspicious of worldly governments, all the rulers and powers that be in this present world shall have surrendered to 'the universal leader,' born of a woman but 'not a virgin this time.'²⁹³ Obu describes this period of transition and the living conditions of the new age as follows:

Before we pass into another generation by 1999, all those who do not possess love will

face judgment. After every 2000 years, God always establishes a new constitution.

In 2001, we shall pass into a new generation, the generation of the reign of Jehovah and His Christ where only righteousness dwells. That generation will not admit any bit of sin. There will no more be any class distinction between men and women, children and adults, white or black. All will be united into oneness in love.

From 2001 onward, whoever does not possess this love will never be allowed to marry, work or do anything to earn a living. He will never succeed in any undertaking. There will be great punishment to sinners if ever they will be allowed to remain. Such punishment and sufferings which have never existed before the foundations of the world were laid.

All what people have endeavoured to do from the beginning of the world will end in 1999. The reign of our Lord Jesus Christ begins fully in 2001 to fulfil his words (in Matt. 19:28). . . . From 2001, all different governments of the world will surrender their governments to our Lord Jesus Christ.

After the year 1999 there will be no Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, Law courts, Judges, Magistrates and Lawyers will no longer exist. All carnal laws will be revoked and only 'love one another' will reign supreme.²⁹⁴

The expected utopia is further envisioned as follows:

In this new age, the circle of incarnations and reincarnations shall be stopped. Hence, no birth, no transition, no pains, sorrows, poverty, lamentation. We shall all attain the Christ consciousness which has eluded us as of this period of time. . . . the perishable body has been completely transformed into an imperishable body.

Man shall not be afraid of the animals nor shall he ever treat his brotherman with contempt. The skies, seas, fire, ants, etc. would do each

²⁹⁴ 'A Special Message from Leader Olumba Olumba Obu: Towards a New Generation,' Daily Times (Lagos), February 16, 1985, p. 11. What adds great significance to this particular sermon from which the above extract has been taken, is the fact that it was given space in Nigeria's national (i.e. Federal Government-owned) newspaper at a time when the country is groaning, as it were, under the heavy staff of a military regime!

other no more harm. Nations shall fight wars no more as we shall exist in a spiritual state with bodies adaptable to the plane of perfection.²⁹⁵

It may be noted that Obu's utopia as described above will not be altogether perfect. For one thing, surprisingly, some people may "be allowed to marry" there! For another thing, we are told that "sinners" will still be there! But these sinners, we are further made to know, will receive "great punishment." Such punishment and suffering as will be meted to these sinners may eventually deter them and other would-be sinners from continuing to sin, to the extent that they may in the long run decide to give up sinning altogether. Perhaps when that happens, Obu's utopia will become a sin-free world. But then even an utopia where sinners will receive great punishment and suffering for their sins will still be much better than the present age in which sinners often escape due punishment while the innocent suffer. Then again, if a sin-free utopia is not realized during the first bimillennium (2000 years) following 1999, there probably should not be much cause for alarm. For, as Obu indicates, since things will be getting better and better after 1999, who knows?--subsequent bimillennia may bring about a completely perfect, sin-free utopia.

Be that as it may, according to Obu's eschatology, the beginning of the new age in 2001 will be the fulfillment of the prophecy in Revelation 12:5 which says: "she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. . . ." In Brotherhood hermeneutics, that "male child" who will rule the universe in the

²⁹⁵ Akpan, Life after Death, p. 82.

millenia after 1999 is none other than Olumba Olumba Obu.²⁹⁶ It is true that Obu himself says in the above description of the eschatological utopia that it will be "'Jehovah and His Christ'" who will be rulers of the new age. However, one should remember that in Brotherhood theology of the incarnations of God, the names "'Jehovah'" and "'Christ'" are simply "'old names'" for the "'new name,'" Olumba Olumba Obu. Indeed, it is specifically and unequivocally stated that "'Olumba Olumba Obu is the name of Christ in the eighth stage of incarnation."²⁹⁷ We are further told, as a matter of fact, that "... members of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star will rule over the whole universe. . . ."²⁹⁸

Obu claims that the eschatological events described above were shown in a vision, at different times and places, to three Roman Catholic nuns who wrote down what had been shown them and later sent the same "'in a sealed envelope'" to the Pope in the Vatican. What was the Pontiff's reaction to the alleged vision? Obu tells us as follows:

After seeing what was contained, he (the Pope) sealed the envelope and refused to disclose the contents so that people might not know that an African was going to rule. People have been pestering the life of the Vatican officials to release the vision of these three nuns, but no person wants to release (it). If you were the Pope, would you have released it? After reading that the person who will rule the world would be a

²⁹⁶ See, for instance, Obu's own sermon "'The Universal Leader in the Year 2001 Is Born of a Woman,'" Sunday Concord (Lagos), January 1, 1984, pp. 5-10.

²⁹⁷ Akpan, Destiny and Brotherhood of Life, p. 3.

²⁹⁸ December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, No. 4 (1980), p.

black²⁹⁹ man, an African, would you have released it?

Biakpan, Headquarters of the Coming Utopia

To members of the BCS, the vision of a completely transformed and overhauled world is not merely the dream of an idle visionary. Rather, it is to them a concrete object of great expectation. In anticipation for the arrival of this new era, the BCS is at the moment engaged in intensive and expensive infrastructural preparatory programmes. Envisaging Biakpan, Obu's birth place--a little peasant village in the northern part of the Cross River State, hitherto unheard of even within the State--to be the divinely-destined universal headquarters for the coming utopia, the movement has already spent millions of naira (Nigerian '\$dollars\$') on the physical development of the place, to the extent that the village is already becoming a major tourist attraction in the State. Indeed, the village is now said to occupy a role in the movement of greater importance than the place of Mecca and Medina in Islam and the Vatican in Roman Catholicism, so much so that most members strive to visit it at least once in their life time. Those who have already been there are considered to be 'fortunate' and 'blessed,' and a source of righteous envy to those who have not yet been able to go. As one enthusiastic member of the movement puts it, 'this town is now gradually taking over from Mecca and the Vatican as

²⁹⁹ Easter Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Realm of the Holy Spirit (1982), p. 69.

(a) centre for world pilgrimage."³⁰⁰ In addition, the village is already enjoying such honorific appellations, at least among the movement's members, as the New Jerusalem, the New Kingdom, the New Eden, the New Nazareth, the Holy City, the City of God, the Promised Land, Paradise Regained, "the Bethlehem of a NEW KING and the launching pad of a new ecclesiastical culture,"³⁰¹ etc. Also, the place has been passionately eulogized in BCS literature. For example, one zealous devotee writes as follows about the village:

Biakpan is the Beaulah Land,
It is that New Nazareth,
The word of God is born in it
That word of God is the SON OF GOD.

The daughter of Zion is born again,
The flesh couldn't prove the mystery,
The Redeemer, the Saviour of our time,
Go to Biakpan and see the Manger.

Biakpan is a wonderful land,
The King of Kings' birth Land,
Wonderful God, the Counsellor indeed,
Almighty God. He's the King of Peace.

A New Nazareth is Biakpan,
Biakpan Town is Beaulah Land,
Biakpan the Holy City of our God,
A City of God on earth it is.

A tree of Life this BIAKPAN TOWN,
Nazareth the promised land of God,
The tree in paradise regained,
Oh! BIAKPAN the Beaulah land.

Go down to the New Nazareth,
See the Garden of Eden,
The land Promised to our Fathers,
The New Nazareth is now our own.

³⁰⁰ Jacob Odugbe, "Biakpan: Cradle of a New Jerusalem," The New World Magazine, 1, No. 2 (August 1978), p. 13.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

It has no seat for earthly Governments,
 Because it has no earthly desires;
 Yet in it, a mighty King is born.³⁰²
 BIAKPAN Town is Heaven on earth.

Another poem about Biakpan runs as follows:

O, Biakpan, blessed homeland
 Of our ancestors great,
 In Biase Local Government Area,
 Of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Birthplace of Leader Olumba Olumba Obu
 Sole Spiritual Head and
 Great Messiah of our age,
 Who has come our generation to save.

O, Biakpan, where divine streams flow
 And mighty wonders of nature abound,
 For miraculous healing and lasting cure,
 Of all ailments therein immersed.

O, Biakpan 'the Bethsaida pool' of Africa,
 Endowed to our State by Almighty God,
 Where holy angels vigil keep,
 And spiritual doctors always at work.

O, Biakpan, land of peace and love,

³⁰² Sunday Joe Udo, Biakpan Town: A New Nazareth (n.d.), pp. 3-7; cf. Anon., "Do You Know?" (another poem on Biakpan), The New World Magazine, vol. 1, No. 3 (April-August 1979), p. 17. For more on the role of Biakpan in BCS theology and eschatology, see, for example, the movement's publication entitled Biakpan: Paradise Regained and Epistle to All Elects of God (1973); see also Theo Monye, The Reign of the Holy Spirit in the Midst of Man (n.d.). Elevating the birth place of the founder/leader of a new religious movement to the status of a holy land or "the city of God," seems to have become a tradition among African new religious movements. For example, in Nigeria, Garrick Braide (1882-1918) renamed his native home-village, Bakana, in the Delta area of the Rivers State, "Israel;" Gideon Urhobo, founder of the God's Kingdom Society, renamed his home-town "Salem City;" the late Pastor S.B.J. Oschoffa, founder and leader of the Celestial Church of Christ, made his mother's hometown, Imeko, in the Egbado Local Government Area of Ogun State, into "the Celestial City;" a group of dissident Cherubim and Seraphim made Aiyetoro ("happy city"), amid the mangrove lagoons east of Lagos, into "the Holy Apostles' Community." In Ghana, Prophet C.K.N. Wovenu, founder and leader of the Apostolic Revelation Society, made his native Tadzewu in Ghana's Volta Region into a "holy city" or "new Jerusalem." For continent-wide examples, see Barrett, Schism and Renewal, pp. 174ff.

Where ethnic division is unknown,
 Whether rich or poor abide,
 For God's grace to all is sufficient.

Oh, come to Biakpan and see,
 Peoples of all walks of life putting
 The true Brotherhood into practice,
 As BCS heralds the new Kingdom of God.

O, Biakpan, May God bless thee,
 And prosper thine off-springs,
 That the whole world may continue
 Thine praises and glorification to sing.³⁰³

In the anticipated new kingdom of God, claims BCS eschatology, the present Biakpan dialect (Emom-eBiakpan), which is believed by members to have been "the language used by God to communicate with Adam and Eve. . . . (and) to be the Word of God itself,"³⁰⁴ will be the lingua franca to be spoken by all the inhabitants of the new world. The Biakpan dialect does not have any orthography at the present time. However, in anticipation of its becoming the universal language of the new era, the BCS is now engaged in the task of working out an orthography for it. In fact, the very first attempt ever at working out an orthography for the language has just been produced by an Apostle of the BCS,³⁰⁵ who also at the same time is in the process of translating the New Testament into the language, beginning with the Gospel of St. Mark.³⁰⁶ Already, hundreds of members from all tribes

³⁰³ Anon., "Blessed Land of Biakpan," in SCC Minutes, September 2, 1983, p. 34.

³⁰⁴ Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 391.

³⁰⁵ See Apostle E. K. Ukpai, Biakpan: Emon Anneyeng (The New World Language 1985).

³⁰⁶ One suspects that when completed, this Brotherhood version of
 (Footnote Continued)

and tongues are studying the new language with great enthusiasm. Moreover, in Biakpan village a multi-million naira bethel, called "The New Jerusalem Cathedral," is nearing completion at a site proposed to be the new world headquarters of the movement.

Furthermore, there is a stream in Biakpan, variously called by members of the BCS River Jordan or New Bethsaida, behind the present BCS bethel there, located about a quarter of a mile from the "manger" (see below). This stream is believed to be the physical materialization of the symbolic "river of the water of life . . . flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1). Like the biblical pool of Bethesda,³⁰⁷ this stream is reported to have curative potencies.³⁰⁸ Sick members travel from all over the country and even from outside the country to Biakpan to avail themselves of the stream's alleged healing powers. Many members have testified that they were healed simply by taking a bath in it at the appropriate times, which, according to the movement's belief, is about 5 O'clock in the morning--before other people enter the stream--and after 5 p.m. when no others will be there. But while the stream is more generally known for

(Footnote Continued)

the New Testament may lead to further polarization between the BCS and other Christian bodies in Nigeria and elsewhere, as it may be seen then by others as an indication of BCS' rejection of the older Bible and claim to know better. Thus, this move by the BCS to further underscore its distinctiveness by producing a different "Christian Bible," may have the indirect consequence of the movement being pushed farther by other Christian bodies in Nigeria to the periphery of Christianity.

³⁰⁷ See John 5:2ff; the Hebrew word "Bethesda" means "house of mercy." Other Bible commentators render it Bethzatha or Bethsaida.

³⁰⁸ See Odugbe, "Biakpan: Cradle of a New Jerusalem," for instance.

its curative powers, we are also told that its water could also be harmful to those members who bathe in it without first confessing all their sins. Obu puts it this way: "This is the healing water of Biakpan. If a person goes into the water without confessing all his sins, that person will come out with another disease."³⁰⁹ The dual nature of the stream is further explained as follows:

The water plays two-fold purposes in power. Either it heals you or makes your condition worse. How? All those going to bathe in it must confess their sins, and must be holy, so as to benefit from (its healing powers). All those who hide their sins, or are unholy are not healed. Rather their condition might even worsen.³¹⁰

Members also use the water from this stream in the place of or in addition to the leader-prepared "holy water" (see section I-(f) in chapter five), and believe that this water is just as effective for healing and protective purposes, because the source of power in both is the same--Obu.

Also, in symbolic re-enactment and reminiscence of the biblical garden of Eden in all its beauty and splendour, there is cultivated in Biakpan a large beautiful "Garden of Eden" which is full of many valuable commercial fruit-trees. Planted and nurtured by some of the Christ's Students and Christ's Servants and sometimes by those on "ministry work," the garden has become one of the spots of tourist attraction to those visiting the town. It is said that at harvest time

³⁰⁹ SQC Minutes, August 11, 1973, p. 5.

³¹⁰ E.U. Udoh, Biakpan Town, p. 4; as quoted in Amadi's "Power and Purity," p. 392.

fruits from this garden "are distributed to the poor and needy" gratis.³¹¹

To make the picture of the New Jerusalem or New Nazareth a complete replica of the old, there is also a "manger" housed in three adjacent rooms on the ground floor of the BCS guest house complex in the town, located on a place believed to be the very spot where Obu was born and brought up in his parents' home. Obviously, the "manger" is a reminiscence of Jesus' manger in Bethlehem.

Visitors to the "manger" of the New Bethlehem enter through the room to the right, where they queue up reverently, prayer in heart. Then each takes a turn into the centre room to the left where are placed a large crib with a large doll baby to the right hand side of the room and a table to the left covered with a cloth on which are placed a large open Bible, a hand bell and a basket of flowers. The visitor kneels for a few moments before the crib in reverence and prayer to "the Christ Child." Then he or she rises and softly and reverently passes on to the third room to the left, where he or she prayerfully puts an offering (usually monetary) in a large offering receptacle placed on a table at the left hand side of the room. Having done that, the visitor comes back to the centre room, bows or kneels briefly before the crib, and then reverently and softly walks out through the centre door, thus bringing the visit to the "manger" to an end.

³¹¹ Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 394.

Other facilities planned for the village, Obu is reported to have outlined, include "an international airport and hotel of some twenty-four square miles. This will accommodate people from various nations of the world, who will be coming to visit and to live in Biakpan."³¹²

Considering BCS' official policy of non-involvement in active political commitments and the fact that the movement as of now does not seem to have any adequate theory of society, many social scientists will, of course, doubt the possibility for the emergence of the kind of utopia about which the movement dreams. But who knows? The movement may some day become so politically aware and economically powerful that it may be able to influence the course of Weltpolitik and world government. After all, dreams can both challenge and inspire.

BCS utopian vision may well appear to be similar to that usually preached by the so-called messianic, millenarian or chiliastic movements. However, as we have endeavoured to point out in chapter eight, it would not be altogether correct to typologize the movement simply as a "messianic" or "millenarian" movement. As we shall show later, the BCS is more than that.

Nonetheless, what is of greater interest to the sociologist of religion is the movement's claim to be able to transform the present social order. This claim makes it possible for one to classify the BCS as an agent of social change, at least potentially. As F.W. Voget has observed, intention to change the pattern of human living

³¹² As told Amadi in an interview with Obu, and reported in Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 395.

conditions, relations and social institutions, constitutes the essential characteristic of a social movement.³¹³

We have dealt in this chapter with thirteen selected topics from the corpus of Brotherhood doctrinal system. We feel that these topics best represent what could be described respectively as original, unique or indigenous, adaptive, syncretic or eclectic in BCS teachings. Although Obu insists that "the teachings in the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star (do) not come from man, the Western world, Africa or the angels. (They are) the kind of teachings that (have) never existed or will never (sic) exist again,"³¹⁴ or that "all that I say unto you are not from any other source but from the Holy Spirit,"³¹⁵ we have endeavoured to show in this chapter that such claims are far from being the whole truth. As we will recall, Obu's teaching on incarnation or reincarnation, predestination, and the law of karma, for instance, are not uninfluenced by ideas from other religions.

But we have also demonstrated amply that some of Obu's teachings are definitely new or original.³¹⁶ Those teachings that readily come

³¹³ See F. W. Voget, Man (1959), art. 25.

³¹⁴ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Spirit of God, p. 62.

³¹⁵ The Comforter Has Come, p. 41.

³¹⁶ It is to be noted, however, that Obu is not always consistent in his claim that none of his teachings had been taught by anyone before him. For instance, in the following statement, he denies the "newness" or originality of his teachings: "In the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, we are not introducing any new doctrine; rather, we are following the doctrine and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ which the world has rejected." December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, No. 4 (1980), p. 63. Elsewhere he insists: "I have brought no new

(Footnote Continued)

to mind here include the doctrine of his deity, aspects of his doctrines of God and of Christ, aspects of his pneumatology and anthropology, and the practical implications of his dated eschatology and vision of an imminent utopia. B

Because Obu's doctrinal system thus consists of both those elements that are new or peculiar to his movement and those that may be found in the teachings of other religious traditions, it would be incorrect, therefore, to conclude that all his teachings are either altogether new or altogether syncretic. Rather, it would be better to say that they are, both new and syncretic. But as we know from the study of world religions, such a combination of the new and the eclectic in one religious system is not at all peculiar to the BCS. To varying degrees every religious system exhibits, consciously or unconsciously, a similar combination of the old and the new.

In sum, without prejudice, one can say that Obu's alternative ways of thinking about and reinterpreting familiar religious beliefs and doctrines (Christian and others) are a definite contribution not only to Christian thought but to religious thought in general. Such contribution, it seems to us, should be commended, not condemned. After all, we believe that Gerhardus Oosthuizen speaks for his fellow Western missionaries (ex and present) in Africa when he says, if belatedly: "The church in Africa needs, apart from the historical

(Footnote Continued)

teachings. I am merely following the foot-steps of our Lord Jesus Christ." SCC Minutes, December 29, 1979, p. 5.

(i.e. Western) creeds and confessions, its own interpretation of Scripture in order to confront its environment intelligently.³¹⁷

As regards the question whether the BCS ~~is~~ doctrinally or ideologically Christian, we can only take at its face value the movement's adamant claim to that effect. We have no other choice. To take any other position on the matter would likely disqualify us from our stance as neutral, disinterested, scientific students of religion. The BCS insists that itself is doctrinally and ideologically Christian,³¹⁸ on the basis of the general christocentric flavour of its teachings, and on the basis of the fact that it concentrates on the New Testament--"the Christian scripture"--as its source of doctrinal authority. We grant it the benefit of the doubt. As a matter of fact, this whole issue of the BCS' uncompromising claim to be unreservedly and totally Christian, and the equally unrelenting counterclaim by most Nigerian older (mission) churches that it is not, raise some rather interesting questions regarding the precise definition of what, ultimately, constitutes Christianity; that is, questions of the content and context (parameters and perimeter) of the Christian religion. For if the older churches in Nigeria do not see the BCS as Christian while the latter sees itself as such, then there are certainly differences

³¹⁷ Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen, "The Church Among African Forces," Practical Anthropology, 11, No. 4 (1964), p. 171.

³¹⁸ See, for example, The Everlasting Gospel vol. 1: Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World (1980), pp. 53, 61; cf; December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, No. 4 (1980), pp. 25, 34, 63; Christmas Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 64; August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 69.

among both camps as to the precise definition of Christianity. Furthermore, we notice in Brotherhood claim to be Christian something of a boundary claim: Brotherhoods are certainly not satisfied even to be fenced off to the periphery of Christianity; they want to be considered as truly and rightfully belonging to its centre or, better yet, as being at its very head. In their view, as we have said, their unceasing preaching of Christ and him crucified (the Cross!) is their credential or title to the very centre or apex of Christianity. In other words, in claiming to be truly and wholly Christian, Brotherhoods are asserting that they are in no way beyond the pale, as their antagonists taxonomize them. "For it is certainly widespread if not a universal in the human situation," observes Fernandez, "to have profound convictions about reality, to seek to escape peripherality and see oneself at the centre of that reality, and to seek to have that view of reality prevail and that centeredness maintained."³¹⁹ It may, in fact, be that Brotherhood insistence on being Christian is the real bone of contention between the movement and the "mainstream" Christian churches in Nigeria. For if the movement did not claim to be Christian, perhaps its presence in Nigeria may not have disturbed the older churches there as much; in that case, the latter would not fear that the colour and content of "pure" Christianity would be polluted.

The question of how much of Brotherhood teachings are Christian is even a more thorny one. One would have to be able to determine which doctrines are genuinely and exclusively Christian, uninfluenced by ideas

³¹⁹ Fernandez, "African Religious Movements," pp. 197-98.

from other sources, and be able to quantify such doctrines, to be able to answer this question. Even if one assumed that all what we find in the New Testament are from their very beginnings Christian through and through, uninfluenced by, say Gnosticism or Judaism, it would still be very difficult for one to answer the question. The main difficulty in all this is that Obu is not willing to be tied down with what he calls "the apron-string" of other religious or ideological systems.³²⁰ For that reason, he does not seem to follow too closely any religious or doctrinal system. As we have observed in this chapter, even in such matters of Christian doctrinal concern as the doctrine of God, Christology, anthropology, pneumatology, eschatology, Obu follows the Christian tradition only so far, and then departs from that tradition to place his own unique and distinctive imprint--a tonality of his own--on these doctrines.

What does the scholar of religion do in such cases? In other words, where does he or she draw the line between the Christianness or otherwise of a particular Brotherhood teaching? Indeed, can the scholar draw such a line at all and still remain neutral in this matter? We raise these practical questions in an effort to indicate the difficulty of determining quantitatively how much of Obu's teachings are Christian and how much are something else. However, although it is difficult for one to quantify or percentize Brotherhood Christianity, most of the movement's beliefs and practices discussed in this and the next chapters lead one compellingly to the conclusion that the BCS is

³²⁰

See, for instance, The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 40.

probably more Christian than anything else. We shall return to this problem in our closing chapters, but meanwhile let us turn to a description and analysis of Brotherhood institutions and practices in order to advance our knowledge of the movement's ideological substratum and its practical implications.

CHAPTER IV

BROTHERHOOD PRACTICES AND INSTITUTIONS

Every religion is a living, indivisible unity. Every part of it - a dogma, a rite, a myth, an institution, a cult - is so vitally related to the whole that it can never be understood in its real function, significance and tendency, as these occur in the reality of life, without keeping constantly in mind the vast and living unity of existential apprehension in which the part moves and has its being.

--Hendrik Kraemer¹

The substance of the observation made here by Kraemer is that an understanding of the individual parts or dimensions of a religion contributes to an understanding of that religion as a whole. There may not always be unity among the individual parts, as Kraemer seems to suggest here, nor need there be such unity, before an understanding of the parts of a religion enhances an understanding of the whole.

However, the essence of Kraemer's observation is certainly true of the various parts of the BCS. We need to know and understand its various parts--its history, its beliefs and practices, its myths and institutions, in order to know more fully the phenomenon of Brotherhoodism. The preceding chapter having paved the way for it, in this chapter, therefore, we discuss a select number of Brotherhood

¹Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World (London: Edinburgh House, 1938), p. 135.

practices and institutions as means of attempting to understand more fully the movement's worldviews and ideology.

But before we proceed, we shall attempt a working definition of what is meant here by the words "practice" and "institution," so that the reader may know precisely what we are talking about. We define "practice" here as the concrete, observable demonstration of what is believed. In the context of religion, a religious practice, simply defined, is a religious observance. But this working definition is not intended to imply that all religious practices or observances can be demonstrated physically, concretely or visibly. Some may only be "practised" or "observed" mentally or "in the heart" and are therefore not visible or physically concrete. Further, not all religious practices or observances lend themselves to logical explanation as statements of faith. For instance, how does one explain logically as a statement of faith the BCS annual practice of making a pilgrimage to Biakpan, Obu's birth place, in supposed commemoration of his mother's (unknown) birthday? Thus, since not all religious practices or observances can be explained or logically accounted for as statements of faith, it follows that in the present chapter it may not be possible to logically or theologically account for each practice or institution of the BCS described here.

The word "institution" is used here to refer to an established order or constituted body, especially if such an order or body is celebrated or commemorated by special periodic events or rituals. Or, one might say that an institution is practice writ large. As such, the usage of both "institution" and "practice" in this chapter will frequently overlap. With that brief explanation, we turn now to a

discussion of a select number of BCS practices and institutions. As in the previous chapter, our main emphasis here is on the social or sociological implications of each practice or institution.

1. Baptism

One of Obu's irrevocable demands for full membership in the BCS is baptism by immersion which, in order to be efficacious, must be conducted by another baptized member of the movement. According to BCS belief, any previous baptisms, whether by immersion or by any other mode, cannot qualify one for membership in this "New Kingdom." All previous baptisms, says Obu, are simply "John's baptism" or "the baptism of repentance."² Such previous baptisms, he asserts, may be a necessary prelude to the "real baptism" or the baptism by fire and the Holy Spirit which, according to him, is the only kind of baptism that brings about salvation. All previous baptisms, Obu believes, were without the Holy Spirit, hence their ineffectualness.

Unlike what obtains in the mission churches and in some of the independent churches in Nigeria where only the ordained minister or elder may baptize people into church membership, in the BCS "all those who had been baptised in Brotherhood have right to baptise. . . . A woman, a man, girls and boys who had themselves been baptized are given power to baptise others."³ BCS baptism is conducted spontaneously;

²His support Bible text for this view is Acts 19:1-6.

³SCC Minutes, April 25, 1981, p. 13.

that is, there are no fixed dates on the movement's calendar of events set aside specifically for baptism, as is done in the mission churches. Rather, people are baptized whenever they express the desire to be baptized.

The BCS also practises child baptism because, as Obu says, "the Bible had not stated the correct (specific) age of baptism. As . . . adults need salvation, so do the children."⁴ But the children must be old enough to be able to make their own decision as to whether or not to be baptized; hence Obu advises: "Only get their consent."⁵

On the day for the baptism of a particular individual, the candidate is led to a stream or any running water by another baptized member of the movement assigned to conduct the baptism. This person is usually the one who had "converted" the candidate either through regular Bible studies or through some other means of "witnessing" such as testimonies or healing. Each location for Brotherhood baptism has a little thatch-roofed hut built by the water, with rooms for the baptizer and the candidate to change their clothes for the ritual. There are usually separate rooms for female and male candidates. Often there is a separate room for the one doing the baptizing; but in the absence of this, he or she may use any of the general rooms designated to his or her sex.

When both the candidate and the baptizer have changed their clothes for the event, the former is led by the latter into the water. After a

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

short invocative prayer by the baptizer, the candidate is immersed three times as the baptizer says respectively: "I baptize you in the name of the Father;" "I baptize you in the name of the Son;" "I baptize you in the name of the Holy Spirit." After the three immersions, the baptizer prays again, finishing up this prayer with the anointment of the neophyte with the holy oil. With this oil, the baptizer makes a sign of the cross on the neophyte's forehead. The sign is believed to have the potency of warding off evil forces from the neophyte from that moment on, until, of course, he or she falls into sin, in which case he or she would no longer have the protection of the Holy Spirit unless he or she confesses the sin, fasts, and prays for forgiveness.

What is perhaps more important for our purposes than the mere doctrinal or theological ramifications of this BCS rite is the fact that it serves, for newcomers, as a rite of passage and a mark of belonging and acceptability to a socio-religious group. Any person who attends BCS services and activities, no matter for how long, but has not subjected himself or herself to BCS baptism, can never be fully accepted or recognized as really belonging to the group. Indeed, such a person may even be looked upon as a spy or an intruder.

2. Feet Washing

It is the practice in the BCS, following the example of Jesus Christ, to wash each other's feet and wipe them with a towel before each member participates in the congregational feast after each Sunday service. At the movement's headquarters in Calabar, Obu himself leads the way in this "ordinance of humility." During this occasion, he is

seen wearing a white shirt and white shorts with a towel tied around his waist. Of the towel he says: "That towel that I use to tie around my waist was the same thing that our Lord Jesus Christ did when he washed the disciples' feet and wiped them with the towel."⁶ The social significance of this practice is that it promotes the spirit of humility and equality among members of the movement, and, ultimately, enhances solidarity and group cohesion among them.

3. Meeting of the Spirited Children

The meeting of the "spirited children" is an all-night monthly meeting of all the visioners known in the BCS as "spirited children" (in Efik Ndito spirit). Each bethel or station of the BCS is expected to observe this monthly event. It is observed every third Friday of the month. All members in each station are expected to attend this meeting. Those who have problems, especially health problems, and those who fear that enemies, witches and sorcerers might be after them usually look forward with great anxiety and expectation to attending these meetings, hoping that the visioners would "see" the cause(s) of their fears and misfortunes and direct them as to what to do for solution.

The main activities of the night consist of singing, praying by the congregation, and intermittent sermonetting by the chief visioner of the station who usually functions as the Leader's representative for that station. At intervals, while the singing is going on, the chief

⁶ Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 39.

visioner or "conductor" would point at a member whom he/she "sees" to have problems, usually enemy or witchcraft problems, and call such a member out to the front, give him or her a special seat, and then begin to tell that member the cause(s)--spiritual or human--of his or her troubles; for example, why he or she does not have children or who or what is responsible for his or her constant sickness, etc. After the diagnosis, the chief visioner would suggest the solution to the specific problem thus diagnosed. The commonly suggested solutions usually consist of a suggestion that the individual who has the problem(s) go to see the Leader (Obu) for special prayers or "blessings;" or that the individual concerned is directed to use the holy oil or holy water or both in a certain way or he or she is advised to undertake a special kind of fasting--usually "dry fasting"--for a certain number of days. More often than not the visioner also recommends that such a period of fasting be followed by a period (usually lasting from a few days to several weeks) in which that member goes on "ministry work" (see section 5 below). Many members testified during this research that invariably their problems were solved in this manner, that is, through the services of the visioners. The meeting of the spirited children usually ends by the conductor giving some monetary or clothing donations to those in need, thus combining theoretical and practical Christianity.

4. Healing

The great emphasis on spiritual healing in the BCS is, of course, not peculiar to the movement. As Noel King has correctly observed, ". . . it is characteristic of much African thought to refuse to separate

religion and healing.⁷ However, as spiritual healing lay at the very heart of early Christianity, one may therefore deduce that the BCS is not only following African thought but also Christian healers, including the example of Jesus Christ himself. And just as it was in the case of early Christianity, one of the ways in which many have come to know the BCS and subsequently embrace its teachings, has been through their successful healing ventures. Of the example of healing in early Christianity, Bryan Wilson makes the following observation:

. . . in the Christian case, the healing of disease, although intermittently relegated or ignored, has been a recurrent expectation among the devout, and it is arguable that only through the belief in such healings did Christian teaching succeed in making its initial impact.

Indeed, the ministry of healing is so central to the whole ideology and mission of the BCS that it is specifically mentioned in its Certificate of Incorporation as one of the aims and objectives for its existence, an aim second only to the objective "to advance Christian Religion by spreading the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to all parts of the world."⁹ Of the healing activities in the BCS, M.F.C. Bourdillon writes:

Healing and the solution of problems is a dominant attraction for new members, and there is a healing episode at the hands of the prophets during the weekly services. Miracles supposed to have been performed by the founder and by other church

⁷ Noel Q. King, Christian and Muslim in Africa (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 91.

⁸ Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 28.

⁹ Federal Republic of Nigeria, "The Land (Perpetual Succession) Act, Cap. 98, Certificate of Incorporation," dated March 25, 1964.

leaders¹⁰ have a central place in Brotherhood propaganda.

As we pointed out in the last chapter, one of the main reasons why members of the BCS believe that Obu is God, is that he is able to heal any kind of ailment simply by pronouncing to the patient the supposedly efficacious words: "Go, all is well" or "Go, I have solved your problems." Such miraculous healings, so the claim goes, are usually carried out after the patients concerned had exhausted all other avenues, for example, allopathic medical treatments both Western and African traditional. Indeed, there are hundreds of stories in the movement's literature and among members about cases where people were healed of ailments pronounced incurable by practitioners of traditional Western and African medicine, such as cases involving victims of insanity, cancer, barrenness, witchcraft, blindness, deafness, lameness, and the like. There are also reports of even the dead being brought back to life.¹² Furthermore, other stories claim that some creatures

¹⁰ In the context of BCS ideology and organizational structure, as we have indicated, it is inappropriate to use the title "leader" in referring to any member of the movement other than Obu himself who is recognized in the movement as the "Sole" Leader and Spiritual Head of the movement. Perhaps the titles "officers" or "ordained ones" would be better substitutes here. One realizes, however, that in some sense the movement's officers are, ultimately, "indirect leaders," sociologically speaking.

¹¹ M.F.C. Bourdillon, "Pluralism and the Problem of Belief," Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions, 54, No. 1 (1982), p. 27.

¹² See, for instance, The Sunday Chronicle (Calabar), August 19, 1979, pp. 8, 9, for the story of one Cornelia Offiong Okon (aged 11) who is said to have been resurrected from death simply by the invocation of Obu's miraculous name; see also the testimony of Ayo Michael who tells of how her still-born baby was brought back to life by Obu; in The Light (Footnote Continued)

such as reptiles, snails, snakes, tortoises or objects such as pins and needles, have been removed from the bodies of human beings.

In most cases, the truth of these stories was verified during the course of this study. In a few cases, clients who were reported to have been healed denied that there was any improvement in their health or condition. An instance of this latter case was that of Miguel Zalduando of Bronx, New York. He was reported by the BCS in a number of Nigerian newspapers¹³ and in the movement's publications to have been healed, in 1982, of an allegedly hitherto incurable lung disease which he was said to have suffered for over a decade before the BCS came in contact with him. When we contacted this man by telephone two years later to verify the story, we were told by him that his condition was "worse" after the reported healing. He did not of course imply that it was the touch of the BCS that made his condition "worse."

As might be expected, BCS explanation as to why some of their patients do not receive complete healing is that such patients lack faith in the Father's ability to heal them or that they did not confess all their sins to the Father before the healing process was set in motion. Or, that the patients concerned went back to their evil ways just before the process of healing was complete. In other words, members of the movement claim that when any person who comes to them for healing is not healed, the problem lies with the sick person concerned,

(Footnote Continued)

of the World; vol. XVI (n.d.), pp. 46-48. For other stories of reported Brotherhood miraculous healings, see SCC Minutes, September 2, 1983, pp. 21-22; see also The Truth about the Christ's Servants, pp. 74-85.

¹³ See, for example, The Nigerian Chronicle (Calabar), December 30, 1982, p. 12; The Nigerian Gong, January 17th-23rd, 1983, p. 1.

not with the healers. At least this much is implied in Obu's remarks on the issue when he says:

It is imperative that when you sin, you must die. I teach you day by day that you should not sin so that you may not die, but you continue in sinful ways and calling upon the Holy Father to help you. You are fornicating, stealing, telling lies, indulging in concoctions and charms, but you still call on the Father to help you. What actually do you mean? You are mixing the two things together. Very many people continue in their mistaken questions, 'Why is it possible that a person stays in Brotherhood for a long time yet he is sick?' They further ask why somebody should die when he is in Brotherhood; and I ask 'Why should they not die? Why should they not be sick? Do you put the words of God you receive into practice?'¹⁴

But what does Obu mean by death in this context? Is it the continuous coming, going and coming-again that the process of reincarnation involves? So it seems. If that is correct, one gets the impression here that in Obu's thought the ever-recurring process of reincarnation is not, as he would want us to believe, altogether a pleasant experience and one that should normally be sought after. But we cannot always be very certain of Obu's thinking on these matters for his, as we have frequently indicated, is not a developed systematic theology.

The reported success stories of Brotherhood miraculous healings are widespread in Nigeria and abroad, and are apparently disturbing to a wide circle of both African traditional and Western-oriented healers. This is probably why Obu, with obvious pride, can say: 'Why are Doctors panicking now? They say that if Brotherhood continues to exercise its power their means of livelihood will be gone, and for this

¹⁴ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 7.

reason they are confused."¹⁵ The same opinion is also expressed by two of his followers who, referring to native "doctors" (healers), occultists, witches, and members of the various secret societies in Nigeria who oppose and criticize the BCS, write:

These categories of critics feel very strongly aggrieved against the Brotherhood and Leader Olumba Olumba Obu because people who had been spending considerable amount of money to patronize them have now joined the Brotherhood and their problems have been solved there free.¹⁶

Members of the BCS claim that one of the most effective means by which healing is effected in the movement is the invocation of the "wonderful, miraculous, healing name of the Father--Olumba Olumba Obu." Here again, testimonies abound of healings which were wrought simply by invoking this "powerful name."¹⁷ Indeed, the practice by some members of writing the three initials of Obu's name (O.O.O.) on their doorposts, window panes, cars, and on other personal belongings, is a concrete demonstration of their belief that the power of their Leader's name keeps away thieves and "dispels all forces of darkness and satanic effects that be."¹⁸ Most of these members believe whole-heartedly that this name can "play (a) wonderful role in times of

¹⁵ The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 25.

¹⁶ Umoh and Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star: Facts You Must Know, p. 3.

¹⁷ See, for instance, E.O. Bassey, "What Do We Say He Is?" in E.O. Bassey et al., Who Is This Man Olumba Olumba Obu?, p. 2.

¹⁸ Duke, p. 42.

danger.¹⁹ Some of them have even claimed to have been able to cast out demons, to speak in tongues, pick up deadly serpents or drink poison without any harm, cure the most incurable of diseases, simply by invoking the powerful name of this man of Biakpan. We are even told that the children of Israel of old made use of this mighty and powerful name! One member puts it this way:

His initials, O.O.O., were the seals used by the children of Israel to free themselves from the (sic) death in the time of Moses²⁰ when Pharaoh refused to allow them leave Egypt.

Many other members of the movement have also testified that the mere invocation of the initials of Obu's name has brought them some remarkable fortunes and successes in their various undertakings. For example, a graduate student member studying in the United States wrote to Obu to testify that the mere writing of "O.O.O." on the back of an application form for a highly competitive grant made it possible for him to obtain a tuition waive for a whole semester.²¹ Also testifying to the potency of Obu's name, another senior member of the movement writes as follow: "Miraculous works are being done in Brotherhood in America, England, India, China, Ivory Coast, etc. The power of the 'three O's'

¹⁹ Bassey, p. 3.

²⁰ Duke, p. 36.

²¹ See the anonymous testimony in Umoh James Umoh et al., eds., God Glorifies His Holy Name: First Evangelical Tour of the United States of America (1982), p. 29.

is the same everywhere you test it in the entire universe.²² Indeed, we are further told as follows about this powerful name:

The most amazing thing about Leader Olumba Olumba Obu is that the mere mention of his initials O.O.O. or to call his name. . . is enough to take anyone out of a grave spiritual, physical or material problem. At any given time, anywhere in the world, call that name . . . during crucial moments of emergency where all hopes of survival have been lost and all the elementary powers and all forces of darkness, the winds, seas, and anything seen and unseen which had been instrumental to such critical dangers MUST, repeat MUST, automatically be neutralised and surrender to the²³ Supreme Authority of Leader Olumba Olumba Obu.

In fact, Obu himself gives support to the notion of the potency of his name when he says: 'Here in Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, (by) the mere calling of one 'O' all your problems are gone forever.'²⁴

Elsewhere, he narrates the story of how a man who had been sentenced to death for highway robbery was saved the night before his planned execution, just by invoking the initials O.O.O. 'It was because of that,' testifies Obu, 'the following morning he was sent for and was discharged and acquitted; nothing else was said.'²⁵ As a further admission of the claim of the power of his name to keep away thieves, Obu adds: 'Even as you are staying here, put any amount of money in an

²² Eyo, The Truth about Olumba Olumba Obu and Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. 72.

²³ Sunday Concord (Lagos), January 1, 1984, p. 10.

²⁴ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 106.

²⁵ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 125.

envelope and inscribe on it 'O.O.O.' and keep on the main road and go away. Nobody will take it . . . ,²⁶

Because of the tremendous premium which members of the BCS put on the potency of their Leader's name as an instrument of healing, one may conclude that to them this name is the very source of all healing. Prayer, the holy oil, the holy water, and even the Biakpan water are therefore only secondary means of healing, Obu's name being the healing force par excellence.

5. Ministry Work

The expression "ministry work" refers to the practice in the BCS whereby members who are in search of solutions to their individual problems are advised to leave their own homes and local stations (bethels) for other stations to perform some specified duty or duties. Such duties are referred to as "ministry work." The performance of such "spirit-directed" duties is believed to be a spiritual aid to the solution of the problem(s) concerned. The duty or duties usually recommended to a particular "seeker" or "searcher" normally depend(s) on the skills or careers of the individual seekers involved. For instance, if the seeker is a professional builder or mason, such a one would normally be asked to go and perform his ministry work at places where the building of BCS bethels is in progress or about to be commenced. If the seeker is a professional tailor or seamstress, he or

²⁶ Ibid., p. 126.

she may be asked to go and work at a BCS welfare centre. Searchers whose skills lie in the area of printing or publishing are most likely to be asked to go and perform their ministry work at the Brotherhood press or the Brotherhood Everlasting Gospel Centre both at the movement's headquarters in Calabar. In the same manner, secretaries and typists are likely to be sent to the movement's secretariat at the headquarters. And so on.

But even if a particular searcher has no specific skills or talents, some work will always be found for such a one. In fact, ministry work could simply be going to stay in a particular bethel or bethels and keeping the place(s) clean daily. Or, it may consist of merely going to a particular bethel area and "witnessing" there, that is, giving Bible studies in that neighbourhood.

Members of the movement believe that performing ministry work is ultimately a spiritual exercise and is essentially apotropaic. This is explained as follows: When the seeker or searcher works "for the Lord" in his or her particular circumstances, he or she is constantly in the concentrated presence of the angels of the Lord, whose presence consequently brings healing to them, if they were sick, or wards off the evil forces and influences of their enemies or of witchcraft. Or, the angels are believed to supply the seekers with their needs, be these needs spiritual or physical, for example children, jobs, marriage, partners, promotion at work, etc. Members also regard the ministry work, like the Brotherhood feast (discussed in the next chapter), as a sort of anticipatory thanksoffering or sacrifice to God for expected solutions to the problems at hand or for special divine favour sought.

The psychologist of religion may see the ministry work as a means of taking the seeker away from the hostile environment of his or her circumstances for the purpose of making him or her forget, at least for a time, about the forces that might be at work against him or her. At the end of ministry work and other spiritual exercises that go with it--fasting and feasting--the individual seeker apparently returns home with new spiritual vigour and assurance. He or she now feels like a spiritual victor in a spiritual battle. Psychologically, such feelings of spiritual victory and protection may help to keep the individual concerned in a condition of emotional stability and physical well-being over a period of time.

From a socio-economic point of view, the ministry work helps the movement to get much of its physical work done without hired labour, thus conserving in its coffers the funds that would normally have been spent on such projects. The large amounts of monetary offerings and other material donations that these seekers and searchers give in appreciation for the solution of their problems also constitute a major source of the movement's income and physical resources. Some members, in gratitude for blessings supposedly received during the ministry work, have been reported to have engaged in projects for the movement estimated to cost thousands of naira.

6. Fasting

Fasting features prominently in Brotherhood ideology. As in other religious traditions, it is regarded as an opportunity for the religious person to rejuvenate himself or herself spiritually through meditation,

the confession of sins, and a 'renewing of covenantal relationship with God or the focus of religious worship. There are officially two types of occasional fasting in the BCS, the weekly fasting on Thursdays and the three days' fasting on the three days preceding the commencement of each Pentecostal Assembly (see below). A description of the nature and significance, for BCS ideology, of these two types of fasting follows.

(a) The Thursday (Weekly) Fasting: In the BCS, members are encouraged to fast and pray as often as possible. But the weekly fasting on each Thursday is viewed as obligatory for all members to much the same degree that the five daily prayers are obligatory for Muslims.

The Thursday fasting begins from six o'clock in the morning and lasts until six o'clock in the evening. According to the movement's belief, this day of fasting 'is to remember the day (Christ) was crucified on the cross.'²⁷ The hours of the Thursday fasting are also very important for Brotherhoods. Obu explains the significance of the timing of the feast as follows:

It was at six o'clock in the morning that judgement was delivered against our Lord Jesus Christ and he was condemned. It was at nine o'clock that he was crucified. He remained in (sic) the Cross till twelve o'clock. At three o'clock He shouted and surrendered His Spirit unto the Father; and at six o'clock in the evening he was lowered from the Cross and taken to the grave.²⁸

²⁷ Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 39. Here Obu departs from the Christian tradition which teaches that the Crucifixion took place on a Friday.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 40; cf. April Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 88.

Thus, the Thursday fasting is not merely a time for individual and group spiritual revival, but also, more importantly, a period for members of the movement to re-enact or re-live with the Crucified One the events of his last day on earth, according to Brotherhood calculation. In this sense, the further spiritual significance of this day of fasting is to suffer with the Suffering One through the mortification of the body.

In contrast with individual fasting which may be observed on any day and anywhere without necessarily setting time apart from one's daily schedule or routine, the Thursday fasting is communal or congregational in nature. In fact, in a number of ways it resembles a semi-worship session consisting of singing, Bible reading and sermonetting by the director or conductor, and prayer. As might be expected, the last item takes the pride of place. Although many of the prayers are said by appointed members on behalf of the other participants, there are also opportunities for individual private silent prayers.

The fast is usually broken with a typical Brotherhood fruit feast, which in itself provides an opportunity for much social sharing and fellowship.²⁹

(b) The Three Days' Dry Fasting: The three days preceding each Pentecostal Assembly period (see below) are observed as days of "dry fasting." By dry fasting is meant fasting twenty-four hours a day without washing any part of one's body, not even one's mouth, and without letting any food to enter one's mouth (not even swallowing one's

²⁹ On more on the significance of Brotherhood feasts, see the next chapter.

saliva!). This practice reminds one of a similar practice during the Muslim Ramadan. According to Obu, "the three days' dry fasting signifies (Jesus') three days and (three) nights in the grave."³⁰ This fasting begins from the midnight of the first day to the midnight of the third. It is believed to constitute the spiritual preparation necessary for the reception of the blessings of the Pentecostal period. The activities of this fasting are similar to those of the Thursday fasting, and, as in the latter, this fasting is normally broken with a fruit feast.

7. The Wednesday "Watch and Pray"

The hours between six o'clock each Wednesday evening and three o'clock the next morning are observed in the BCS as the period to "watch and pray." This observance is said to be a symbolic re-enactment of the episode in the last day of Christ's earthly ministry when, in the garden of Gethsemane where he had gone to pray to prepare himself for the "cup" that he was about to drink, he had left his favourite disciples, Peter, James and John, at the foot of the mountain with the instruction to watch and pray (Matt. 26:36-46). Thus, the Wednesday "watch and pray" is to commemorate the day Christ was arrested and tried. According to BCS teaching, it was also on this day that "He selected the Apostles out from the rest of the world and

³⁰ Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 39.

ordained them and called them his disciples."³¹ It is further believed that it was also on Wednesday that "He gave the last supper to His disciples."³² Accordingly, the BCS also observes the Lord's supper, which they prefer to call feast, every Wednesday night in symbolic re-~~mem~~brance of that historic last supper.³³

Even at the risk of stating the obvious, one must stress that, in addition to its many Christian teachings discussed in the last chapter, Brotherhood minute attention to the above observances in commemoration of the crucial events in Jesus' life and ministry, marks the movement out as being definitely Christian. This stress is necessary if only to counter and correct the movement's antagonists in Nigeria who hold a contrary opinion.

8. The Pentecostal Assemblies

The BCS observes three special month-long assemblies or conventions annually during which members from far and wide come together for spiritual revival and rejuvenation. These assemblies are called "pentecostal" in anticipation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as was the case on the biblical day of Pentecost. Until a few years ago, the Pentecostal assemblies used to be held exclusively at the movement's headquarters in Calabar. Members and representatives from all over the

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ See, for instance, The Supernatural Teacher, Book 1 (1979), pp.

world used to go there to attend them. But increased numbers of attendants soon posed the problem of congestion not only in the headquarters' central bethel at 34 Ambo Street, Calabar, where these assemblies are still being held, but also in the whole city, as all the hotels, motels, and guest houses there, including Brotherhood guest houses, could no longer accommodate all those who came to attend this Brotherhood haji. Consequently, the Pentecostals had to be decentralized so that there are now Pentecostal centres in the major cities in Nigeria and abroad.

The main activities of the Pentecostal periods include preaching and exhortation twice daily by Obu himself, praying, giving of testimonies by those members moved to do so, and friendly singing competition by choirs from the various stations. The morning activities last from ten o'clock to about two or three o'clock in the afternoon or sometimes even later. After the morning session, some members go on "outing," which is a procession of singing and dancing Brotherhood members in the major streets of the host city. This outing, they say, is a way of "witnessing for the wonderful work of the Father and to let the world know that the Father is doing His work," explained one member. All members not involved in special meetings or other assignments related to the Pentecostal are expected to participate in the outing which usually lasts between two and three hours, after which members return to their various residences to change up and get ready for the evening session which normally lasts from seven o'clock to the early hours of the morning.

Besides the outing, the interval between the morning and evening sessions of each Pentecostal day is also used for meetings of the

various Fellowships and Associations, during which time each group gives reports of their previous activities and lays plans and programmes for subsequent ones. All these meetings are usually scheduled in advance in each Pentecostal's calendar of events, mainly so that Obu will be able to attend them to offer his advice, approval and blessings on whatever plans are laid.

In the city of Calabar, for instance, Pentecostal periods are usually periods of economic boom for the city and the movement. For one thing, they are an opportunity for hoteliers to make money off the hundreds of visitors that flock into the city at this time. For another thing, the Pentecostals also provide an opportunity for craft dealers, food vendors, and sellers of souvenirs to sell their wares.

The Pentecostal periods also provide the movement's various Fellowships, Associations (see chapter three above) and officers the opportunity to give reports of their activities, and to meet and discuss their various short-term and long-term plans and programmes, ways and means to execute these, and to seek their Leader's guidance, approval and blessings on those plans and projects.³⁴ A discussion of the three annual Pentecostal assemblies and their significance, as seen by the BCS, follows.

(a) April Pentecostal: The April Pentecostal, according to BCS teaching, is observed to commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is also said to be observed to welcome the new year since,

³⁴ Cf. N.P. Oduok, 'Brotherhood of the Cross and Star: Pentecostal Assemblies,' InsightOut (April/June 1983), p. 125.

for the BCS, "April is the first month of the year."³⁵ This Pentecostal is also important because it is during this period that the key officers of the movement are promoted and ordained by Obu himself, in the belief that it was also in April that Christ had chosen and ordained his twelve disciples.

(b) August Pentecostal: According to Brotherhood ideology, the August Pentecostal is said to commemorate a number of milestone events in the history of the movement. In the first instance, it is said to mark the month in which the movement moved from its very first meeting place at 8 Eton Street, Calabar, to 26 Mbukpa Street in the same city, from which place it later moved to its present headquarters at 34 Ambo Street. This Pentecostal is also said to commemorate the month in which members of the movement put on their white soutane for the very first time.³⁶ In the early days of the movement, what is now a four-week celebration every August was celebrated only on August the 8th of every year, the very day the movement is reported to have moved from its Eton Street meeting place to Mbukpa Street. But in addition to marking these events in the history of the movement, the August Pentecostal is also believed to mark an important event in the life of Jesus Christ. According to Obu, it was in the month of August "that our Lord Jesus Christ was revealed to the entire world," that is, the month in which the voice

³⁵ Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 43.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

from heaven declared to the whole world, during his baptism in River Jordan, that he was indeed the Son of God.³⁷

It is not, therefore, accidental but providential, Obu declares, that the very month of the year in which Jesus Christ was revealed to the world, although he had existed from the beginning of time, should also be the very month in which the BCS was revealed to the world, although, he believes, it had always existed from time immemorial. Furthermore, just as Jesus was baptized in August, as Obu claims, so also

the first baptism in Brotherhood was in August, and in that month also they (members of the movement) were revealed to the world that they were the children of God. . . . all important events in Brotherhood took place during the month of August. . . . Jehovah and his Christ perform wonders in the month of August.³⁸

Obu further claims that it was during the month of August that the flood of Noah's day took place as a judgement on an unrepentant generation.³⁹

(c) December Pentecostal: This Pentecostal is observed in commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Its activities are exactly as those during the previous two.

³⁷ Ibid.; cf. The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), pp. 30-31.

³⁸ The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 32.

³⁹ Ibid.

9. Mother's Day

Obu's late biological mother, Ibum Mba, has been canonized in the BCS, perhaps in much the same way that Roman Catholicism has canonized the virgin Mary. The fourth of November is observed as her day--''Mother's Day.'' On this day, members, especially the female members, visit Biakpan to pay respect to ''the Mother of God.'' This day was chosen not because she was born on that day or, for that matter, in the month of November. Rather, it was chosen because during this time of the year the rains have ceased and the bad roads to the village are a little travellingable. Thus, as Obu himself has said, ''that time is fixed for convenience.''⁴⁰ As a further tribute to her, a large restaurant, named ''Mother's Canteen,'' has been built in Calabar by the Women's Fellowship in remembrance of her. Curiously, there is no mention of Obu's biological father in the teachings and activities of the BCS, and consequently there are no memorials for him which parallel those for ''the Mother of God.'' Could this be because the biological father(?) of Jesus Christ does not receive the same amount of attention in Christianity as does his biological mother?

10. The Institution of Christ's Studentship

The so-called Christ's Students are a special category of BCS ''officers'' who have been made to take the vow of chastity during the

⁴⁰ Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 65.

period in which they retain that title. In that celibate state, it is believed, "they are the true pictures or resemblances of how the angels are or behave."⁴¹ They are the movement's official celibates or "eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake."⁴² In addition to the requirement that they be celibate, they are also expected to forsake "all these worldly things including parents, husbands, (wives), relatives, wealth, children, even worldly education, etc."⁴³ Christ's Students are further defined or characterized as follows:

These bought out or purchased people, a people for a special possession, pillars of the truth, chaste and undefiled from the standpoint of God, have rejected with contempt the ceremonious homage to their earthly or carnal parents, relatives, loved ones⁴⁴

Besides the requirement that Christ's Students vow to abandon their families--parents, spouses, children, and relatives⁴⁵--Christ's Students are also made to take some two and half dozen other vows among which are, chiefly, the vow of celibacy, defined in the BCS as "virginity;" the vow of unflinching obedience to Obu; the vow to practise and demonstrate in their lifestyles the virtues of truthfulness,

⁴¹ The Students' Handbook, 2nd ed. (1979), p. 39.

⁴² Ibid., p. 21.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 38.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁴⁵ Christ's Students may, however, seek and obtain permission from the movement's "Supreme Council," i.e. from the Spiritual Council of Churches, to visit their parents or families or even to leave the Studentship if they so wish.

faithfulness, impartiality, patience, humility, pacificity, compassion or mercy, cheerfulness at all times, contentment, meekness, decorum, purity of heart, self-control, industry, etc.⁴⁶ Attached to these vows is the following warning, written in block capitals in The Students' Handbook: "IF ANY OF THE . . . LAWS ARE VIOLATED, THE VICTIM (violator) WOULD BE EXPELLED IRRESPECTIVE OF AGE AND PERSON."⁴⁷

Vow No. 27, curiously entitled "Common sense" (perhaps "common purse" was intended),⁴⁸ requires that all Students live communistically. Specifically, this vow states: "Hand over all the money given to you to your supervisor or group heads who will then bring it to the general purse."⁴⁹ This requirement, it is claimed, is a re-activation or re-enactment of the spirit of "the students of old," by which are meant the early disciples of Jesus who lived communistically. In this same vow, the Students are in return expected to bring to the know of the headquarters, through their supervisor or grouphead, their needs: "Inform the H.Q. on things that you need, instead of stealing things or going on begging from people."⁵⁰ Also in the same vow, they are encouraged to be thrifty or frugal and not to be

⁴⁶The Students' Handbook, pp. 6-10.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁸We find the phrase "common purse" on p. 41 of The Students' Handbook.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 9; cf. pp. 40-41.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 9-10

profligate: "'Do not be extravagant. . If you misuse things given to you, you are a thief.'",⁵¹

This group of men and women of varied ages (usually between 16 and 45) consists of those who were married before but are now, either widowed, separated or divorced; those who are still legally married but, following the example of Obu himself, no longer live with their wives; and those who have never been married. All in this group come to live in a special residence built for them at the movement's headquarters in Calabar for a period of time (about twelve months) at which period they receive special instructions and training from Obu himself on the celibate life. While in Calabar, they also serve as Obu's "'errand boys and girls'" and as hosts and hostesses to the hundreds of visitors that daily flock into the movement's headquarters to see the Leader for one reason or another. Some of the Students are assigned to attend to the movement's several guest houses within Calabar and beyond. After this period of training, those not assigned duties at the headquarters are posted to minister at the movement's bethels anywhere in the world.

The functions of the Students include the composition and singing of hymns and songs for the movement, preaching, healing the sick, baptizing new converts, and rendering of humanitarian services to those in need "'as the Father gives them the ability to do so.'",⁵² In sum, their services are seen as being mainly intended to be altruistic. We are told, for instance, that "'their duties are to seek for the interest

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵² Ibid., p. 42.

of others. . . . They can even come to your house, wash and iron your clothes for you, fetch water for you, sing songs of praise to make you happy.⁵³

Brotherhood Studentship was instituted in August 1968⁵⁴ and inaugurated during the December Pentecostal of that year, when for the first time in the movement's history a group of seven young men and women--four boys and three girls--were introduced to the Assembly as 'Saints,' which appellation anticipated the kind of lifestyle they were expected to lead from that time on. This number increased the following year and during the 1969 December Pentecostal Assembly their title was changed from 'Saints' to 'Students--in--training,'⁵⁵ and later to the present name 'Christ's Students.' In 1970, sixty-two more men and women were admitted into the group. That number continued to grow steadily until there were as many as three hundred and fifty of them by 1973.⁵⁶ However, with some of them leaving the Student (monastic) life and new ones coming in, the number has remained at about the 350th mark in recent years. A recent BCS source puts the current

⁵³Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁴Members will of course argue that the institution, like the movement itself, had always been in existence; that it is as eternal as God himself; that there was never a time when it was not.

⁵⁵The Students' Handbook, p. 14; cf. p. 41.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 41. This number seems to have been greatly inflated by Amadi who says that 'by the end of 1973, the student population had reached five hundred;'"--'Power and Purity,' p. 323; cf. p. 327; see also Ayankop, p. 78.

number of Students at "over three hundred."⁵⁷ About Obu's original motive for instituting Studentship in his movement, Amadi conjectures as follows:

It seems that the Leader originally intended to establish a movement with strong monastic orientation, but found this impracticable in the light of his own marital status; there was also the problem of introducing stringent moral ideology of a pure monastic institution to a people whose social and cultural backgrounds have no place for it. . . . The establishment of the Institution of Studentship . . . in 1968 thus became for a him a partial realisation of the original dream.⁵⁸

Considering Obu's attitude toward marriage and family life (see section 12 of the last chapter), if there is one position which he would encourage his members to attain, it is the position of the Christ's Students. As he sees it, this is the only really spiritual position which all should aspire and strive to reach--the position of the "virgin" in mystical wedlock with Christ their spiritual husband. Christ's Students, Obu intimates, are in a special relationship with this spiritual Groom, because they have left all--father, mother, family, husband, wife, and, above all, their sex life--to be married to and live completely and exclusively for their newly found spiritual husband, Jesus Christ (spelled Olumba Olumba Obu). According to Obu, this spiritual kenosis--self-emptying, leaving all else behind for the sake of Christ--is the one colossal difference between the Christ's

⁵⁷ See BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 92.

⁵⁸ Amadi, "Power and Purity," pp. 363-64.

Students and all other categories of officers in the BCS. Obu says, for instance:

Many people say that there is no difference between the Students and others because all of you can preach,⁵⁹ but you have seen the vast difference now.

The "vast difference" here refers, of course, to nothing other than the supposed celibate state of the Christ's Students.⁶⁰ That, according to Obu, is the one unique quality that marks them out within the rank and file of BCS membership.

Thus, as far as Obu is concerned, the only "superiority" in the movement is "spiritual superiority" which, he implies, can only be attained through the celibate, "kenotic," and self-denying lifestyle as epitomized by the Christ's Students. It is in this light that his following statement about what he calls "episcopal seniority" is to be understood:

There is some misunderstanding in Brotherhood concerning the assertion that everybody is equal here. This is an expression of oneness and liberty for all, but in status, we are not equal. When Christ came . . . the first time he had thousands of disciples from where he chose seventy, then twelve apostles, and lastly, the

⁵⁹ SCC Minutes, August 11, 1973, p. 15.

⁶⁰ Amadi has pointed out, however, that the ideals of celibacy and abstinence from sexual pleasure on the part of the Students have not always been achieved. He goes on to narrate stories about some of the Students who actually got involved in sexual activities among themselves, resulting in the pregnancy of some of the women in the group. Defaulters, as might be expected, were expelled from the group, drastically reducing their numbers from 350 in 1973 to only about 150 in 1978. See Amadi, "Power and Purity," pp. 327-31. Ayankop also "noted two cases of . . . pregnancy of unmarried girls members of the movement in 1970 in one congregation," although he did not say whether these girls were among those who had taken the vow of celibacy; see Ayankop, p. 70.

three men cabinet. Could this show that all the disciples were of equal rank? Among the three, he chose one he loved best and reposed all confidence in him. They always passed their requests through him to Christ. He also chose Peter among the three, to be the head and spokesman. This is the work of God. Jesus loved John best but selected Peter to be the head. This shows that people have different gifts from God. Peter and John had no access to the money for Judas was charged with financial responsibility. When he was crucified, he did not hand over his mother to Peter who was the head, but he gave to John the beloved. Jesus himself did not entangle himself with financial affairs. During the time of prayer he would either go with twelve, nine, three or alone and pray to the Father to show you that all were not equal.⁶¹

Having said that, he goes on to remark further as follows about the uniqueness of the position of Christ's Students:

All the positions in the Brotherhood are quite clear to people, but the position of the Students is a mystery even to the Students themselves, but only God knows.⁶²

The mystery-referred to here which allegedly surrounds the office or position of the Christ's Students cannot be other than "spiritual mystery," for the mysterious, according to Rudolf Otto, is at the very core of spirituality. What is germane to our argument here, however, is the fact that of all BCS offices, it is the office of the Christ's Students around which Obu himself has cast this cloud of mystery, which suggests to us that it may, in fact, be this office which stands out in his mind as the one closest to his own leadership and spiritual position. Indeed, it is because of pronouncements such as those just

⁶¹ SCC Minutes, August 11, 1973, pp. 18-19.

⁶² Ibid., p. 17.

quoted above, that some of his followers, especially the Christ's Students themselves, conclude that immediately after the position or office of Obu as the movement's spiritual leader and overseer, comes the office or position of the Christ's Students in the movement's sacerdotal hierarchy. The basis of such a conclusion, as we have indicated, is the belief among most members of the movement that the celibate is more spiritual and that, in a "spiritual kingdom" like the BCS, the truly greatest or highest among the membership are those who have completely given up their sex life for the sake of this kingdom. However, when one remembers what Obu has said about the office of the elder--that it is "the highest of all positions in the house of God"⁶³--one cannot but wonder as to who, next to Obu himself, is really the greatest.

Perhaps what is more important for us, however, sociologically speaking, is the way the movement uses the skills and talents of the Christ's Students for its social and economic advantages. A good number of these Students were formerly trained in one profession or another before they joined the Studentship. Some of them had been trained carpenters, for instance. Some others had been professional masons. Others had had training in such other trades as tailoring, driving, school teaching, hair dresssing, etc. Still others of them had been trained artists and craftsmen and craftwomen. Others had been professional electricians. But not all of them had been usefully employed before joining the BCS and the Studentship. So when the previously unemployed had the opportunity to be used in the movement,

⁶³ The Elders' Handbook, p. 21; cf. pp. 52, 53.

"for the Lord's work," even without any salary, not a few of them were only too glad to be so usefully employed. The movement has for its part not hesitated to take advantage of such varied talents among its membership. Rather, it uses the many skills and talents profitably in different sectors of its developmental projects. For instance, the carpenters, masons, and the electricians among them have been tremendously useful in the building of the movement's bethels, healing homes, vocational centres, guest houses, office complexes, both in Nigeria and abroad. The secretaries and typists among them have been employed in various capacities in the movement's secretariat, in its publishing outlets and so on. Some of the trained school teachers among the Students have been employed in the Brotherhood elementary school located on the premises of the movement's headquarters in Calabar⁶⁴ and also at their vocational school all over the Cross River State.

Moreover, as we mentioned above, some of the Students are talented singers and song writers. These have been used in making tapes and albums and song books which are then sold to thousands of both members and non-members. The financial returns from the sales of these items are usually quite a substantial source of income for the movement. In addition, those Students who have been given special permission by Obu to continue in their "secular" vocation or employment are expected to turn their salaries or wages into the common purse.

⁶⁴ This elementary school, along with other denominational schools in the Cross River State, has been taken over by the State government. However, many of the teachers there are members of the BCS who turn in their government-paid salaries into the "common purse" if they are Students.

Thus, as in the monastic orders in other religious traditions, the Students' vows include not only a vow to celibacy but also one for "poverty." In fact, vow No. 20 specifically requires that these Students "avoid lustful desires," and then goes on to elaborate on what these desires consist of--money, clothes, etc. This particular vow goes on to instruct them to "fix your hearts in God" instead of fixing them on such lusts and luxuries as money and clothes.⁶⁵

In 1975 another body known as Christ's Servants, whose goals and objectives are quite similar to those of the Christ's Students, came into existence in BCS institutional and organizational structure. To this later body we now turn attention to see who they are and how they came into existence.

11. The Institution of Christ's Servantship

Formerly referred to as "On-active-service Body,"⁶⁶ BCS Christ's Servants are a special group of men and women who, like the Christ's Students, have decided to dedicate themselves, their time and energy to full-time service for God. At the time of this writing, they are said to be "over two hundred in number."⁶⁷ The major difference between them and the Christ's Students is that they may marry. Other differences between them and the Christ's Students are indicated by the

⁶⁵ See vow No. 20 in The Students' Handbook, p. 8.

⁶⁶ BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 92.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

following statement said to be part of an address to them (Christ's Servants) by Obu, in which he defined their identity and role. The body, Obu reportedly said, was made up of

. . . mature Christians, who have come to practise and demonstrate the life of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Students and others. The Students come to learn that they will not marry, wear shoes, watches, have radios, and to forsake their carnal fathers, mothers, relations, to serve God and His Christ day and night. But the Christ's Servants are not learners, but mature brothers and sisters, who have no interests in the things of the world and have therefore determined on their own to serve God. . . . The Students have signed papers (the written vows?) with me, but in your own case, you do as the Spirit directs you. . . . People are among you who do not want to marry, but when the time comes, I will know where to place them. . . . Those who marry, I will know where to place them, . . . At the end of time, I will group people according to their works. I will select my virgins one side, those who married one wife, one side, and others will be sent outside. . . . You are free to marry and go to the university. If you do the work of God with sincerity and honesty, you will have radios, motor-cars, etc.⁶⁸

We see, then, from this speech that Obu seems to be more liberal with the Christ's Servants than he is with the Christ's Students in terms of what both groups may or may not do in and with their lives. Christ's Servants not only may marry, but may also "have radios, motor-cars, etc.," and may even attend the university to obtain "secular" education. Christ's Students, on the other hand, may not do any of these things or own any of these luxuries. Although the Christ's Servants may do or own these "worldly" things, yet we are told here that they "have no interests in the things of the world and have

⁶⁸ Cited in Amadi, "Power and Purity," pp. 331-32.

therefore determined on their own to serve God.'" Is this a contradiction in logic? Indeed, if the Christ's Servants may engage in such mundane activities as marriage (as Obu definitely regards marriage), obtaining secular education, owning things like radios and motor-cars, while the Christ's Students may not engage in these activities, it is not clear in what sense the Servants are any more "'mature Christians"' than are the Students or a suitable spiritual example to the latter. In other words, given the freedoms of the Servants and the restrictions of the Students, how can the former institution be logically and morally be said to be, as Amadi claims, a spiritual and "'moral testing ground for prospective students"'?⁶⁹ Might not the "'free life"' of the Servants be, in fact, a source of temptation and distraction to the Students? These are by no means merely rhetorical questions. Their significance is, in fact, underscored by Obu's own awareness of the possible negative spiritual influence the Servants might have on the Students. He once articulated this awareness in his address to the Servants in which he said in part:

Christ's Servants are warned from mingling with the Christ's Students in order not to spoil and corrupt them from their voluntary obligations and vows. You are not one kingdom with the Christ's Students. The Christ's Students are not to marry, or to be given in marriage. They are not to have anything to do with the affairs of this world. On the other hand, in your own kingdom, you are given the option to own a sister or remain single. This being the case, why do you want to spoil the Students who are not to marry?⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 330.

⁷⁰ The Truth about the Christ's Servants, p. 116.

Perhaps what Amadi means here by "'moral testing ground'" is that, with regard to the question of celibacy as the ideal virtue for the religious life, it may be at the level of Servantship that Obu will be able to tell fairly accurately who among the Servants will be able to stand the "'test'" of the celibate life. For we see even from the speech quoted above that the celibate life is still being held out before the Servants as the ideal for those who want to be truly religious and spiritual. The provision that the Servants may marry seems to be given here with the tongue in Obu's cheek or, as Amadi himself puts it, "'was as much a test for them to prove their ability to withstand the stringency of celibacy, as it was a door conveniently provided for the 'weaker brethren' among them to leave the fold, as some actually did.'"⁷¹ Indeed, Obu seems to have come to review and revise in recent years the initial freedoms and privileges of the Servants, and now demands celibacy and poverty even of them. In a recent address to the Servants, he told them:

Now I want to know how many Christ's Servants do not want to marry, and all those who want to deny all the material things of this world and the pleasure of the world for the sake of the gospel. The reason I did not cast a yoke upon your neck was that some have turned to the material things of this world. Therefore in order to avoid such disappointment, I gave you that condition (the option to marry) to test your faith in God. I thank my Father because . . . there are some among you that do not want to marry and some also have denounced the things of this world. The day such people break their vow, I shall dismiss them. The Christ's Servants should not misuse the privilege the Leader gave to them to marry only one wife. . . . All those who vowed never to marry and to denounce the things of this world,

⁷¹Ibid., p. 333.

if later on they turn back to all these things, they have failed to redeem their vows to God. All the Christ's Servants who honour their vows, their names should be sent to the Leader's Office for record. A time will come (when) I will make my final selection. I shall reward all faithful Christ's Servants for their celibacy.⁷²

Moreover, Obu has come to change his mind about the issue of the Servants owning such "worldly things" as radio and television sets.

His new position on this issue is unequivocal:

I do not permit television or radio sets or cassettes in the Christ's Servants' quarters. I have nothing to do with any instruments made with human hands. Whosoever wants to have radio sets, television sets and other disco equipment should go into the world.⁷³

Of his initial permission that the Servants may own things and be married, Obu explains:

Do not take undue advantage to indulge in fornication and adultery because I say some Christ's Servants who cannot maintain their celibacy can marry one wife or husband. Some of you misunderstood me. When I told you to wear shoes, have radio sets and tape recorders, this was only to test your faith in me. I have people among the ordained ones, choristers, elders and congregation who had denounced fornication, adultery and have chosen to marry God in preparation for this wonderful kingdom of God now on earth with men.⁷⁴

In fact, one of the functions of the Christ's Servants' Council (CSC) is to keep regular records for special commendation of:

- a. Those among the Christ's Servants who vow to be celibates.

⁷²The Truth about the Christ's Servants, pp. 34, 123.

⁷³Ibid., p. 125.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 124.

- b. Those Christ's Servants who do not wear shoes, trousers, coats, etc.
- c. Those who have denied themselves everything to follow God.

Those to be noted for rebuke include:

- d. Those who marry more than one wife; and
- e. Those who wear shoes, trousers, etc.⁷⁵

The basic differences between the Christ's Students and the Christ's Servants notwithstanding, however, the Servants, like the Students, live communistically in the special quarters built for them on the premises of the movement's headquarters in Calabar. As also in the case of the Students, the Servants' 'welfare, posting and activities are controlled and organized by the Leader's Office . . .',⁷⁶ Unlike the Students, however, the Servants are not bound, as indicated in Obu's reported speech above, by any spelled-out vows. But the Servants undergo the same basic training, as do the Students, conducted by Obu himself, in the life of dedicated discipleship, in how to 'witness' to non-members, how to conduct Bible classes and worship services in the bethels. In other words, during their stay in Calabar both the Students and the Servants are prepared for the ministry of the the movement in the same manner.

Although Christ's Servants are not bound by any written vows, they are nonetheless expected to conduct themselves in ways which their Leader considers to be morally, socially, and spiritually becoming of

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 119-20.

⁷⁶ BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 92.

their calling. These ways include, among other things, dedication, trustworthiness, industry, patience, simplicity of lifestyle, decorum, honesty, thrift, and love for the word of God and spiritual matters.

While in training, the Christ's Servants, like the Christ's Students, run errands for the Leader, are sent to nearby bethels within Calabar to put into practice the training they received in conducting services, or are assigned to help in various capacities in the general infrastructural run of things in the headquarters. In sum, "the ministry of Christ's Servants is a humanitarian service, service for humanity without seeking for immediate rewards."⁷⁷ In addition, the Servants are told to go from house to house to pray for people, "wash their clothes and minister unto them as if you do it unto their Lord."⁷⁸ After their training, which usually lasts for a year or so, they are then posted to the movement's "out-stations" to minister in different capacities, especially preaching and baptizing. Their other duties are summarized as follows:

1. It is the responsibility of all the Christ's Servants to see about the general tidiness of 34 Ambo premises (the movement's headquarters).
2. It is their responsibility to usher in strangers and arrange everything in order without being told.
3. They should fetch water for the visitors at the guest house and Students' quarters.
4. It is their responsibility to share feast

⁷⁷The Truth about the Christ's Servants, p. 114.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 123. We recall here that this was the kind of life of selfless service that Obu himself is reported to have led as a young man (see chapter 1).

and to make sure all partake in the feast in equal share.

5. All of them should attend morning prayers, ten o'clock service and various fellowships in the evening regularly and on time. It is their duty to go and assist our Holy Mother in some manual work at 26 Mbukpa Road.
6. All the Christ's Servants should change pulpit in the out stations. In short, all the Christ's Servants should co-operate in love, gentleness, meekness and peace to see about the general welfare of their master's vineyard.⁷⁹

Because of the similarity in function and the kind of moral image expected of both the Students and the Servants, Amadi concludes, and we agree, that

The Institution of Christ-Servantship is thus, in some ways an extension to the original (Student) body. Both represent the movement's attempt to portray and institutionalise the finer aspects of its moral teachings and ideals, and to inspire both members and non-members alike to strive for them.⁸⁰

But the advocacy of celibacy and the establishment of semi-monastic and monastic institutions such as the Christ's Servantship and Christ's Studentship are in themselves alien to African cultures. For in these cultures marriage, the family, and the begetting of many children are obligatory and seen as means of perpetuating the family lineage and ancestral roots. Hence, even in modern Africa, any system or ideology that advocates the single life or, in religious language, celibacy, is

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁸⁰ Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 334.

suspect and looked upon as "an incomprehensible upsetting of the social and religious order."⁸¹

Amadi narrates that the institution of Christ's Servantship was born after the purge in 1973 within the camp of the Christ's Students. The purge, according to him, had come about as a result of the embarrassing moral decadence and failure to live up to their monastic vows on the part of the Students (see note 60 above). We are told that after the purge, "the old policy which allowed for indiscriminate admission into studentship, now required some sort of reappraisal..."⁸² One of the outcome of the reappraisal was the establishment, in December 1975, of the institution of Christ's Servantship "as a probationary institution for admission into studentship. In other words, it could be regarded as a moral testing ground for prospective students."⁸³ Amadi goes on to suggest, in fact, that "the main object" for establishing the institution of Christ's Servantship, was to provide a kind of foil to the Students and thus to "revive and regenerate them against further moral slip."⁸⁴

But if Christ's Servantship is a kind of preparatory school for entry into Studentship, and Christ's Servants are permitted to marry, would such an arrangement not break up the family life of those Servants who, having been married by the permission granted them, may later

⁸¹ Zahan, p. 10; cf. Mbon, "African Traditional Community in Transition," pp. 57-59.

⁸² Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 330.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 333-34.

decide to become Students? Amadi claims, however, that "although they (the Servants) were given the freedom to marry, this (freedom) has so far not been exploited . . . (because) they seem to have voluntarily opted for celibacy and a life of poverty as their student counterparts."⁸⁵ But why would the Servants choose the celibate life even though they are allowed to marry? Most likely due to the very high regard and status accorded the celibate in the movement. Or because they are truly convinced of, as Amadi puts it, "the principle that celibacy is the best form of life to be pursued," and that, according to their leader, "only celibates will be qualified to attend Christ's spiritual feast. The defiled can neither see Him nor walk with Him."⁸⁶

12. Special 'Weeks'

The BCS observes special "Weeks" throughout the year for each of the categories of officers discussed in chapter two, including, of course "Weeks" for both the Christ's Students and Christ's Servants. During each of these Weeks, all officers of the movement throughout Nigeria and from abroad whose Week is being observed, come together at the movement's headquarters in Calabar. This period provides a special retreat for the officers to learn more from the "source" (Obu) about their specific responsibilities and how to carry them out properly and efficiently at their various stations. In other words, the Weeks serve

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 333.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 322.

as periods of special refresher course for the various categories of the movement's officers. Ultimately, the Weeks are Obu's means of continuing to exercise his charismatic leadership and of keeping his officers committed to his cause.

We have in this chapter been examining a select number of BCS practices and institutions, with a view to understanding more fully its modus operandi, its mental pictures of the world (or map of the universe), its intellectual constructions of reality, and the totality of its ideology. No doubt, the institutions and practices which we have examined here are nothing but BCS affirmations of its own scale of values relative to things both sacred and secular.

Further, these institutions and practices are important to the movement, not only because they serve to give it its self-identity as a community of believers, but also because they serve, too, as a means whereby the movement attempts to preserve or perpetuate its existence, since they are even now beginning to form the foundation of its mythos and traditio for subsequent generations of members. Thus, the movement's institutions and practices of today will become its tradition, that which is handed down, to future generations.

But tradition and myth are never static or monolithic. Therefore, there is no guarantee that BCS institutions and practices of today will retain their present content and colour forever, unchallenged and unquestioned by future members. Indeed, BCS's attitude towards African religio-cultural traditions, the subject of our next chapter, is a trenchant illustration of the challengeability or even overt defiability (at least partially) of myths and traditions.

CHAPTER V

HAVING ONE'S CAKE AND EATING IT: OBU AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Of a truth, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star has
come to destroy custom and tradition.

-- Olumba Olumba Obu¹

Eric Sharpe has correctly observed that religion "may . . . approach the culture in which it finds itself in either an affirmative or negative way, either supporting or attempting to overthrow (or at least modify) the values it finds there."² In somewhat the same vein, Bryan Wilson, referring specifically to new religious movements in general, writes: "It is a characteristic of sects arising within a traditional culture that they are simultaneously both radical and conservative."³ It will be evident in the present chapter that Obu portrays this dual, largely ambivalent attitude towards African traditional culture, straddling, so to speak, between apparent acceptance and obvious rejection of some African traditional religio-cultural beliefs and practices. The first part of the chapter endeavours to point out vestiges of the traditional culture which Obu

¹Revelation of the Holy Spirit: Special Release for Christ's Week (1981), p. 27.

²Eric J. Sharpe, Understanding Religion (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), p. 131.

³Bryan Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 105.

adopts and adapts into his system of beliefs and practices, while the second part discusses those elements of the culture which he condemns and rejects.

1. OBU HAVING HIS CULTURAL CAKE, OR SO IT SEEMS

(a) What is Man?: One of the areas of apparent continuity between African traditional religions and the teachings of the BCS may be observed in the anthropologies of the two. There is something in Obu's anthropology that is strikingly reminiscent of African traditional belief in totemism, according to which every person is believed to maintain a certain entitative relationship with certain objects or beings in nature such as trees, animals, mountains, etc. According to this belief, a person's other soul (ukpong) may inhabit some animal or tree in the bush. That other soul is called in Efik ukpong ikot (literally "bush soul"). Thus, the "soul" in the bush becomes the person's "double." It is forbidden to kill the animal or cut down the tree in which a person's "double" is believed to inhabit, for doing so, according to the belief, would mean physical destruction (premature death) for the person who carries in himself or herself the "soul complement" at home. That Obu believes this with all his heart there is no doubt, as is evident when he says: ". . . if you cut down a tree you have committed murder because somebody must die somewhere."⁴

⁴The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 146.

It is because of this belief in the totemic relationship between human beings and the things of nature that Obu preaches vehemently against meat eating, stressing that "if you eat meat of any animal, do you not know that you have eaten man?"⁵ Indeed, he could not be more emphatic on this point than when he says:

Brethren, I have told you that animals and birds are human beings. Any time you kill a he-goat for food, somebody must surely die somewhere in the world. You have therefore killed a man. When you kill a she-goat, you have killed a woman or girl. All male animals represent male (humans), and female animals represent women or girls. . . . All the fishes killed daily represent the number of human beings who die daily in various parts of the world. No matter how small a fish may be, he is a human being.

Having incorporated some aspects of this belief into his teachings, Obu goes on to speak, as we have already observed, of the multiple sources of human beings. Thus, some humans come from the vegetable part of the earth; others from water; and still others from the celestial or heavenly bodies.⁷ Obu expresses this belief this way: "Right now our brethren are emerging from water, others from the moon and stars and from all the plains of creation."⁸ According to him, each human being in this world behaves according to the particular source from which he or she originates.

⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 145-46.

⁷ On the elaboration of this belief, see section 5 of chapter three above, especially page 152.

⁸ Our Lord Jesus Christ the Alpha et Omega, p. 52.

(b) Brotherhood Feast: Another practice in the BCS which resembles very closely a similar practice in African traditional religions, is the Brotherhood rite of feasting. Viewed against the background of its origins, this rite also resembles the rite of the love feast or the agape feast in early Christianity. But the particular aspect of Brotherhood feast that resembles African traditional oath taking is to be seen in its symbolism. As practised in the BCS, the feast, like the agape feast, symbolizes the oath which binds members in a kind of covenantal obligations. In African traditional religious systems, oath taking between two individuals or between groups of people is a vow to the effect that neither party will consciously harm or plan any evil against the other. In order to seal a pact between two individuals or between two communities or groups of people, a common covenantal meal or drink is shared, usually from a common dish, by the parties concerned. The meal or drink symbolizes the fact that neither party will harm or think evil of the other. A common food item which is still being used for this purpose among the practitioners of the traditional religions is the kola-nut. Even modern Africans still believe that the person with whom one has shared a piece of kola-nut is morally bound not to harm or think evil of one. It is believed in this context that if one thought evil or planned to harm a person with whom one had shared a covenantal meal or drink, one would offend the gods and ancestral spirits, and would consequently be punished by these supernatural beings. The punishment could take one of several forms, such as personal sickness or even death, bad luck in hunting, poor harvest, ill-luck in trade, or one could even be struck dead by lightning, etc.

This is exactly the way Obu interprets the significance of Brotherhood feast. For example, he says: "... you eat the same bread and drink from the same cup . . . and so if you think ill of another you will suffer."⁹ Further stressing the socio-ethical dimension of the feast as an integrating factor, Obu states:

Do not underrate this feast. It brings you new life and binds you together. There should be no division in the bethels. Realise that you are members of one family.¹⁰

In another context he emphasizes the same point as follows:

Oneness is what this feast signifies. It is the same as the last supper of our Lord. Whatever you do, if there is no feast, you have done nothing. . . . It¹¹ is a Passover which takes away our problems.

The feast is also believed to be a symbol of humility and equality among members. The symbolism is explained this way:

Brotherhood is humility. This is very simply illustrated in the Brotherhood LOVE FEAST. In serving the feast, there is no class or age distinction. Every person, no matter how high or low, rich or poor, young or old, eats from the same plate. With humility in us we can overcome all influences that can make us chew ourselves as meat.¹²

Brotherhood feast, like the covenantal meal in African native religions, we are further made to understand, should be eaten with a clear conscience; that is, after one had confessed all of one's sins to

⁹ SCC Minutes, April 25, 1976, p. 10.

¹⁰ SCC Minutes, December 30, 1978, pp. 10-11.

¹¹ SCC Minutes, December 1977, p. 4.

¹² SCC Minutes, February 28, 1980 (in the Dec., 29, 1979 issue of the Minutes, p. 31).

God and resolved all misunderstandings and ill feelings between one and one's neighbours. That is what Efiong Orok means when he says: "Clear your mind before you eat any feast."¹³ Indeed, even in the modern African village, the kola-nut is still regarded as a symbol of friendship, trust, and good will.

The African traditional oath to which we have referred itself may consist of some concoction prepared by a traditional medicine man or woman or by the elder or leader of a particular community. It is then drunk from the same cup by the parties concerned. Or, in the case of an oath between two individuals, it may simply consist of one of them licking literally some blood taken from the other by piercing his or her body with a sharp instrument. In some cases, the blood is taken from both parties, in which case each one licks the blood of the other. Sometimes the licking of blood is done symbolically by each one simply kissing the other's bare breast.

As we have said, Brotherhood feast performs the same function which African traditional oath taking performs in terms of being a symbol of covenant between two parties. That this is so is explained as follows:

- Any member of Brotherhood who thinks evil against another is bound to face hardship and problems; that is, all who have participated in the same feast. The feast is another way of saying that we are one.¹⁴

Indeed, even the devil or the "destroyer and his hosts" are also believed to participate in Brotherhood feasting. Therefore, even these

¹³ Efiong Orok, Mysteries in Brotherhood (n.d.), p. 61.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

devilish beings are also bound by the covenantal obligation which binds all who participate in the feast. Because of that, we are told, "they have no adverse mind against the members for they have taken a common vow."¹⁵

Brotherhood feast consists of eating together, usually from a common dish, as in African traditional religions, biscuits, sugar cane, groundnuts (peanuts), and fruits. This is the simpler of two main forms of the feast--the form found to be more convenient to handle after each Sunday service involving hundreds of participants. It is also this form that members are encouraged to use in entertaining guests in their homes. Members are strongly urged not to allow guests to leave their homes without being entertained. They are constantly reminded to follow the example of Abraham whose habitual hospitality led him to entertain angels inadvertently and was abundantly blessed as a result. Members are also reminded that by entertaining every visitor who happens to turn up in their homes, they may be entertaining not only angels but also, more importantly, Obu himself who may decide to visit them in any guise, for instance, as a stranger, sick person, beggar, etc., in order to bestow his blessings or healing on them. Should such members turn him away in those guises, they would therefore not receive the blessings or healing intended for them. For that reason, BCS members always insist on entertaining their visitors, even if such entertainment involved giving the visitor only a glass of water. In this connection, Obu specifically admonishes his followers as follows:

¹⁵ Ibid.

Celebrate the feast everywhere. Fruits should not be lacking in your house, in your offices, in your cars, and everywhere. Now people do not eat alone. All eat with angels.¹⁶

Obu himself demonstrates this act of hospitality by providing 'fruit feasts' to the hundreds of visitors that he receives daily. Fruits are used for these feasts, because, as we are told, 'fruits are angels' food. They feed not only the physical body but emotional, astral and ethereal bodies of man as well.'¹⁷

A fuller Brotherhood feast consists of the items mentioned above, in addition to full course meals. This form, because it involves much cooking, is usually carried out in individual members' homes, as 'directed by the spirit' through either Obu himself or through the visioners or 'spirited children.' But both forms of feast may be recommended to members to be performed in their homes, depending on the financial circumstances of a particular member.

Regarding what used to be included in the fuller form of the feast when it was first instituted in the movement, Obu tells us: 'Formerly . . . we usually killed many goats, cows, for feast, but now no more.'¹⁸ The animals killed on those occasions are not to be seen as sacrificial (as an appropriation of a ritual from the native African religious system), but merely for meat. It is customary even in modern Africa to kill cows on remarkable festive occasions firstly as a sign of

¹⁶ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, vol. 1: The Spirit of God (n.d.), p. 43. This statement is reproduced verbatim in The Return of the First Begotten of God to the World (1983), p. 46.

¹⁷ Orok, p. 52.

¹⁸ Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 133.

the significance of the occasion and secondly in order to provide enough meat for those who grace the occasion with their presence. Obu claims, however, that God has instructed them against the killing of animals for the feast, because animals are also human and even divine and killing them, therefore, is just as sinful as is murder or as sacrilegious as sacrificing God. What is interesting to note here, however, is how, even in the life time of the founder and leader of a religious movement, change in religious practice can take place.

Although it may be seen as the ritualization of social relationships, a Brotherhood feast is not merely a social event; it is first and foremost a religious rite. A feast is usually recommended in circumstances in which a particular member of the movement is in search of employment, promotion at work place, children, recovery from ill-health, protection against evil powers, success in examinations, for instance. Or, it may be recommended in celebration for these blessings already received or in fulfilment of a vow. In the former case, the feast represents a kind of sacrificium salutis--sacrifice or offering intended to evoke salus, salvation. In the latter case, the feast becomes a sort of votive offering--offering in fulfilment of a vow. In this context, Brotherhood feast may be seen to be a substitute for animal sacrifice or offering in African indigenous religions. One gets that impression from this statement from Obu himself:

. . . we have a right to rejoice and celebrate feast. And all the feasts we celebrate here are the requirements of the Holy Spirit and He really enjoys it (sic). If there is no feast, you

cannot find any spirit here. We do not require sacrifice here (any longer) but the feast.¹⁹

Whether the simpler form of feast (commonly called "fruit feast" because only fruits are used) or the fuller form is recommended, depends, as we have said, first of all on the financial circumstances of the particular member and secondly on the gravity of the problem for which solution is sought or received. In any case, Brotherhood, like the holy water and holy oil (discussed below), is believed to provide those who partake of it with some kind of protective coating against the evil powers of dangerous spirits or malevolent persons.²⁰

Some occasions for Brotherhood feasting require only the presence of children up to the age of seven or so, supervised by an adult or two. For example, if childless couples are in search of children, they are usually advised to "make a feast" for children. The belief behind this is that the souls of the children at the feast will attract children from the spirit world into the families of the couples making the feast. In Brotherhood cosmology, as in African traditional cosmology, children are seen as spirits of those who no longer physically walk this earth and are therefore spiritual beings in human flesh. Or at least they are thought of as beings who have been to the spirit world and returned. This notion is articulated by a number of adherents of the BCS respectively as follows:

All children born into this world are but the dead come alive through natural birth, through woman. In worldly vocabulary, this

¹⁹The Truth About the Christ's Servants, p. 43.

²⁰See Orok, pp. 59-60.

process is called reincarnation. Without death there would be no birth.²¹

In the same vein, E.O. Akpan writes: "The children we have are souls incarnate and reincarnate."²² And Apostle V.E. Ekpenyong tells us that children should receive first consideration in everything because they are

the father of the man. They are the prophets of old come back. That is why they have more wisdom in not going back to worship the idols of our forefathers but think constantly about God.²³

Because children are thus believed to be spiritual beings, they are therefore to be held in high regard and treated with respect and dignity. That is why disciplining a child by flogging is listed in the BCS as one of the cardinal sins from which members are warned to flee.²⁴ That is also why at a feast where both children and adults are present, the former must be served first as a sign of respect. This view of children, however, may be traced back to Nigerian traditional religious background where there is a saying among the Cross Riverians (Obu's ethnic group), for instance, that "children are spirits" (Nditonwong edi ekpo). Obu, in fact, reiterates this traditional saying when he remarks: "... children, they are all spirits."²⁵ From a purely

²¹ Apostle E.K. Ukpai, in an interview, March 16, 1982.

²² Life After Death and Mastery of Life, p. 52.

²³ V.E. Ekpenyong, in an interview, May 4, 1982.

²⁴ For the cardinal sins marked out in the BCS, see O.O. Obu, First Step to God (n.d.), pp. 2-3.

²⁵ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 74.

sociological point of view, this way of treating children as people, even as more than ordinary human beings, is significant in an age of rampant child abuse.

It is also believed in the BCS that during a feast, angels and beings from the spirit world are present to take part in it. We are told, for instance, that

during the feast in Brotherhood; angels, elementals, and other beings participate in addition to man. In every feast, all the participants we see are not human beings. Some people taking part are from the abyss, Atlantis and other planes of consciousness. They have to borrow human bodies in order to identify themselves²⁶ with man with whom they have to associate.

In fact, it is believed that the primary motive behind the institution of the feast in the BCS is to solicit the help of these spiritual beings whenever one has a problem that needs urgent solution. In other words, the feast is basically a thanksoffering to the spirit beings, whose presence is both visible (as represented by the children present) and invisible, in anticipation of the solution or help sought from them. That is to say, the feast is a means of making the spiritual beings to work for the one who has prepared it. When the help sought has been received, another feast is usually recommended, as a way of saying "thank you" to the spirits for a job well done, for as Obu says, "when God does something for you and you show a thankful heart, He will

²⁶Orok, p. 52; cf. Obu, The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, pp. 151-52.

continue to do more and more for you.'²⁷ Elsewhere he instructs his followers as follows: 'Celebrate full feasts and fruit feasts often. They work wonders. Do not wait for visioners to ask you to prepare them. . . . Angels are many and they must feed in order to work.'²⁸ We should note here that the purposes of Brotherhood feast are, in fact, not at all different from those of offerings and sacrifices in African traditional religions.²⁹

Obu himself explains further the covenantal significance and symbolism of the feast in the following way:

Do you understand that the feast that we take is an oath that we take? There is no oath as powerful as the feast we take. Once you partake of the feast and think evil of a Brotherhood, you put yourself in fervent prayers. For you to put your hand in a plate, take out feast and eat with your brethren then after this, you think evil of any of your brethren, means incurring suffering upon yourself. . . . When once you eat together with a person, you must make sure that you do no harm to that person with whom you eat. To do so with your brethren you have caused havoc and perform(ed) wicked acts with them.³⁰

This explanation depicts graphically, as we noted above, the philosophy underlying oath taking and covenantal sharing of meal or drink in African religious practices. However, members of the BCS may object to the analogy drawn here between their feast and the covenantal meal or

²⁷ Gospels for Destined 144, 000 Virgins, p. 37.

²⁸ SCC Minutes, August 29, 1981, pp. 8-9.

²⁹ See Francis A. Arinze, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1970) and J. Omosade Awolalu, Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites (London: Longman, 1979).

³⁰ Father's Prediction for 1981, pp. 22-23.

drink in African indigenous religions. They may say, for instance, that such an analogy is but the figment of this author's imagination; for they prefer to see their beliefs and practices as originating directly from God himself and as having no parallel or resemblance whatever in another religious tradition, especially a non-Christian tradition. Indeed, even when what they believe and practise is clearly present in the Christian tradition, for instance, they still claim that they have received it new directly from above. Be that as it may, we all know that there is often the difference between the actors' interpretation of the sources and meanings of their actions and the researcher's interpretation of the same. In other words, actors' explanation of the avowed meanings of their actions and the researcher's interpretation of the latent meanings of those same actions often do not consort.

The theological or ritual content of Brotherhood feast aside, however, what is of interest to the sociologist of religion is, of course, the potential capacity of the rite to promote among members of the movement solidarity, trust, and good will. That is to say, it is the rite's capacity to keep the movement's members together as a social group in an ever-strengthening bond of love and brotherhood that is of sociological interest here.

(c) The Pluriformity of Spiritual Beings: Among Brotherhood beliefs that clearly reflect aspects of African traditional religious beliefs, one might mention the belief in the pluriformity of spiritual beings. Obu teaches, as it is also believed in native African religions, that God can appear to people in a variety of forms, such as in the form of a rat, a cat, a dog, a bird, a sick man or woman, in the form of an old

man or old woman, in the form of a young man or woman.³¹ This belief, it seems to this author, is but a carry-over from African traditional belief in the ability of such "spiritual" beings as witches and sorcerers to take the forms of different creatures of their choosing whenever they are about to undertake a mysterious, usually pernicious mission in the spirit world. That Obu is not unfamiliar with such a belief in the native religious thought is evident in his abundant references and allusions in his sermons and bible classes to such elements in traditional religions as magic, witches, wizards, witchcraft, sorcerers, mermaids, juju shrines, charms, "concoction," talismans, oracles, and the like. There is hardly a sermon or bible class of his in which all or some of these phenomena are not mentioned and condemned or sometimes denied existence.

In fact, Obu seems to be so conversant with the methods and workings of certain aspects of witchcraft that one cannot help wondering how he knows about these things. For example, he seems to be well acquainted with the techniques of bewitching a person and making him or her to become insane. He describes the procedure rather vividly as follows:

. . . when a fellow wants to charm another fellow to become mad, he always looks for the hair, nails, clothes of a mad fellow to use in preparing the concoction. When the charm and the incantation is (sic) done, the person to be charmed is always hunted by the spirit of these mad fellows. The spirits of mad fellows will overwhelm him. The same thing happens if you want to charm somebody to become a rogue or

³¹See Father's Prediction for 1981, pp. 55-57; cf. The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, pp. 34-35, 41, 98.

commit any kind of sin. Such a person is
hunted by the spirit of such fellow.³²

If anyone should wonder how Obu knows all this, that person should remember where he (Obu) was born and brought up--the northern part of the Cross River State of Nigeria, which is notorious for the twin science of witchcraft and sorcery. Perhaps Obu heard stories about the techniques of the science from the environment in which he grew up. Moreover, because of the frequency with which he alludes condemningly to witchcraft and its cognates, one cannot help wondering whether some of his followers might indeed be engaged in such practices or at least in using the services of those professionally engaged in them. In other words, one cannot help wondering whether the practice or use of witchcraft might in fact constitute a social and religious problem in the movement. Could those aspects of the movement's practices which members are forbidden to reveal to non-members have anything to do with witchcraft?³³ Indeed, one's wonderment about this matter is even accentuated when one reads a statement by Obu himself such as: "Most of the members of Brotherhood of the Cross and Star believe in juju, charms, and all sorts of fetishes."³⁴ One wonders as to the extent of such a belief among the membership of the movement. Does this belief

³² The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 69; cf. Anefiok E. Bassey's testimony as recorded in Biakpan: Paradise Regained (n.d.), pp. 13-14.

³³ Kenneth Enang reports that "a member of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star at Obio Akpa . . . confessed at an interview that he took an oath not to reveal what he saw in the church to non-members." See Enang, Salvation in a Nigerian Background, p. 338.

³⁴ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, Book 1, Nos. 1 & 2 (1981), p. 16.

lead most members of the movement to actually get involved in the use of charms and juju, or is it merely mental assent to the reality of these elements of African traditional religions that Obu is talking about here? In fact, Obu's frequent references to the phenomenon of witchcraft and his apparent awareness of its techniques have led his antagonists to "attribute the powers of Brotherhood leaders"³⁵ and the successful expansion of the church to the practice of witchcraft."³⁶ We have no empirical evidence, however, for such allegations against the BCS.

Nonetheless, underlying Obu's obsession with sorcery, witchcraft, "concoction," magic, charm, mermaids, wizards, etc., are certain basic assumptions in traditional African belief systems. First of all, there is the assumption that a person's death or misfortune demands specific explanation. Second is the assumption that human beings can injure or harm (charm) each other without any physical act. Thirdly, it is also assumed that it is possible for someone, a human witch, to be responsible for the death or suffering of another human being. Finally, there is the belief that oracles or divination can reveal truth when other means fail. That Obu himself is aware of these assumptions seems clear enough from his obvious conversance with the methods of bewitchment as pointed out above.

³⁵ On this word "leader" as used here, see footnote 10 of chapter four.

³⁶ Bourdillon, "Pluralism and the Problem of Belief," p. 27.

(d) The "Living-dead": One of the cardinal beliefs in African traditional religions which has reincarnated in Brotherhoodism is the belief that the dead are still alive among the living. Obu teaches that the "living-dead" are very much members of Brotherhood congregations and participate actively in their worship services. He is unequivocal about this when he says:

Do you know that all those people whom you declare dead long time ago are still here? They go to morning and evening prayers and are washing (sic) and doing every bit of thing. During Pentecostal Assembly all of³⁷ them attend. They take part in all activities.

Elsewhere he maintains this belief as follows:

When you call upon your transferred (dead) father from the hades to save you, he is not in the hades. He is here. . . . When you claim you see your (dead) brother in the dream, it is not in dream but in this physical world. . . . Believe also that all the Prophets of God, the high priests, and his apostles are here on earth. Believe also that Adam, Abraham, Melchizedec, Noah, Elijah). . .³⁸ Moses and the rest of them are here on earth.

(e) Going Barefoot: The practice of going barefoot to places of worship or to sacred places or towards sacred objects is common among many religious traditions of the world, including, of course, African traditional religions. In the BCS, however, this practice seems to have originated not ab extra from Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam, for

³⁷ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 151; see also The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 74. Cf. Obu, Our Lord Jesus Christ the Mouthpiece of God, p. 141.

³⁸ Our Lord Jesus Christ the Alpha et Omega, pp. 46, 51-52.

example, but ab intra from African traditional religions, despite Obu's claim that the practice "is not the teaching of the world but the directive of the Spirit : . . .³⁹ and that

all the performances here in the fold of Brotherhood of the Cross and Star compare with those in Heaven. The angels in heaven do not wear shoes and here we do not wear shoes, we wear what⁴⁰ they wear and worship the way they worship.

In another place, Obu contends that

Some people say that they would have remained in Brotherhood but for the fact that we remove our shoes before entering the bethel. If this is so, what about when you go to native doctors, mourning houses and when you play your cultural dances, do you not remove your shoes?⁴¹

The rhetorical question in this latter statement would seem to indicate more convincingly than the former remarks the source of Brotherhood practice of going about barefoot, because what Obu describes in the latter statement is closer to his and his followers' socio-cultural context, than does his reference to what angels do in heaven. In physical terms, neither he nor his followers have been to heaven to see what angels do or do not do.

Moreover, Brotherhoods believe that in going about barefoot they are in direct contact with nature and with the spirits of the earth who may communicate directly with them, which communication would otherwise

³⁹ From Cross to Star: The Glorification of the Holy Spirit, p. 78.

⁴⁰ Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 91.

⁴¹ August Pentecostal Assembly-Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Spirit of God, p. 66; the same statement is reproduced in The Truth about the Christ's Servants, p. 65.

be interrupted or prevented if shoes or any type of footwear were worn. They believe, too, that not only their bethels are holy but that every inch of the earth is, on account of the overarching omnipresence of God on earth in the person of Olumba Olumba Obu. We note here a stronger practical accent on the belief of God's omnipresence than one usually finds in most world religions which discourage their devotees from wearing shoes or sandals around places of worship or designated sacred grounds or objects only, whereas here in the BCS everywhere on earth is sacred.

This belief in the sacredness of terrestrial space is, in fact, consonant with a similar belief in African traditional religions that any spot on earth may become a place of worship and "can offer man, in a more or less durable fashion, a material base for his religious conceptualizations."⁴² Furthermore, the belief that humans can listen to messages from the earth is borne out in some of the African myths of creation. For instance, some of the Ibos of Eastern Nigeria believe that after the Supreme Being, Chineke (God the Creator), had created the world and the first couple in it, he one day gave them instructions on how to live happily in that edenic environment. Among other things, the myth says, Chineke spoke this proverb to them: "I ge Ndi Ali Ganu Ikiti Okpa Nanda." ("If you listen very carefully to the ground, you will hear the footsteps of ants--that is, if you listen inwardly to yourself,

⁴²Zahan, p. 31.

you will hear my faint voice within you telling you what to do on your hour of need and telling you what is right or wrong.'')⁴³

(f) The Holy Oil and the Holy Water: One final religious practice in the BCS that reminds one of a similar practice in African native religions, is the use of the so-called 'holy' oil and 'holy' water for purposes of healing, warding off evil forces, or for allegedly obtaining good fortune in one's daily undertakings. Spiritually, the holy oil is also believed to have purifying or cleansing potencies; hence Obu says of it: 'The holy oil is good, is saving because once you commit sins, the holy oil cleanses your sins and the Spirit comes back to you.'⁴⁴ Apparently, members of the BCS put so much of their faith in the efficacy of these two items to the exclusion of private prayers and fasting that Obu sometimes regrets having introduced these elements into his cultus. He hopes, however, that some day his followers will be so spiritually mature and enlightened that the use of these things will no longer be necessary. It is probably that time that he has in mind when he declares: 'Time is coming when I will no longer give you this oil.'⁴⁵ We are told, in fact, that at the present time the use of these two objects is mainly 'for 'younglings' who are not yet strong in faith.'⁴⁶

⁴³K.O.K. Onyiah, 'The Metaphysical Background to Traditional Healing in Nigeria,' The Conch, VIII, Nos. 1 & 2 (1976), p. 204.

⁴⁴SCC Minutes, April 25, 1976, p. 11.

⁴⁵SCC Minutes, April 28, 1979, p. 23; cf. The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 84.

⁴⁶Eyo, The Truth Has Come, p. 32.

The preparation of Brotherhood holy oil and holy water is said to be the exclusive responsibility of Obu. It is believed that no other person in the movement has the kind of spiritual powers that, when infused into the water and oil, would make them as powerful and effective. Obu himself says, however, that "God is the maker of the holy oil,"⁴⁷ and that in consequence members should worship the Creator of the oil and not the created. Obu also says the holy oil should not be toyed with or handled lightly, because it is "the blood of Christ."⁴⁸

Members of the movement demonstrate daily their strong faith in the efficacy of the holy oil and holy water when they queue up at the movement's headquarters, large containers in hand, to receive their share of the holy stuff. Members even come all the way from other countries to receive them. The official hours for distributing these two items are between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. daily, except Thursday (the day for their day-long "dry fasting") and Sunday (their official day of general worship). But because the queue of seekers is usually frustratingly and discouragingly long, some go there as early as 4 a.m. in order to take their position close to the front of the queue.

One should add, however, that the use of the holy oil and holy water is not peculiar to the BCS. The same practice may be observed in

⁴⁷ Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 26.

⁴⁸ SCC Minutes, April 28, 1979, p. 23; see also SCC Minutes, April 25, 1976, pp. 11-12; The Prophets' Handbook, p. 7, and The Supernatural Teacher, Book 1, p. 15.

many other Nigerian new religious movements,⁴⁹ and its origin may even be traced to non-African religious traditions, including some versions of Christianity. But, as in the case of the practice of going barefoot, we prefer to trace Brotherhood use of these items to the same practice in African traditional religions, because these religions are closer to the religio-cultural background of members of the BCS who see these things as objects of protection in much the same way that the practitioners of African indigenous religions and other religious traditions regard such objects as talismans, amulets, rings, etc.

Having thus far discussed some of the practices in the BCS that either have their origin in African primal religions or at least resemble similar practices in these religions, we now turn to a discussion of those practices in the native African religio-cultural background which Obu condemns and rejects.

2. OBU EATING AWAY HIS CULTURAL CAKE

(a) Denying the Existence and Powers of the Spirits: In spite of the clear evidence we have so far presented to the effect that Obu is very much aware of the reality of witchcraft even in contemporary Africa, he quite often turns around to deny the existence of this phenomenon. He would declare, for instance: "I have said before and now repeat that there are no ghosts, witches, wizards and the like; they do not

⁴⁹ See Enang, Salvation in a Nigerian Background, pp. 264-68.

exist."⁵⁰ Or, he would sometimes aver: "If any person tells you that elementary spirits exist, that person is a liar."⁵¹ this in contradiction of Ephesians 6:12 which specifically calls Christians' attention to the reality of such spirits. In the same source where Obu makes the latter declaration, he also says: "There is no juju; there is no mermaid; there is no witchcraft, except that all these phantoms are produced by our disobedience."⁵² He continues to contend elsewhere that "... there are no concoctions, witchcraft and the like."⁵³ Then, in the true spirit of a faith healer, he admonishes his followers as follows: "Whenever you are encountered with (sic) care and trouble, seek our Lord Jesus Christ, and discard the invitation of the native doctor, the fetish and juju priests because they are devoid of salvation and power."⁵⁴ Having said that, he concludes that "When people consult oracles and indulge themselves in the preparation of charms, concoction and talisman, the Spirit of God cannot be found there."⁵⁵

These denials of the existence and reality of the agents of the spirit world are no doubt an indication of Obu's inability to rid

⁵⁰ SCC Minutes, March 22, 1975, p. 20.

⁵¹ Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 101. As usual, Obu contradicts himself elsewhere, declaring: "The world is full of elementary spirits. Test the spirits and make sure they come from God." SCC Minutes, December 29, 1979, p. 25.

⁵² Ibid.; cf. Obu, From Cross to Star: The Glorification of the Holy Spirit, p. 22; Father's Prediction for 1981, p. 35.

⁵³ SCC Minutes, April 28, 1979, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 104.

⁵⁵ From Cross to Star: The Glorification of the Holy Spirit, p. 73.

himself completely of the vestiges of missionary Christianity which also denied in Africa the existence and reality of these powers. But such denials seem hardly convincing to even modern Africans to whom the world of the spirits and ancestors still proves to be a real living world, and with which many of them have much contact. Further, Obu's denials of the reality of these powers is a departure from the stance of most African new religious movements or "spiritual churches" which not only "accept the existence of such powers and even attribute most of the failures in life to the activities of such powers . . . (but also) claim and advertise as being able to help their members to overcome such powers."⁵⁶ But Obu's denials of the existence of such a world are also very confusing in view of his further claim that "if you come across a witch, wizard, evil spirit and such-like things, know that they are messengers of God."⁵⁷

However, one can only see in such denials Obu's deliberate attempt to discourage his followers from being enticed and tempted to look in the direction of witchcraft for help. Indeed, in such denials, he might be saying to them that he himself has something better and more powerful to offer--a more effective way of dealing with the supernatural. In other words, in denying the existence of witchcraft and all that goes with it, he is really claiming to have access to higher spiritual powers

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Amoah, "Culture and Religious Pluralism and Dialogue in Africa: The Ghana Situation," paper presented at a conference on Religious Pluralism and Dialogue in Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, September 5-8, 1985, p. 5; cf. p. 7.

⁵⁷ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, vol. 1, Nos. 1 & 2 (1981), p. 78.

which enable him to achieve more quickly and more effectively what witches and priests of African traditional religions endeavour to achieve through the invocation of lesser spiritual forces or beings. Another way of putting this is that in denying the existence of these "constants" of African indigenous religions, Obu is attempting to take the soul out of these religions and thus to call his followers' attention away from the traditional religious practices, to his own spiritual powers. Like a good salesman or politician, he puts down the powers or effectiveness of his opponents in order to promote his own.

In fact, it would seem that the greatest threat to the existence of the BCS comes not so much from other Christian churches in Nigeria but from Nigerian traditional religions which still hold out apparently irresistible attraction and fascination to many professed Nigerian Christians. In other words, the gods and the ancestors are still very much alive and well in the religious consciousness of Nigerian (African) Christians. In this connection, Gerhardus Oosthuizen, whose remark is still true even today, was not exaggerating when he said more than two decades ago: "If an African is converted to Christianity and comes into the Christian fold, he has two religions."⁵⁸ If one substitutes Islam for Christianity and Islamic or Muslim for Christian in this remark, it will still be quite true in the African context. In a similar vein, Lamin Sanneh has observed more recently that

... in spite of the public appeal of the new factors clamouring for allegiance, African religions have continued to fill a fail-safe

⁵⁸ Oosthuizen, "The Church among African Forces," p. 163.

role when the other options had been tried, and had failed to cope with personal problems.⁵⁹

Many honest African Christians would say ditto to these observations. A similar observation was made several years ago of Yoruba Christians and Muslims in West Nigeria, whom J.D.Y. Peel noted to be "'pluralists, going to church or mosque and also, when they wanted, to a babalawo.'" ⁶⁰ Peel then went on to comment as follows on this pluralistic behaviour of the Yoruba:

This is reasonable behaviour, for they want clear and well-defined this-worldly goals, and they pursue whatever means they have any reason to suppose effective; the sources of spiritual power are manifold and none need be rejected.⁶¹

Having said that, Peel went on to suggest that the propelling force behind this pluralistic search for effective spiritual power was always "'practical efficacy," not "logical coherence." ⁶²

⁵⁹ Lamin Sanneh, West African Christianity: The Religious Impact (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1983), p. xvi; see also E. Geoffrey Parrinder, "'Traditional Religions and Modern Culture (Africa)," in Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, vol. 1: The Impact of Modern Culture on Traditional Religions (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), pp. 105-106; 110; cf. E. Geoffrey Parrinder, African Traditional Religion (1954; rpt., Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), pp. 142-43.

⁶⁰ J.D.Y. Peel, "'Syncretism and Religious Change,'" Comparative Studies in Society and History, X, No. 2 (1968), p. 129; babalawo is a Yoruba word for the traditional religious specialist or medicine man or woman. Cf. J.K. Parratt and A.R.I. Doi, "'Some Further Aspects of Yoruba Syncretism,'" Practical Anthropology, 16, No. 6 (1969), 252-56.

⁶¹ Peel, "'Syncretism and Religious Change,'" p. 129.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 129-30.

(b) Condemnation of Cultural Fraternities and Societies: Obu demands that before one is accepted into full membership of his movement, one should renounce one's membership in or association with traditional religio-cultural societies, such as Obon, Ekong, Ekpo, Ekpe, Ogboni, etc.⁶³ He still makes such demands even today when the State and Federal governments of Nigeria and, indeed, many Nigerian Christians see and encourage participation in these societies as essential for the promotion and revival of their cultural heritage--a time when even some Nigerian Christian theologians, in fact, "have come to emphasize the goodness of indigenous culture and its compatibility with Christianity."⁶⁴ Obu simply does not agree with such Christians. Rather, those elements of African traditional culture which are not consonant with his religious perception he condemns in the sharpest of terms and summarily dismisses as "demonism",⁶⁵ or "the yoke that weighed down your fathers."⁶⁶

Obu regrets, as a matter of fact, that even his educated countrymen and women still participate in traditional cultural practices. He expresses this regret as follows:

It is pitiable today in the world to see people who have spent years overseas studying either as doctors, lawyers, or qualify as priests, bishops, but returned to revive what they call

⁶³ See, for instance, August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, Book 1, Nos. 1 & 2 (1981), pp. 37, 52.

⁶⁴ Joseph Kenny, "Religious Movements in Nigeria, Divisive or Cohesive: Some Interpretative Models," Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies, XVI, No. 2 (1984), p. 126.

⁶⁵ Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 33.

⁶⁶ Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 23.

traditional culture. They share in offering libations, and in fetish activities. Such persons are really out against God's divine law. Such persons have forsaken God and God has deserted them completely.⁶⁷

Having said that, he proceeds to condemn the action of some of his followers who apparently still avail themselves of the services of the traditional religious specialists, and to pass judgment on those Christian churches that, in his opinion, still patronize traditional culture in some form or another. Here is what he says on the matter:

When you go to the soothsayers, sorcerers, black magic priests, what do you see? It is these tongue-tight idols. You are asked to bow to them and tell them your request. In this way you dishonour yourself and stray into a wrong path. This is the cause of all your troubles and woes. The worldly people call this act of idolatry culture and call true worship as revealed by God . . . imported worship. All the churches of Christendom are idolatrous, since they promote and support culture. . . . What a shame to see a preacher, a bishop, a priest, or minister of religion preaching idolatry and encouraging it from the pulpit, and calling it 'traditional culture.' How can they escape God's punishment!⁶⁸

The obvious implication of the last three sentences in this passage is that since it does not support culture--wholly, one must add--the BCS is not "idolatrous" and is therefore more Christian than other Christian bodies.

But for a people so accustomed to consulting the traditional diviners of the Nigerian society, in spite of their public confession of the Christian faith, Obu's demand that they desist completely from

⁶⁷ Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins, p. 26.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

consulting these traditional religious specialists is quite radical. Nigerians, as we have said, are used to the habit of going to these religious specialists in order to "see" what or who has caused a certain misfortune to come their way. Expecting them suddenly to stop this way of life is probably expecting a little too much. To what extent Obu has in fact succeeded in dissuading his members from availing themselves of the services of these traditional religious specialists is at the present time still a large question which needs closer study.

Obu's condemnation of the practice of consulting traditional diviners has caused these diviners to respond negatively to his movement. The economic reasons for such a negative response are quite obvious, of course. For if Obu should succeed in turning most of his members from patronizing the diviners, then he would be doing some serious damage to their (diviners') source of income. Perhaps for the same economic reasons, Obu feels that on his part, he has to discourage his followers and even non-followers from seeking help from the traditional religious specialists, in order that he might retain his clientele who will always "thank the Lord" with substantial monetary offerings for what he has done for them.

But dissuading his members from patronizing the traditional religious specialists does not mean that Obu does not show respect and sympathy toward those specialists. As far as he is concerned, even "native doctors" are still the children of God and members of the universal Brotherhood. Indeed, as he sees it, these traditional religious specialists and native doctors are only acting in accordance with the amount of light they possess now, with the possibility of better action and behaviour on their part when more light becomes

available to them. That this is Obu's attitude towards the traditional religious specialists is clear when he admonishes his followers thus: "Do not abuse a native doctor. Before electricity was brought to your house, you were using lanterns. You do not have to throw away the lamps now. Keep them to be used whenever the electricity is taken away."⁶⁹

This admonition may be interpreted to mean that Obu does not really want his followers altogether to do away with all elements of African traditional religious practices ('the lantern' or little light), but to retain some of the elements for invocation and appropriation on those occasions when Christianity ('electricity' or the greater light) fails to provide immediate answers to their existential problems. As we have pointed out above, this seems to be exactly the way many Nigerian Christians, without any compunction or personal conflict, have in fact used both religious traditions.⁷⁰

(c) Polygyny: Yet another traditional African social and cultural practice which Obu condemns in no uncertain terms is polygyny.⁷¹ Unlike some other African new religious movements which encourage this practice,⁷² Obu teaches, as we have pointed out, that marriage is a

⁶⁹ SCC Minutes, September 2, 1983, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Cf. Friday M. Mbon, "Response to Christianity in Pre-colonial and Colonial Africa: Some Ulterior Motives," (forthcoming in Zeitschrift fur Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft).

⁷¹ On this cultural practice among the ethnic groups of Nigeria's Cross River State, see Enang, Salvation in a Nigerian Background, pp. 14-20.

⁷² For example, the Aladura group of churches, the Celestial Church
 (Footnote Continued)

great impediment to spirituality--a great evil lesser only than unwed sexual promiscuity. For him, even monogyny is bad enough. Infinitely worse, according to him, is polygyny which he definitely reckons as one of the seven deadly sins to be shunned like leprosy.

With that negative attitude towards marriage, Obu lambasts the African traditional socio-cultural practice of giving and receiving bride-wealth during traditional marriage transactions, dismissing the practice as one of those which he classifies as "the work of darkness" which, he vows, he is bent on destroying.⁷³ His vow and commitment to play the role of the great cultural iconoclast run as follows:

My first assignment on the earth plane is to uproot all those things that were not planted by God. . . . Whoever receives a bride-price carries a burden on his or her head. . . . The yoke and burden that your fathers could not carry, our Lord Jesus Christ came and removed them. These are the very burdens and yokes that you are now carrying. . . . Do you believe that you are still a child of the soil? All the things God knows are bad for His children are what He has come to destroy. . . . You will all see what I will bring about at the close of the age. You will never pay any bride-price before a woman is given in marriage because love is the bride-price. . . . Brotherhood of the Cross and Star has come to remove that heavy burden that your grandfathers could not carry which you are struggling to bear.⁷⁴

As we pointed out in our discussion of Obu's teaching on marriage (see chapter four, section 12), his attack on polygyny and bride-wealth is

(Footnote Continued)

of Christ, God's Kingdom Society (all in Nigeria), and Elijah Masinde's Dini ya Msambwa (Kenya), to name but a few.

⁷³ Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 17.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 17, 18-19, 21.

quite revolutionary in the context of African traditional culture where these practices are seen as essential threads in the fabrics of the society.

In the light of our discussion thus far, it is quite clear that many of Obu's teachings are definitely anti-cultural or, one might say, culturally iconoclastic. To the extent that that is so, especially at a time when contemporary Nigeria is advocating cultural revival as a significant factor for national self-identity and development, one may aptly describe Obu as being revolutionary. This point is worth bearing in mind especially when one comes across writers on African new religious movements who tend to give the mistaken and misleading impression that all of these movements are pure and simple "revivalistic" or "nativistic" in the sense of consciously attempting to revive or revitalize every element of native African cultures, or that these new religions represent "residual paganism" or are no more than the old⁷⁵ traditional religions in new bottles or perhaps simply new religions in old bottles;⁷⁶ or, as one writer recently put it, that the new religions are pure and simple "genuine

⁷⁵ The word "old" as used here is of course not meant to imply that African traditional religions are now non-extant. Far from it. Rather, the word is used here to indicate the fact that in Africa these religions are older than both Islam and Christianity.

⁷⁶ See, for instance, Leith Mullings, "Religious Change and Social Stratification in Labadi, Ghana: The Church of the Messiah," in George Bond, Walton Johnson and Sheila S. Walker, eds., African Christianity: Patterns of Religious Continuity (New York: Academic Press, 1979), pp. 86-87; cf. John C. Messenger, Jr., "Reinterpretations of Christian and Indigenous Belief in a Nigeria Nativist Church," American Anthropologist, 62 (1960), 268-78.

religious and cultural revival movements in modern Africa."⁷⁷ The point is also worth remembering specifically in reference to the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star which a Canadian Presbyterian clergyman, DeCourcy H. Rayner, basing his judgment on some hearsay, incautiously described as being solely "a weird combination of Christian faith and African religious rites."⁷⁸ Such a catch-all characterization of the movement is not only unfair and inaccurate, but also, to those not acquainted with its teachings, absolutely misleading. To those who know the movement, such a generalization about it, as we have shown, is certainly less than half the truth.

What has evolved from this chapter, as indeed from the last two, is that Obu's teachings no doubt involve the processes of selection, adaptation, and synthesis (accommodation). In all three chapters, we find that he has successfully functionally selected, adapted and synthesized in his teachings and philosophy elements from other religious traditions, though he does not admit this. Thus, we see in this chapter that he has selected and adapted elements from the African indigenous religio-cultural and ideological substratum, while rejecting, through the same process of selection and adaptation, others which he views as being irrelevant to his attempts to grapple with the meaning of

⁷⁷ Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere, Prophecy and Revolution: The Role of Prophets in the Independent African Churches and in Biblical Tradition (London: SPCK, 1981), p. 256.

⁷⁸ Christianity Today, November 9, 1973, p. 60. The word "weird," which I emphasize here, is quite instructive in this context, as it indicates the kind of unguarded, hasty judgment that some "orthodox" Christians can condescend to make against the BCS, even outside Nigeria (!) where the movement is regarded as a sort of bête noire.

human existence and order. Because his beliefs and teachings are coloured predominantly by Christian worldviews which historically have mostly remained antithetical to African traditional worldviews (although, as we have shown, he also rejects much of the Christian worldviews), Obu has rejected much that is pivotal, indeed indispensable, to the existence, health and longevity of traditional African cultures and religions--much without which these cultures and religions would become empty shells unfit even for the museum. The consequence of this position is that he obviously leans more heavily on the side of Christianity, thus encouraging it, as it were, to continue its war against the vestiges of African native cultures.

By standing à cheval on both African indigenous and Christian traditions--consciously or unconsciously--Obu faces an unavoidable dilemma: he cannot Africanize or indigenize Christianity completely; neither can he baptize or christianize African indigenous religions completely. As a way out of this dilemma, he adopts the sometimes wise approach of not throwing out the baby (in this context both Christian and African indigenous ways) with the bath water. Rather, through the processes of eclectic selection, reinterpretation, and synthesis, he keeps what, for him, is worth keeping of both traditions and throws the rest away. In doing this, Obu demonstrates that he is in many ways a true syncretist, defined by Peel as 'a man (sic) who sees some good... in his traditional religious practices and beliefs, identified as such, and attempts to synthesize them with new beliefs in a harmonious

religious system,"⁷⁹ (We shall return to this matter of syncretism in chapter eight where we deal with, among other things, the question of typology.)

Ultimately, Obu's simultaneous adoption (adaptation) and rejection of African traditional cultural elements in his teachings illustrates rather trenchantly both the pre-secular situation in which religion and culture were not separated one from the other, and the perennial controversy, in the post-secular situation, between religions and cultures or, more specifically, between Christ and culture. In the latter situation, there are those who argue, on the one hand, that religion (or Christ, in the context of Christianity) transcends culture, and those who argue, on the other hand, that religion is part of and stands within culture, and that "unless religion learns to come to terms with the cultural factor, it will never understand itself, and will have no hope of making any impression on any human community."⁸⁰ However, that one can still see elements of African traditional cultures in Obu's teachings, in spite of his public denials and condemnation of the totality of these cultures, is an illustration of the fact that culture-free religion is, in the final analysis, perhaps an illusion. Indeed, it may be said that the presence of these elements of African traditional cultures in the BCS could be seen to be an attraction to not a few Nigerians who, as we have said, cannot altogether relinquish

⁷⁹ Peel, "Syncretism and Religious Change," p. 129.

⁸⁰ Sharpe, Understanding Religion, p. 126. See the entire chapter nine of this book on the whole controversy of the relationship between religion and culture.

African traditional cultures from their religiosity. Conversely, it could also be argued that perhaps many more Nigerians who might have become members of the movement stay away from it, because Obu has kicked against so many of the crucial elements that give vitality to African traditional cultural life and personality. This, we will recall from the history of Christian missions in Africa, was the very reason why a great many Africans bluntly refused (and still refuse) to convert to Western cultural Christianity which even today still demands that they part completely with their own cultural heritage and identity.

As for the question as to whether Obu can at once eat his native religio-cultural cake and have it, we conclude as follows: Because he has rejected so much of the essential, indispensable features of African traditional religions and cultures, not very much of that cake is left now. Perhaps he may in time eat all away the tiny bit that is left. On the other hand, he may decide to save this little bit for posterity. But as Edmund Burke is reported to have said in quite a different context, "People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors"! Only time will tell what Obu does with the bit that is left of African traditional religio-cultural elements that still cry out for recognition, albeit faintly, in his teachings and practices.

Obu's teachings related to African traditional culture are bound to have some degree of lasting impact on Nigerian cultural modus operandi, at least among thousands of his followers. Such impact may in some ways reflect on the political, economic and social life of the people. But it is too early to determine now the extent of that reflection. Meanwhile, let us pass on to the next chapter where we examine the

impact (if any) which the BCS is already having on Nigeria's politics, economy, and social life.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE CROSS AND STAR

In the study of religion one's concern is not primarily the doctrines and scriptures and prayers and rites and institutions; but rather, what these do to man.

--Wilfred Cantwell Smith¹

As students of sociology our main concern with religion . . . is with its function in human society. The term function . . . refers to the contribution of religion, or of any other social institution, to the maintenance of human societies as going concerns. Our interest, then, is in the part that religion has played and still plays in furthering their survival.

--Elizabeth Nottingham²

This chapter deals mainly with what Harold Turner refers to as the "secular effects of Africa's new religious movements."³ It deals

¹Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Traditional Religions and Modern Culture," in The Impact of Modern Culture on Traditional Religions: Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), p. 68.

²Elizabeth K. Nottingham, Religion and Society (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 12.

³Harold W. Turner, Religious Innovation in Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements (Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall, 1979), p. 113.

with a particular movement's impact on the political, economic and social life of contemporary Nigeria. Our aim here is primarily to show in what ways (if any) the BCS has influenced the political, economic and social life of Nigerians. Although this work is on the BCS, we shall in the present chapter refer also to what other Nigerian new religious movements are doing in these areas of the country's social life. The purpose for doing this is to compare the social activities of some of the new religious movements in the country, in order to appreciate better the social activities of the BCS.

1. Nigeria's New Religious Movements and Nigerian Politics

The basic attitude of Nigeria's new religious movements toward politics is still conditioned, to a greater or lesser extent, by the theological teachings of the older, mission-founded churches. There is still among most of these movements the idea that Christians should steer clear of politics, and that in this respect the things of Caesar and those of Christ must remain in separate camps; or that Athens and Jerusalem must remain separate. As a consequence of this theological position, the new religious movements, like the mission churches, have generally failed to provide leadership facilities to their members in the political affairs of the country. Nor has the general membership of the movements been well informed on how to criticize the government constructively, when necessary.

This does not mean, however, that individual members or small groups within these movements do not participate in partisan politics. For instance, in 1964 John Edokpolor, then an Apostle of the Cherubim

and Seraphim branch of the Aladura movement, contested and won a parliamentary seat in Benin, Bendel State of Nigeria. In 1965, Rev. Akinadewo, also of the Cherubim and Seraphim, contested the regional election in his Ondo Constituency.⁴ Similarly, some key members of the BCS are known to have sought political appointments by contesting elections. In fact, Pastor Asuquo Ekanem of the BCS stood as a candidate in the 1983 Governorship elections in the Cross River State, although he withdrew in the early stages of the race, "for personal reasons." But these individual participations, which do not usually have any observable impact on the general political scene of the country, must not be seen as being necessarily always backed by the religious movements in which the participants are members. In most cases, an individual member's participation in politics is to be seen more as that member's way of expressing his or her political convictions and civic responsibility.

However, the Aladura group of movements, some of which began to emerge in the Western part of the country in the early 1920s, could sometimes be quite vocal in matters of politics.⁵ Although some of

⁴ See J. Akin Omoyajowo, The Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Relation to Church, Society and State: A Jubilee Publication 1925-75 (Ibadan: Claverianum Press, 1975), p. 133.

⁵ In the following discussion of the political involvements of the Aladura group of movements, I am indebted to Omoyajowo for information got from the following works of his: The Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Relation to Church, Society and State; "The Aladura Churches in Nigeria since Independence," in Edward Fashole-Luke et al., eds., Christianity in Independent Africa (London: Rex Collings; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 96-110; Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church (New York: NOK Publishers, 1982). The definitive works, to date, on the Aladura movements, however, are J. D. (Footnote Continued)

these movements are known to have proved to be a-political through most of their career, a majority of them have been quite active in politics. Historically, their founder, J.O. Oshitelu, is reported to have been held as a suspect and interrogated by the colonial administrators as early as 1931; and his very close associate, Joseph Babalola, served six months in prison for the apparent political implications of the Aladura movements.⁶

The Nigerian Independence in 1960 was enthusiastically welcomed by the Aladura movements with thanksgiving services. Furthermore, when the political unrest in the then Western Region catapulted the entire country into a series of crises in the early 1960s, it was the Aladura movements that played the prophetic role in warning the people of Nigeria against the impending social and political catastrophes that would result from the injustices and corruptions that were rampant in the political arena. While the older mission churches maintained their characteristically acquiescent, nonchalant and generally sit-on-the-fence attitude, and exercised the greatest restraint in making statements that had any transparent political implications, the Aladura movements became quite outspoken in condemning those politicians whom they felt to be corrupt, thereby making life difficult for the Nigerian people in general.

(Footnote Continued)

Y. Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba (London: Oxford University, 1968) and Stanley R. Barrett, The Rise and Fall of an African Utopia: A Wealthy Theocracy in Comparative Perspective (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1977).

⁶ See Turner, Religious Innovation in Africa, p. 135.

When on January 15, 1966, the first coup d'état took place in Nigeria, many Aladura prophets claimed that the event had been shown them in vision several weeks before. In fact, one such prophet in Kaduna (Northern Nigeria) actually claimed that he had foreseen the coup the night before, in the form of an open combat between Jesus Christ and the Prophet Muhammad. Jesus, this prophet narrated, was armed with a sword while the Prophet Muhammad fought with a spear. The outcome of the combat, according to this visioner, was victory for Jesus, while the Prophet Muhammad was set ablaze. This Aladura prophet is reported to have burst into tears publicly as he was narrating the vision to his congregation during a service he was conducting. He is reported to have cried out during the occasion: "'Look, the Prophet Muhammad is burning!

...'" Quite naturally, the Aladura movement in the predominantly Muslim Northern Nigeria interpreted this particular vision as portending the victory of the Christian South over the Muslim North. And since Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, then the Premier of the North, was regarded by the Aladura as the symbol of Muslim unity there (Bello had claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad), his death in the coup, which culminated in the thirty-month Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), was seen by the Aladura as the triumph of Christianity--especially the Aladura brand of Christianity--over Islam. Following the civil war, some leaders of the Aladura movement in the North claimed that hundreds of Muslims there had converted to Aladuraism, leading, they further claimed, to the establishment of many branches of the movement in the North.

When the Nigerian civil war broke out, most of the Aladura members pledged their support for national unity and openly condemned the

activities of Odumegwu Ojukwu, the leader of the secession, for whose defeat they just as openly prayed. But they did not stop there. Towards the end of the war, they went on to donate substantially to the Federal government-launched Troops Comfort Funds for the rehabilitation of the war victims. The movement's Women Association, led by "Captain" Christianah Abiodun of the Cherubim and Seraphim group, donated various articles to the residence of the Head of State, then Major-General Yakubu Gowon, at Dodan Barracks. This Association is reported to have been warmly received by General Gowon (himself a Northern Christian) who is said even to have posed with the delegation in a number of photographs.

Even to this day, the Aladura movement is still known to be keenly interested in the social and political problems that face the country. One hears of this concern for the unity, well-being, and political stability of the country on the lips of the praying Aladura all over the country. Occasionally, they even visit some of the leaders of the country to tell them about their visions and to pray for them. Indeed, the Aladura movement, rather than the mission-founded churches, have been known intermittently to ask their members to observe special days of prayer and fasting for the leaders and people of the country. In fact, during the Nigerian civil war, there were several stories in Biafra to the effect that prophecies played a crucial part, especially in the surrender of one Biafran army Division. And one senior officer in the Biafran administration recalls that several prophets constantly

came to instruct him ("by revelation") to take specific courses of action, such as to call a fast, etc.⁷

In the same vein, Gideon Urhobo, the founder and former leader of the God's Kingdom Society, was extremely vocal in political issues, especially during the heydays of Nigeria's nationalism of the colonial era, although his interest in politics could be dated to a much earlier date.⁸ Between 1948-1952 (he died in 1952), he is said to have on several occasions preached publicly against the exploitations and oppression of the colonial masters, even sometimes to the annoyance of conservative Nigerian Christians who felt that his preaching was becoming too political in tone. Indeed, Ilegu has remarked that "one of the reactions to Urhobo's preaching in Lagos was that he had put aside religion and turned a politician."⁹ He, in fact, adds that

Many people could not differentiate between being a politician and merely intervening. Even if they could, Urhobo's involvement was so deep that one might not hesitate to call him a partisan. However, the issues he struggled with were not to be solved from the pulpit. A preacher reaches only his congregation from the pulpit.¹⁰

⁷ See Andrew F. Walls, "Religion and the Press in 'the Enclave' in the Nigerian Civil War," in Fashole-Luke, p. 207.

⁸ The political involvements of Urhobo have been well documented in Ilegu, especially chapter VIII. Mention is also made of the politico-nationalist philosophy of the God's Kingdom Society in James S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 177; *passim*.

⁹ Ilegu, p. 255.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 306, note 90.

Believing and teaching that "self-government for every nation is one of God's purposes of creation,"¹¹ Urhobo initially got actively involved in the "Zikist" nationalist movement (so named after its founder/patron, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, alias "Zik"), although he later turned against Zik and his movement because, he believed, the movement had come to adopt atheistic ideologies in its politics. From that time until his death in 1952, Urhobo became particularly opposed to two problems created by the nationalist movements of those days. The first problem was the violent political revolution against the colonial government that was being planned at that time by some hot-blooded impatient nationalists, including Zik and his disciples. Secondly, he vehemently attacked the atheistic ideologies of what he called "godless nationalism." Ultimately, the influence of his preaching against the atheistic political philosophy of the nationalists and against their planned violent revolution contributed in no small measure to the eventual banning of the Zikist movement by the colonial authorities, and to a non-violent change of power from colonial rule to Nigeria's political independence in 1960.

Although the late founder and leader of the Celestial Church of Christ, Pastor S.B.J. Oschoffa, said officially that he had "no political dealings with anybody," he admitted, however, that he had been sending messages received "in vision" to the government of his country, the Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey), warning that country

¹¹ West African Pilot, February 7, 1949, p. 3.

of "the impending doom of the influx of mercenaries in the country."¹² If that concern with the presence of foreign mercenaries in the Prophet's country was not a political and economic concern, one wonders what else it could be.

Samuel Wobo, the founder and leader of the fast-growing Spiritual Healing Church of the Lord (S.H.C.L.) is reported to have been involved in conducting a series of prayers and fasting the aim of which was the cessation of the Nigerian civil war. "and for Nigeria to recognize Biafra's right to self-determination."¹³ Wobo himself is also said to have frequently given "spiritual advice to each of the two sides in the conflict, at different occasions throughout the war."¹⁴ In December 1959, he is reported to have, in one of his political predictions, openly condemned Chief Obafemi Awolowo, party leader of the defunct Action Group during Nigeria's First Republic, for his extravagance in his electioneering campaign of that year. Part of Wobo's prediction addressed to the Chief ran as follows:

. . . Awolowo in his helicopter shall not achieve any good results. Why lavish this money, and why not give it to the poor, in order to earn eternal life . . . You have obscured My Name, and relied on your own powers. You have disdainfully looked down on

¹²See Nigerian Television Authority, "Meet the Founder of the Celestial Church of Christ," Drum (Lagos), January 1981, p. 6. Although founded in another country, the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) is also very strong in Nigeria where its founder and leader lived until his sudden death on September 10, 1985.

¹³Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 44.

¹⁴Ibid.

My messengers, and therefore there shall be no truth in your saying any more¹⁵

> Wobo is also alleged to have predicted the collapse of the Action Group thus:

To your tents O Westerners (i.e. Western Nigerians) and seek if there will be a devout man, devoted to lead you for awhile. Your much-respected party (the Action Group) shall be rent into two, and few henchmen shall take the reins of affairs, and it shall be short-lived, said the Powerful God of Jacob.¹⁶

Another political prediction of his in 1960, the year of Nigeria's independence, is reported as follows:

Disaster and weeping shall be seen in many homes, because of the arrest of some of the political leaders . . . Many a man shall be confused and suffer ignominiously, and this shall begin in 1963, if hostilities in political activities of Nigerians do not come to a halt. Detention, arrest, threats, intimidation shall plague the officers of our renowned political parties, saith the Lord.¹⁷

These pronouncements have been quoted here merely to show how very involved politically some of the leaders of Nigeria's new religious movements can be, even to the extent of personally attacking individual politicians whose political philosophies and policies they do not like. However, as we shall see below, although Obu is as politically aware as anyone can be, we do not find in his preaching such direct attacks on personalities as we find in the preachings of the Aladura, Urhobo, and

¹⁵ Samuel Wobo, "Catalogue of Prophecies," p. 3; quoted in Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 71.

¹⁶ Wobo, ibid.

¹⁷ Quoted in Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 72.

Wobo. Indeed, it will be quite obvious from our discussion below that Obu is not nearly as vocal in his political pronouncements as the leaders of the other Nigerian new religious movements. The individual members of his movement seem to be more articulate than he on political matters.

The official position of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star in matters of politics is that of non-involvement. In fact, one of the rules of the movement laid down in black and white states unequivocally: "You should not be a politician."¹⁸ Further, in reaction against an alleged political article credited to a member of the movement, the General Secretary of the movement, Pastor Offu Ebongo, said: "Brotherhood of the Cross and Star is not a political organization but exclusively religious, purely devoted to (the) spiritual welfare of the world."¹⁹ Also, Obu himself is quoted as saying: "I do not come for politics, I come for love."²⁰ Elsewhere he says, in regard to why he did not leave the city of Calabar as others were doing during the civil war: "I was not connected with anything because I was not a politician."²¹

But one should not conclude from such statements that Obu himself is uninterested or unaware of what is going on in the country politically; or, as Ayankop mistakenly puts it, that "no political

¹⁸ Prophets' Handbook, p. 3.

¹⁹ The Nigerian Chronicle, May 26, 1981.

²⁰ Kevin, p. 118; cf. SCC Minutes, January 2, 1982, p. 13.

²¹ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 118.

sentiments are expressed in their teachings and practices.'²² On the contrary, Obu can be politically quite insightful, especially where the political structures and policies have or are likely to have unwholesome repercussions on the country's future and economy. For instance, he is often heard to criticize in retrospect those Nigerians who, thinking that Nigeria was not yet ripe for self-government, opposed the nationalist movements which fought for the country's political freedom from her British colonial masters. Even to this day, Obu continues to lambast such disgruntled elements for

still saying that during the rule of the white man things were very good. They say so because that was the era when they were all servants and fed fat from the kitchen of the white man without much labour. Now, they are annoyed because they see the independence of the black man as an incident that robs them of their indolent lives of feeding fat in the white man's ingenuity and industriousity (sic).²³

Obu is, in fact, of the opinion that if it were possible for such disgruntled Nigerians whom he condemns here to turn back the hands of the clock, they 'would have gone to bring back the white man to govern Nigeria.'²⁴ Moreover, he condemns Nigeria's economic over-dependence on the white, satirizing such parasiting as follows:

Just see the so-called Republic which we claim to have attained. The productive resources of the country is still harnessed by the white man, while the black man loiters about the premises of the

²² Ayankop, p. 88.

²³ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 49.

²⁴ Ibid.

white man's companies with long certificates
(looking) for work.²⁵

He then goes on to condemn the white man's greed and unfairness in coming to deprive Nigerians of their "abundant natural resources," leaving only "the crumbs that fall from the table . . . for the blacks."²⁶ Having said that, he makes the following observation about the white man's investments in Nigeria:

If the white man ever invested here, such investment was geared towards his own comfort. . . . What the white man does now is to try as hard as he could to swindle all the money acquired here back to his country. The white man's economic or business association with black countries are fraught with danger because they are never sincere now or ever.²⁷ He does not come to help . . . but to swindle.

Such politico-economic pronouncements from Obu do not show that he is completely insensitive or indifferent to what is happening in the political and economic sectors of his country. Neither do these comments in any way support Amadi who talks about ". . . the complete absence of political or racial overtones . . . in B.C.S. doctrines."²⁸

²⁵ Ibid. Compare Obu's insight in this statement with that of the editor of a Brotherhood journal, who, years after Obu's statement, remarked in an article on the 1983 Federal Government budget as follows: "Most Nigerian industries or trading firms are only subsidiaries of such concerns in the metropolitan (sic) capitalist countries--United States, Britain, France, West Germany and so forth. Others which claim to be Nigerian are either wholly dependent on concerns in these metropolitan (sic) countries or partially so."--See Robert Roberts, "Budget '83: Inflation," InsightOut (December 1982), p. 112.

²⁶ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 49.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 402.

In addition to these obvious politico-economic concerns on the part of Obu, there are also strong individual voices in the movement on political matters, particularly in the Cross River State, the seat of the movement's headquarters. That this is so is no secret even to Obu himself, who once commented as follows on the political inclinations of some of his followers:

During the last General Election in Nigeria (in 1979), some brothers spent a great deal of money for campaigns, for²⁹ bribes, for thugs and what-have-you . . .

In the last civilian rule (the outcome of the general elections referred to here) which ended on December 31, 1983 when the military under Major-General Buhari seized power, many of these voices were pro-NPN (National Party of Nigeria) which was then the ruling Party both in the Cross River State and at the federal level. This fact may explain, at least in part, why there were then so many members of the BCS in the State Governor's office, in the State House of Assembly, and in various government establishments in the Brotherhood-based Cross River State and throughout the federation as a whole.

Indeed, a prominent Apostle of the BCS, V.E. Ekpenyong, once wrote an open letter to the editor of the weekly "The Nigerian People," cautioning him to stop criticizing the incumbent Cross River State Governor of the last civilian regime. In the letter, the Apostle said, among other things: "I am not against brethren playing politics but our politics must be completely free of rancour for so is pleasing to our

²⁹ The Everlasting Gospel: Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World, vol. 1 (August 1980), p. 95.

Father God."³⁰ This letter was apparently occasioned by an earlier newspaper article captioned "'Ethnic Politics of Governor Isong,'" written by the addressee of Apostle Ekpenyong's letter and published in "'The Nigerian People'" of 18th-23rd May, 1981. A section of this article had been specifically addressed to Apostle Ekpenyong as follows: "'Apostle Ekpenyong! can you advise Governor Isong that God hates injustice in any form and manner? If you are a Christian, you must see Governor Isong before his dinner tonight. God sees our hearts and thoughts'" (p. 3).

In another article on the subject of public offices, Apostle Ekpenyong said, inter alia, that Nigerians should thank "'our Father for the humble person He has selected for us as our President'" and that "'we must thank God because the rare idea and decisions do not emanate from President Shagari but from the Father who loves Nigeria more.'"³¹ In an "'End of the Year Message'" to the Nigerian people, Apostle Ekpenyong said also that it was Obu, in his capacity as God on earth, who had made it possible for the previous Nigerian military regime (1967-1979) to hand over power to the last civilian government (1979-1983) without bloodshed.³² Obu himself seems to agree with his

³⁰V.E. Ekpenyong, "An Open Letter to Chief Ernest Etim-Bassey of 'The Nigerian People'--a Call for Peace Between You and the Governor of the Cross River State," unpublished ms. (n.d.), p. 4.

³¹V.E. Ekpenyong, "Public Offices," unpublished ms., dated April 16, 1980, p. 4. Alhaji Shehu Shagari was the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria between 1979 and December 30, 1983 when the Buhari military regime seized power on December 31, 1983.

³²V.E. Ekpenyong, "End of the Year Message: the Dignity of Man," unpublished ms., dated December 8, 1979, p. 2.

Apostle here.³³ Indeed, Apostle Ekpenyong further believes that "Nigeria is the country of God,"³⁴ and that every Head of State of this country is God-appointed and, therefore, should be respected and not criticized.³⁵

Could Apostle Ekpenyong's political utterances be taken as indicating the political position of the BCS as a movement? Perhaps. But in the light of the movement's apparent ambivalent attitude towards politics, one would be wise not to make any categorical statement in answer to such a question. However, when one considers the fact that Apostle Ekpenyong is a top-ranking officer of the movement and no doubt one of the closest associates of Obu whom, in fact, Obu himself could trust well enough to recommend to this writer as an authoritative informant, one cannot, and probably should not, dismiss as insignificant the Apostle's political statements. In fact, one is tempted even more strongly to take seriously these statements when one remembers that it was this particular Apostle whom Obu himself elected to represent him and the movement in 1978 at a meeting of the Nigerian Council of Religious Leaders which was convened "to advise the Civil/Military administration on how to relate political administration to the purposes

³³ See The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 131.

³⁴ V.E. Ekpenyong, "An Open Letter to Nigerian Rulers and Electorates: The Only Key for Success is Love and Forgiveness," unpublished ms., (n.d.), p. 1.

³⁵ V.E. Ekpenyong, "Who Will be the Commissioner?" unpublished ms., dated July 25, 1977, p. 2. On Obu's recommended attitude of honour and respect towards rulers, see, for instance, What Is Brotherhood?, p. 13; cf. Romans chapter 13.

and plan/will of God."³⁶ It is on the movement's records that Apostle Ekpenyong performed this assignment so well that it "was celebrated by the Fellowship at the end of it with a function, a big feast and a thanksgiving service to the Father."³⁷ Further, Apostle Ekpenyong told this writer in an interview that he sent copies of all his writings to Obu himself, and so far we have neither seen nor heard any concrete statement from Obu contradicting the Apostle's political ideas. Some people have wondered whether such silence on Obu's part may not be tantamount to at least calculated sufferance.

The first NPN Governor of the Cross River State, Dr. Clement Isong, was in attendance at the worship service of the BCS on Sunday May 16, 1982, by the invitation of the movement. This invitation was perhaps a return gesture to the the Governor's invitation to the movement to participate in a State-sponsored Christmas Carol Night two and a half years earlier.³⁸ The Governor's acceptance of the invitation may throw some more light on the question as to whether one should take Apostle Ekpenyong's political utterances as indicating the political philosophy of the movement. The Governor was accompanied on this occasion by his family and more than a dozen of his top government officials, including the Secretary to the State Government and some of the State Commissioners. Apostle Ekpenyong was said to be the man who had organized the royal visit.

³⁶ SCC Minutes, December 30, 1978, p. 13.

³⁷ Ibid.; the Fellowship referred to here was the BCS Apostles/Evangelists Fellowship.

³⁸ See SCC Minutes, December 29, 1979, pp. 44-45.

During the church service, many special prayers were said for the Governor and his government. Prayer was also said for the rapid return of economic progress in the State and in the country as a whole. Furthermore, God was asked to bless the Governor and his government, and to give him wisdom and understanding for the great work that He had given him to do in Nigeria. One prayer even assured the Governor that God had already marked him out for eternal life. In his response to all the blessings and good wishes bestowed upon him during the service, Governor Isong expressed his wish to return to worship with the Brotherhood congregation in the very near future. After the Governor and his entourage had left, Obu proudly, and with a sense of accomplishment, declared to his congregation: "Brethren, we have captured the Governor and his government. That means peace has come. Things are going to change in the government from now on." This declaration drew from the congregation shouts of hallelujahs and amens that lasted for some minutes. But that Governor did not win in the State gubernatorial election a year later, for a second term.

We see, then, that, like their Aladura counterparts, members of the BCS do pray for the well-being and success of political leaders, some of whom are known to have paid Nicodemus visits or written to Obu for the purpose of either seeking political power or that there may be peace in the country. For instance, it is on BCS records that one of the Heads of State in Nigeria's First Republic, Major-General Yakubu Gowon, once wrote to Obu in August 1969, during the civil war in that country, "to offer special prayer in order that the war might be brought to an

end.³⁹ The efficacy of the said prayer is believed by Brotherhood members to have brought about the end of the thirty-month war in January 1970. But the BCS not only prays for the well-being of the State government; it also takes an active interest in the activities of the government by sending donations and official delegations to all government functions and ceremonies to which it is invited.

In considering further the involvement or otherwise of members of the BCS in Nigerian politics, it might be instructive to recall here that one of Obu's sons owns a very high quality and generally popular journal called InsideOut, printed by the Brotherhood Press in Calabar. This journal, the declared orientation of which is "a special bias in favour of politics,"⁴⁰ publishes serious and timely articles by intellectuals on current political, economic and social issues in Nigeria and the world at large.⁴¹ In fact, a University of Calabar

³⁹The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 120.

⁴⁰"Publisher's Note," InsightOut (April/June 1983), p. 103.

⁴¹Samples of articles published in various issues of the journal are: "Mass Sack in Cross River State Public Service," (January 1982, p. 103); "The Nigerian Labour Congress: What Direction?" (*ibid.*, pp. 105-107); "Nigerian Labour Congress and Fraternal Unions Abroad," (*ibid.*, p. 111); "The Nigerian Labour Movement: Struggle of the Working Class," (*ibid.*, pp. 112-114); "Academic Staff Union of Universities Strike," (*ibid.*, p. 115); "The Trade Unions Amendment Bill," (*ibid.*, p. 116); "The Economy Under Two Years of Civil Rule," (*ibid.*, pp. 118-20); "Zimbabwe: Rousing the Sleeping Revolution," (March 1982, pp. 123-24); "U.S. Policy on Poland: Is It Hypocrisy?" (*ibid.*, pp. 124-26); "Nigeria at 22: A Regime of 'Internal Colonialism'," (October 1982, pp. 106-110); "Impeachment: A False 'Democratic' Process," (*ibid.* 114-16); "Governors and State Creation," (*ibid.*, p. 119); "The OAU Mess Paying Back Khaddafy?" (*ibid.*, p. 121); "Politician without Official Platforms," (November 1982, pp. 114-17); "Brezhnev's Funeral: The Pomp and Politics," (December 1982, pp. 118-22); "Nigeria: Will 1966 Repeat Itself?" (January/March 1983, pp. 109-111); "Survival of

(Footnote Continued)

lecturer who was serving part-time as the journal's special correspondent, associate editor, and political analyst, resigned his appointment with the University in order to take up full-time employment with the publishers of the journal as its Managing Editor. Although it is owned by Obu's son, its publishers say that the journal is administratively and ideologically independent of the workings and ideologies of the RCS as movement. Be that as it may, considering the kinds of articles published in it during the NPN days, it was not difficult for anyone to see that in orientation and sympathy the journal was definitely pro-NPN, as could be illustrated from three articles published then: "The NPN Dichotomy in Cross River State" (November 1981 issue, pp. 103-105); "NPN Can't Lose at the Polls. . ." (*ibid.*, pp. 118-21); "The Power of Incumbency: The Power that Can Keep a Ruler in Power Indefinitely" (November 1982 issue, pp. 110-111). In spite of these bare facts, the publishers of the journal still lay claim to political neutrality.

As we have shown thus far, the leaders of Nigeria's new religious movements are by no means politically unmusical. They are certainly aware of what is happening on the political scene of the country, and many of them speak out, as we have indicated, whenever the spirit moves them to do so, some more loudly than others. The little effort that these religious leaders have made in speaking out on political matters

(Footnote Continued)

Democracy," (*ibid.*, p. 111); "Ghana: The Situation One Year After," (*ibid.*, pp. 115-17); "Libya: A Case of Self-Determination," (*ibid.*, pp. 118-19); "British Intelligence Service," (*ibid.*, pp. 122-23); "Apartheid and Blackman," (*ibid.*, pp. 125-26; cont'd. in April/June 1983 issue, pp. 120-21); "The History of Nigeria's Fourth Coup," (March 1984, pp. 108-109).

is indeed a welcome departure from the usual nonchalant, sit-on-the-fence attitude of the older mission churches which, for the most part, still preach the complete separation of church and state or of Christ and Caesar. On the contrary, the new religious movements show that their message is not merely other-worldly but one that touches the human situation in this world of politics. This, no doubt, is one of the reasons why their message is seen to be more appealing to contemporary Nigerians than does the message of the older so-called historic churches. In view of the above clear instances of strong political voices from Nigeria's new religious movements, we must disagree absolutely with Geoffrey Parrinder's generalization that Africa's "sects" "have been more quiescent politically than mission churches."⁴² In our opinion, the reverse of that statement is the case.

However, it is difficult to determine now the extent to which the political voices of Nigeria's new religious movements have influenced the country's present political scene, or the weight of their impact on the country's political future. One thing seems certain, nonetheless: if these apparently lonely voices keep speaking up as they are now doing, their words are likely to have some measure of observable impact not only on the membership of the new religious movements, but also in the general political arena of the country. And if that happens, then the current official policy in most of these movements of

⁴²Parrinder, "Traditional Religions and Modern Culture (Africa)," p. 107.

non-involvement in political affairs may have to be reviewed in the not too distant future.

2. Nigeria's New Religious Movements and Nigerian Economy

(a) Brotherhood Economic Manifesto: It will be quite obvious from the following discussion that Nigeria's new religious movements are usually very pragmatic and fearlessly this-worldly in their teachings and practices. This general remark is particularly true of Obu's BCS. That Obu's teachings can be unequivocally and unembarrassingly concerned with the things of this life may be illustrated by referring to what one may call Obu's prophetic manifesto on Nigerian economy. We find in the manifesto described below that, for Obu, technology and theology are not always enemies.

To begin with, Obu blames the current deplorable economic situation of Nigeria firstly on the colonial masters and secondly on the laziness of Nigerians. The colonial masters, he says, out of selfishness and envy of the rich natural resources of Nigeria, failed to give Nigerians the kind of education and guidance that would prepare them to make the most of those resources. Obu is particularly critical of the type of education which the colonial masters gave to Nigerians, the kind of education that prepared them only for white-collar jobs but taught them nothing about the importance of manual work and technical skills. In his opinion, that kind of education provided for Nigerians by the white man was, to put it mildly, morally deceptive and in the long run valueless. He minces no words in telling Nigerians his opinion of colonial education:

The Englishman has deceived you with liberal education. He taught you how to write and keep accounts. After knowing all the accounting principles and practising them in the office, where is your own money which you will count?⁴³

He repeats the same point elsewhere as follows:

The introduction of Grammar schools induced people to learn theories, mathematics, science and accounts. Today the system has collapsed. When you complete the course, you are awarded... certificates without any employment and at last you sit down and lament because you cannot make use of your hands to produce for your subsistence.⁴⁴

He further blames the white man for introducing into Nigeria "the attitude of staying in office," and then asks: "You become accountants, teachers and clerks; who are those to produce what you in offices would feed on?"⁴⁵ Indeed, it is Obu's strong belief that "if the College of Technology (in Oshagbiri) . . . trade schools had been introduced earlier, there would have been a great trend toward productivity."⁴⁶

But not only does Obu blame the contemporary miserable Nigerian economic situation on the failure of colonial educational system, but he also attributes the situation to the white man's selfishness and greed in usurping Nigerian land for his own selfish ends, and then turning around to hire Nigerians to work that land for him for only meager wages

⁴³ The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 23.

⁴⁴ The Everlasting Gospel: The Transcendent Teachings of the Holy Spirit, vol. 2, p. 26.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

on which Nigerian could not live decently, let alone save any of it for the rainy day. As far as Obu is concerned, the white man cheated Nigerians who worked for him, because he did not pay them wages commensurate with their labour. In commiseration with his fellow Nigerians, Obu poses to them the following rhetorical question:

Why will you not die of hunger and suffer abject poverty, when you surrender all your lands to the white man to establish rubber and palm plantations for himself, but the following day you emerge with a long application requesting to be employed as an accounts clerk under him?⁴⁷

Having posed that question, he goes on to point out the danger of being someone else's employee, especially a white man's employee, as opposed to being self-employed:

He (the white employer) can sack you at any time because he is at the head and owner of the work. All your turnover goes into his pocket. Your salary⁴⁸ does not reflect your turnover for a month.

Obu also directs his diatribe against those mission churches in Nigeria which allowed themselves to be exploited by the "home missions" abroad which, having established in Nigeria industries, schools and farm projects, "stay abroad to rule in Nigeria, while we only go to seek employment in their establishments."⁴⁹ This sort of arrangement, Obu warns, "brings poverty to our country."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 23.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Then Obu turns his attention to castigate Nigerians for their laziness in failing to use their hands in manual work, especially in agriculture. This laziness, he asserts, is "the only thing that weakens and shakes any nation to its very foundation,"⁵¹ or "the cankerworm eating deeply into the fabric of our economy."⁵² After pointing out that Nigerians "cannot all be doctors, engineers, lawyers, magistrates and judges . . . soldiers, police, accountants, drivers and contractors," Obu goes on to stress the importance of agriculture, and calls on all Nigerians who have their individual as well as national economic interest at heart to "go back to land and receive the blessing of God Almighty."⁵³ God, he says, has given Nigerians the land, to the envy of the white man. Why should his country men and women not make the best of the land, he wonders. As far as he is concerned, "there is no gift more valuable than the surplus land at our disposal. This land is money, but it requires enthusiasm and initiative for her economic exploitation."⁵⁴ Obu believes, in fact, that "if this land were given to the white people, they would have been very prosperous."⁵⁵ Having said all this, he makes the following observation about his countrymen and women:

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 24; cf. The Everlasting Gospel: The Transcendent Teachings of the Holy Spirit, vol. 2, pp. 18-23.

⁵³ The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 23.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

It is laziness that makes a natural farmer⁵⁶ to be ordinary clerk with a small pay. Because he wants to go in tie, so he prefers to be a clerk not minding his daily financial problems. A natural farmer who, because of laziness, takes to law, medicine etc. cannot make up the grade.

At a meeting of the Spiritual Council of Churches, Obu told his followers about his plans to practise what he preaches concerning self-employment and agriculture. Among other things, he told them:

Brethren, most of you are advocating to be Government Officials, forgetting that your children cannot succeed you there but they can take over your business. That is why I am acquiring some land for the development of business, agriculture, etc., so that your children will have something to eat.⁵⁸

Such economic foresight and business acumen as expressed here are not only admirable but also pleasantly surprising coming from a person of Obu's background with almost no formal education or training in economic planning. One wishes that the political leaders of Nigeria had even half as much foresight! Pointing to the examples of those developed countries which are rich because of their strong agricultural programmes, Obu calls on the Nigerian government to encourage agriculture in the country:

The Government of Nigeria should as a matter of urgency establish many farm projects at various

⁵⁶ By "natural farmer" he means one who is naturally talented as a farmer.

⁵⁷ The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 23.

⁵⁸ SCC Minutes, December 22, 1973: p. 36.

... levels to absorb these jobless and lazy young men and women who daily roam our streets.⁵⁹

He then adds that only when his country is economically independent can she say that she is truly independent. In his words, "Africa is not yet independent because they still apply for employment instead of being employers of labour."⁶⁰ Having said that, he goes on to advise his country as follows:

Today if you use your hands to work, the Europeans will apply to work under you, and other countries will come and stoop down for you, and your country will become an emporium of economic activity, and your prestige will be greatly enhanced.⁶¹

It is an irrefutable fact that inadequate conception and execution of workable agricultural projects is the root cause of many African countries' inability to feed their inhabitants. Obu states the problem quite frankly this way: "There is an acute shortage of food because you are lazy to labour with your hands to produce food."⁶²

That a religious leader should speak out so passionately about the significance for a country of self-sufficiency in matters of food production and the economy goes to show that there is, after all, an interesting connection between agriculture, the economy, religion, and the enhancement of the kind of prestige (power) of which Obu speaks here. Indeed, it has been said that "all religions are basically

⁵⁹The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 23.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 24.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 25.

⁶²Ibid.

concerned with power . . . with the discovery, identification, moral relevance and ordering of different kinds of power . . .⁶³ including, of course, economic, technological, and political power. Power--whatever the kind--it has further been said, "allows one to get more enjoyment and pleasure out of life," and "makes it possible to remove those things and those men which one regards as hostile and aggressive or merely as dangerous",⁶⁴ --those things which threaten the regular and steady supply of our daily bread, the effective maintenance of our bodily, mental, moral, and spiritual health, and thus the prolongation of our life on earth. The aim to remove the undesirable from life is, therefore, a function which religious (spiritual) power, economic power, and technological power share. Thus, it is believed that one raison d'être of any religion is to generate spiritual power which will in turn fulfil the said function. It is precisely because people, especially members of contemporary new religious movements all over the world, believe that religion is capable of providing this kind of spiritual power, that they take refuge under the sacred canopy of religion in times of life's crises. That this is so, in the case of members of the BCS, may be shown from the various reasons they give as to why they joined the movement. That the leader of this movement believes it, is evident in his techno-economic manifesto discussed here.

⁶³See Bunridge, p. 5.

⁶⁴Anton Antweiler, "Religion and Technology," in Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, vol. I: The Impact of Modern Culture on Traditional Religions (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), p. 136.

A professional economist could hardly offer a more sensitive and penetrating insight into an analysis of Nigeria's economic situation than Obu has given here. One only wishes that the various governments of the country had taken these prophetic and insightful remarks seriously and begun to establish and make agriculture an attractive occupation for Nigerians. Had this been done early, perhaps Nigerians might have escaped the economic tragedy into which dependence on a one-commodity economy (oil) has plunged them. Unfortunately, it took Nigerian leaders well over a decade after Obu's declared economic manifesto to begin to embark upon the now proverbial River Basin and Green Revolution agricultural projects, with no more money in the national coffers to back these up.

Those interested in writing about protest and millenarian movements may, of course, see Obu's economic manifesto as a statement of protest. In one sense it is just that. But in this case, Obu is not so much protesting against any foreign economic and political exploiters (as is usually the case with protest and millenarian movements) as he is protesting against political misleadership and lack of economic foresight on the part of Nigerian leaders. However, when he speaks retrospectively about the adverse influence of colonial education on Nigerians' mentality and its consequences on Nigeria's present economy, one may see his manifesto rightly as a retrospective protest against what he sees as the lingering vestiges of British colonization and economic and political exploitation and selfishness.

In the more immediate context, as we have said, Obu's manifesto is directed at Nigerians' laziness, misguided sense of values, and their terrible lack of the sense of responsibility and accountability.

Indeed, as Obu sees it, these defects in the Nigerian people have caused them to experience anew a situation of self-imprisonment or self-oppression, a situation calling for deliverance--deliverance which is possible only through heeding the counsel of the voice crying in Nigeria's economic wilderness. Obu sees his as that voice. Moreover, if it is true that "an adequate or more satisfactory way of gaining prestige, of defining the criteria by which the content of manhood is to be measured, stands at the very heart of a millenarian or messianic movement,"⁶⁵ then there is a sense in which Obu's movement may be seen as "millenarian" or "messianic," since his economic manifesto deals precisely with the question of Nigerians finding a new, more satisfactory way of gaining and retaining economic prestige, self-respect, status, and integrity. That new way, according to Obu, is the way back to land--the way back to using the hands in agricultural pursuits. In Obu's view, going back to land means, ultimately, going back to Mother Earth--to God himself or herself who, for Obu, is the most authoritative definer of human identity and greatest benefactor of lasting self-respect, status, integrity, and glory. Indeed, that this interpretation is faithful to Obu's vision of economic, political, and technological autarky and concomitant international respectability is unequivocally borne out by the following remarks of his:

If you lack the knowledge and technical-know-how, God advises you to ask from him, and it shall be given you. God is with you and He is willing to teach you free of charge the technology of manufacturing. The Europeans get this knowledge from God after

⁶⁵ Burridge, p. 11.

much self-sacrifice and devoted prayers. Why don't you seek glory for yourselves?⁶⁶

He makes the same claim elsewhere as follows:

. . . you are well aware that the Holy Spirit teaches you the methodology of doing everything . . . He will teach you contract work, how to run any business; He will teach you various disciplines.⁶⁷

These assertions illustrate neatly Obu's characteristic creative ability to be pragmatic and to be in tune with the times. In fact, there is a sense in which it may be said that his religion operates first on the natural, practical, this-worldly sphere--the sphere of human needs and experiences in the here and now--and then gradually raises itself higher and higher into the supernatural, "impractical," other-worldly

⁶⁶The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 25. Cf. Easter Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, vol. 1: The Realm of the Holy Spirit (1982), p. 19, where Obu asserts: ". . . the whites do not disclose that it is the Holy Spirit who has taught them these sciences. When you argue that the whites are very experienced and intelligent in inventing, discovering and manufacturing, I tell you that they do not know anything, because it is the Holy Spirit who teaches anyone when and what to invent." Incidentally, Obu is not alone in seeing God and the Holy Spirit as the ultimate source of social, economic, technological, political and spiritual power. Another Nigerian (academic) also believes in the divine source of political power; hence he writes: "A living dynamic and sensitive church cannot opt out of politics. She must realize that political power is from God and that all power is divine. . . . power--social and political--is from God, and therefore divine."--N.S.S. Iwe, Christianity, Culture and Colonialism in Africa (Port Harcourt: R.S.N.C., 1979), p. 163. Interestingly, the allegation that the whites concealed from the colonized peoples of the world the real source of technological, economic, political, and spiritual power, seems to be common among new religious movements in the so-called primal societies worldwide. See, for example, Harold W. Turner, "The Hidden Power of the Whites: The Secret Religion Withheld from the Primal Peoples," Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions, 46, No. 1 (1978), 41-55.

⁶⁷Easter Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Realm of the Holy Spirit (1982), p. 15.

sphere--the sphere of the unknown, of the beyond, of the mysterious and miraculous. Thus, in these assertions, Obu first points up Nigerians' existential need for "technical-know-how," for instance, and from there he directs their attention to an other-worldly source from where this needed know-how may be obtained. In doing this, Obu brings heaven down to earth and then tries to marry the two. Peter Berger calls this way of theologizing "an inductive approach," by which he means "an approach that begins with ordinary human experience, explores the 'signals of transcendence' to be found in it, and moves on from there to religious affirmations about the nature of reality"--a procedure which goes "from the human to the metahuman."⁶⁸ Indeed, Obu's economic manifesto is significant in at least one theoretical respect: it challenges the age-old prejudice that all religious visionaries are by nature apathetic to and unconscious of socio-economic and political concerns.

(b) Brotherhood Economic Manifesto in Practice: In this section, we wish to show how the BCS has attempted, in various ways, to put into practice its economic manifesto. Here again, although our focus is on the BCS, a few other Nigerian new religious movements are also referred to, for the purposes of comparison.

When one begins to consider in what ways Nigeria's new religious movements have contributed to the economic development of the country,

⁶⁸ Peter L. Berger, The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979), pp. (ix), 124.

one may be tempted to look only at the negative impact that some of the movements seem to have had on the country's economy. One may, for instance, notice only those things which could have detrimental effects on the sectors of the nation's economy which produce them. They include, for example, prohibitions in some of the movements against drinking and the eating of meat; the requirement that only white soutanes, which are usually available more widely and cheaply than are expensive clothes such as three-piece suits and lace dresses, should be worn in church services and sometimes elsewhere as well; and the practice of going about without shoes. One could imagine here what would happen to these sectors of Nigeria's economy if there were millions or even thousands of Nigerians who adhered strictly to these prohibitions. Apparently, the prohibition in the BCS against drinking, for instance, seems to have been felt by those who produce and sell the drinks. We have a clue to this in Obu's following remarks: "... the people of the world are abusing members of Brotherhood and the Holy Father and say (sic) all sort of things because they have stopped the people from drinking."⁶⁹ We realize, however, that money saved by not indulging in luxuries could be put to better use which, in turn, could help to promote the country's economy.

On the positive side of the coin, and in the face of acute shortages of essential social services, such as medical care, welfare services, employment and education opportunities at both the State and national levels, it is gratifying to see some of the new religious

⁶⁹ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, pp. 13-14.

movements like the Aladura group, the BCS, and the Celestial Church of Christ rising to the situation by building their own schools, factories, grocery stores, health centres, maternity services, publishing and printing houses, bookshops, the business of making musical records, public transportation services, guest houses, etc. Indeed, Obu sees no conflict between religiosity and entrepreneurial undertakings. His conviction, on the contrary, is that "God does not prevent human beings to farm, trade, or undertake any type of business or occupation. . . . He does not prevent us from eating, dressing nicely, or living a comfortable life. . . ."⁷⁰ In fact, one of the convictions behind Brotherhood ideologies is that "God's work is uplifted through the establishment of schools, hospitals and markets."⁷¹

The Aiyetoro socio-religious Community, founded in 1947 in Western Nigeria by the Cherubim and Seraphim wing of the Aladura group, had within the first twenty-five years of its existence established hospitals, a fishing industry, a shoe factory, a textile factory, a bakery, tailoring and laundry services, a cabinet workshop, an electrical department, internal telephone system, pipe-borne water, water and land transport systems, a technical school, a secondary school, a primary school, a kindergarten school, and an adult education programme.⁷² So successful has the Aiyetoro Community become in

⁷⁰ December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, No. 2 (1980), p. 3.

⁷¹ SCC Minutes, January 2, 1982, p. 22.

⁷² See Omoyajowo, The Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Relation to Church, Society, and State, p. 88; cf. Barrett, The Rise and Fall of an African Utopia, pp. 2-4.

economic terms that it has been described as "Nigeria's most successful case of village-level development" and as having "the highest standard of living of any village in the country."⁷³ Of this same Community, Chandana Juliet Highet writes: "Few other comparable rural towns in Africa have the same facilities--electricity in every home and a telephone system which works."⁷⁴ Harold Turner speaks of the Community thus: "The short history of Aiyetoro provides a fascinating study of the interplay of social, economic and religious forces : . . with obvious relevance to the Weber-Tawney theses and to African development in general."⁷⁵ According to Barrett, the people of the Community "contend that their economic success was a result of their religious belief;" and part of this religious belief was that "hard work and economic prosperity reflected a person's faith, and hence were a means to salvation and immortality."⁷⁶ One is reminded here of Max Weber's theory of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, according to which religious belief is said to be an important source of motivation for hard work and the resultant economic success. But this particular economically self-sufficient Community, because of its

⁷³ Barrett, The Rise and Fall, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Chandana Juliet Highet, "Aiyetoro, the Happy City," Skypower (The Inflight Magazine of Nigeria Airways, December 1983), p. 5.

⁷⁵ Harold W. Turner, "The Relationship Between Development and New Religious Movements in the Tribal Societies of the Third World," in Frederick Ferré and Rita Mataragnon, eds., God and Global Justice: Religion and Poverty in an Unequal World (New York: Paragon House, 1985), p. 107.

⁷⁶ Barrett, The Rise and Fall, pp. 2, 4.

isolation from the larger Yoruba society, has very little impact on that society.

Members working in the establishments of the new religious movements are not usually paid a full salary or, in some cases, paid at all, because their services are seen as "for the Lord." But those who are not paid salaries are nevertheless given small honoraria for their daily living, that is, if they do not live communally as in the Aiyetoro Community.⁷⁷ These workers may themselves never become rich, but their service are invaluable to the society. Money accrued from these services also helps to boost Nigeria's economy.

In Ibadan, the capital of the Oyo State in West Nigeria, the Cross and Christ World Mission is building a maternity hospital to be financed by revenues from a supermarket and office complex which it has built next to the hospital.⁷⁸ This project will no doubt provide job opportunities for many Nigerians--doctors, nurses, clerks, attendants, etc., possibly including non-members of the church.

In a Calabar-wide Sunday service held on November 15, 1981, to raise funds in aid of disabled persons, the BCS donated more than two thousand naira (about three thousand U.S. dollars) on the spot. And in December of that year, this same movement announced a plan to build a

⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the situation in Aiyetoro today has changed from what it used to be in the late 1940s and middle 1960s as a result of the secularization processes that have confronted the Community. With the introduction of private enterprises in 1968, people began to demand wages for their labour, and, consequently, the spirit of the communal system began to disappear.

⁷⁸ See Rosalind I.J. Hackett, "Nigeria's Independent Churches: Gateways or Barriers to Social Development?" Africana Marburgensia, 14, No. 1 (1981), p. 17.

centre for the disabled in the Cross River State at an estimated cost of over two million naira (approximately three million U.S. dollars),⁷⁹ in addition to their existing vocational centre for the handicapped at Ikot Ide, Ibesikpo L.G.A. (Cross River State), where various crafts are taught. A similar BCS school has been in operation since 1977 at Nung Udoe, also in the Cross River State. Appealing for material and financial donations for the execution of the Nung Udoe project, Obu had outlined the goals and objectives of the school as follows:

This is a school for the maimed, our handicapped brethren. Here varying crafts are taught. . . . This school will find occupation for our deformed brethren, occupy their minds, make them productive, responsible and proud of themselves. They will no longer murmur against God; will no more pity their states because in this school they can learn crafts, sell their products and live on the proceeds of their handiworks. At the completion of this school, all those who had hitherto depended on alms and charity organizations will be absorbed to use their hands or legs to turn out crafts with which to live on. Surely their morale will be raised because they are no longer⁸⁰ a liability to the(ir) relations or public.

Furthermore, the BCS operates large plantations of yam, cassava (tropical plant of genus Manibot), plantain, pineapple and other fruit trees in Ikom in the northern part of the Cross River State and also in Obu's birth place, Biakpan. These plantations not only contribute tremendously to the Green Revolution programme which has been the subject of much discussion in Nigeria, but they also offer job opportunities to many Nigerians, both members of the movement and

⁷⁹ Radio Nigeria National News, Monday, December 7, 1981.

⁸⁰ SCC Minutes, April 2, 1977, p. 6.

non-members as well. Moreover, Obu strongly encourages all BCS bethels or stations to embark upon viable agricultural projects aimed at sufficient food production for the maintenance of their unsalaried workers and the needy among them.⁸¹ In addition, the BCS has a large company of buying and selling contractors called the Globemaster Services Ltd., the branches of which can be seen in many parts of the country and in the United States. It also owns a large sewing industry called the Star Sewing Industry, with branches all over Nigeria. This industry specializes in making, for fees, soutanes and other uniforms for members, although it may also take sewing contracts from non-members. Indeed, the BCS has clearly stated that one of the reasons for its existence is to "show practically what Christians can do to improve the economic and social situations around them."⁸² Obu tells us how his movement goes about achieving this aim:

In Brotherhood, wherever we are given land we have to build houses in villages, towns and cities, and even establish firms and other institutions so that people who are stranded, people who have no dwelling places, people who have no occupation, will be sent there to work.⁸³

Such projects and programmes as we have described here are obviously a positive note on Nigeria's keyboard of economic development. Similar

⁸¹ See The Spiritual Council of Churches (Calabar: Hope Waddell Press, n.d.), p. 9.

⁸² Udoumoren, "The Profile of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star," p. 36.

⁸³ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 99. Similarly, The St. Joseph Chosen Church in Abak is reported to be engaged "in building houses for the sick and the needy;" see Enang, Salvation in a Nigerian Background, p. 337.

projects and the many healing homes built by these religious movements will certainly supplement and complement existing inadequate medical and health care services in the country.

The founder of the Celestial Church of Christ explained as follows how his members become quite rich: "The money some of them may have used in drinking beer, adultery, fornication, smoking and visiting native doctors could become useful and may be used for other tangible things. That is why members have money."⁸⁴ One of our informants in the BCS also gave, almost verbatim, the same reasons why their members who work for the movement are not financially poor even though they do not receive full salaries but only allowances for their daily living. Among other things, this informant said that merely working for the movement was in itself a source of divine blessing: "Although our workers are not paid full salaries, they nevertheless gain in many other ways," he said. Then he went on to explain further:

The Father (Obu) protects our members from diseases, sicknesses and all kinds of troubles on which they would normally spend their money. Now, since they don't experience all these situations, they consequently save the little money they have, which they would have spent, had the Father not protected them from all these things. Secondly, since they do not drink or run after the lust of the flesh, they also save their money this way.⁸⁵

The reasons given here as to why adherents of some of Nigeria's new religious movements get "rich" and remain so are clearly religious

⁸⁴ Nigerian Television Authority, "Meet the Founder of the Celestial Church of Christ," P. 7.

⁸⁵ Interview with Apostle E.K. Ukpai, March 16, 1982.

reasons. This means that, as in the case of the effect of the Calvinist work ethic on the spirit of capitalism, the religious beliefs and values of some of these movements have indeed been responsible for the material wealth of a good many of their members. Indeed, these religious reasons remind one of Richard Niebuhr's remark that "restrictions on consumption accompanied by emphasis upon production have their inevitable result, in an economic salvation. . . ."⁸⁶ What we have here, then, appears to be a kind of dialectic between sacred religious values and secular economic realities--a situation where the latter seem to be the by-product of constant stress on the former. This may be a good illustration of Hans Mol's observation that "increasing objectification or transcendentalization . . . also may have secularization as a by-product."⁸⁷ But Obu seems to have no qualms about such a development. For him, being "religious" should not be equated to being poor, as, in his opinion, the historic churches seem to teach. He expresses his opinion on this matter as follows:

It is a belief of the people of the world that a man of God is as poor as a church rat. The church denominations easily conclude that since a godly man is always poor, his reward is in heaven. In this new Kingdom (the BCS) it is not so. All those who come are so wealthy and prosperous that people say, is it because of this money that you come to Brotherhood? How money comes into the hands of Brotherhood members is best known to the Holy Father.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism (1929; rpt., New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 55.

⁸⁷ Hans Mol, Meaning and Place: An Introduction to the Social Scientific Study of Religion (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983), p. 91.

⁸⁸ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 75.

But the reflexive effect of the increasing economic prosperity of many of these movements, sociologically speaking, is that some of them can no longer be labelled sects. Religious sects typically come into existence with members who are generally poor and who tend to withdraw into their little "spiritual enclaves" where no active economic or political activities take place. This means that, in some ways, the new entrepreneurial interest has been a great distraction for members of some of the movements from their hitherto purely religious or spiritual concerns. Such a distraction may do serious damage to the movements' early piety and religiosity, if prosperity is allowed to overshadow piety. Indeed, one sometimes wonders as one observes some of these movements which are so deeply involved in mundane businesses and money-making, whether they have not in fact left heavenly concerns to the angels and the sparrows, at least temporarily. However, where they may thus lose spiritually, some of the movements do gain economically. And for our purposes--speaking of Nigeria's economic development--the economic gain is a welcome experience both for members of the movements as individuals and for the nation as a whole. Such a situation should not lead us, however, to lose sight of the primarily religious foundations of the movements.⁸⁹ Perhaps both those new religious movements actively engaged in modern socio-economic enterprises and techniques and those who criticize them for such engagements might gain some useful insight from Wilson's pertinent remarks here:

Failure to embrace modern techniques puts a religious movement at a disadvantage relative to

⁸⁹ See, for instance, Turner, Religious Innovation in Africa, p. 38; cf. Sanneh, West African Christianity, pp. xiii, 188.

secular agencies with which it has to compete. On the other hand, too complete an espousal of modernity must for any movement put into jeopardy its basic religious concerns. Whilst new movements have the advantage of being able to adopt modern facilities and to utilize rational and technological procedures, they must do so with circumspection if they are not to sacrifice explicitly religious functions.⁹⁰

3. Nigeria's New Religious Movements and Social Life

Perhaps the most observable impact of Nigeria's new religious movements is to be seen in the social functions that they are performing for their votaries in particular and for Nigerian society in general. For the generality of Nigerians, these movements provide certain compensations in the face of political and economic inequality and ethnic domination and oppression.

The social philosophy of the BCS, for instance, is based on the principle of sharing. Members are encouraged to share what they have with the less fortunate of the society. Hoarding is considered an attitude of unbelief and one of the cardinal sins which members must shun. This social philosophy is succinctly articulated by Obu as follows: "Our duty is to serve and relieve the oppressed, the needy, the destitute, the orphans, the widows, the afflicted and the broken-hearted."⁹¹ In keeping with this philosophy, the BCS gets

⁹⁰ Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 133.

⁹¹ December. Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, No. 4 (1980), p. 64.

actively involved in many social welfare programmes. There is, for example, a huge canteen in Calabar, the 'Mother's Canteen,' built by the movement's Women's Association. In addition, all over the country the various Fellowships and Associations (see section 10 of chapter two above) of the movement visit orphanages, welfare centres, hospitals, and make huge donations in cash and kind--food, fruits, clothing and beddings. Also, Obu himself receives numerous invitations from groups and individuals performing ceremonies asking for financial donations. It is said that he honours all these invitations with generous donations.⁹² Furthermore, Obu encourages his members to honour all invitations from other churches and individuals who ask for financial donations and contributions.⁹³

Moreover, Obu strongly encourages his adherents always to participate in and contribute to all projects aimed at the development of whatever communities they happen to find themselves in. He sums up this encouragement and recommendation in the following dictum: 'Obey and not fight the Government. Pay your taxes . . . and keep the rules of the Community.'⁹⁴ Doing so, he says, is not only their civic responsibility but also their sacred duty. Especially, he sees in such participation and involvement an opportunity for members to attract non-Brotherhood members of the community into the BCS; hence this admonition to his members:

⁹² See Etuk, Revelation of the Great World Leader, p. 63.

⁹³ See SCC Minutes, August 11, 1973, pp. 8-9.

⁹⁴ SCC Minutes, December 29, 1979, p. 26.

If you say you are a Brotherhood but you stand aloof and refuse to take part in the programmes of progressive activities of your family or your village, how would you encourage them to come to the fold of Brotherhood of the Cross and Star? Do you not know that the Government of any village is constituted by people inside that village? You cannot stay aloof and continue to say you are a Brotherhood and as such you should not be involved in the problems of the place you come from. You have to take active part in whatever they are doing for progressive undertakings in improving the village, otherwise they are capable of ostracizing you from their society and the Government can do nothing about it.⁹⁵

Having admonished his followers thus, Obu goes on to lambast other Christians for failing to support community development projects and civic undertakings:

Some of these self-acclaimed Christians are great liars. They undergo the guise of being a Christian (sic) but do not want to pay tax, contribute to the building of schools which are built on communal efforts or any other development efforts. . . . They do not want to do anything to help the Government or the Community. Yet the amenities provided by the Government are being enjoyed by them and their children. Their children go to the same school they refuse to contribute to build.⁹⁶

These assertions clearly indicate Brotherhood commitment to and involvement in programmes of social development and improvement. They show, too, that this particular movement is not at all antagonistic to the larger society, as might have been expected of a typical 'sect.'

The new religious movements also perform social functions in other areas. For instance, in situations where people had been 'nobodies'

⁹⁵ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, pp. 63-64.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

before becoming members of the movements, or where personal recognition and movement into the higher echelons of authority had been slow or even impossible in the mission churches, members of these movements now claim to achieve personal social recognition at almost all levels, because many of these movements practise the principle of the priesthood of all believers, thereby sharpening their sense of self-worth. Further, a member to these movements soon feels that he or she has "joined a company of fellow believers on whom he (or she) could rely for consolidation and admonition. . . . a company that not only cared for him (or her), but that (also) shared a practice of life that transcended the cares of life and formed the basis of their fellowship."⁹⁷ In that company, "the experience of transcendence, the commonness of purpose and motive, and the support group of intimates bound by a moral code safeguard the believer in varying degrees from the anxieties of modern living."⁹⁸ Thus, many Nigerians sooner or later discover that in order for them to become "somebodies" it is first necessary to belong to these movements, because belonging, they testify, makes it possible for them to define who they are.

Moreover, members of these movements now claim to know and experience love. For example, one of our informants in the BCS confessed that one of the reasons why she left the Methodist Church for this movement was because she found members of the BCS to be more

⁹⁷Benton Johnson, "A Sociological Perspective on the New Religions," in Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, eds., In God We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1981), p. 58.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 62.

concerned about the welfare of each other at all times, especially in times of personal crises. "For instance," she explained, "if one of us is sick or is having some testing problems and we know about it, several of us will volunteer to go to that member and pray for him or her or even stay with him or her until he or she feels better. You can't find such a demonstration of true love in the big established churches." This informant went on to add that she felt that the trouble with the big churches was that their members were too busy with their daily work and schedules to take time out to be with or even listen to those badly in need of such expression of love and care. Indeed, Obu himself is of the opinion that "love is what attracts and magnetizes, and it is love that draws people into the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. . . . People will always be attracted to where there is love. This quality of love is what is bringing people to the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star."⁹⁹ In practical terms, one is occasionally impressed by the warmth and affection vibrating from members of this movement as they greet themselves and even non-members with the typical Brotherhood greeting: "Peace, brother/sister so and so," which form of greeting is probably got from the Muslim "Assalaam Alaikum" ("May God's Peace be upon you"), based on Qur'an 10:10: "And their greeting in Paradise shall be 'Peace'." With these various expressions of love and care, this movement, like its counterparts, generally generates feelings of interpersonal warmth and closeness and a spirit of social solidarity among its adherents, which experiences stand

⁹⁹ BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), pp. 57, 59.

in clear contrast to the usual cold, impersonal, lifeless and artificial way of life which characterizes modern society. In this connection, Wilson is right when he observes: "The impersonal contexts of modern society facilitate the attraction of socially anonymous individuals to new religious communities."¹⁰⁰ Thus, in the process of creating this feeling of love and care among its members, the BCS at the same time enables its members to recapture enough of the traditional African spirit of community, which then provides them with self dignity and integrity in the face of modern technological denigration and the depersonalization resulting from the anonymity, ambiguity, and the growth of the lonely crowd of our modern mass society. As Sharpe has correctly observed,

. . . voluntary religious organizations offer human fellowship before they offer anything else. They may well function as a 'substitute family', under the guidance of a 'father' or 'mother', offering a mixture of authority, guidance, discipline and human warmth to individuals who feel alienated from other (often 'natural') communities. This pattern--which is most powerful in the case of today's 'new religious movements'--may mean that the individual is attracted for reasons having little or nothing to do with what the group actually believes or claims to believe. Only gradually will he discover the faith and beliefs of the community, and very often these will ultimately be accepted as a mark of self-identification with its values, along with such outward symbols as dress, taboos, language and scales of values.¹⁰¹

In the same vein, Cyril Nwanunobi, writing about "sects" in Eastern

¹⁰⁰ Wilson, "The New Religions: Preliminary Considerations," p. 26. See also Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 119.

¹⁰¹ Sharpe, Understanding Religion, pp. 103-104.

Nigeria, says: "Of all the cross ethnic voluntary associations open to most members of the heterogeneous migrant urban population(,) sects ... are the nearest approximation to the traditional extended family and kinship network."¹⁰²

The BCS, like other new religious movements in Nigeria, is very pragmatic and life-centred in its theodicy and doctrines. For it, meaningful life is the result of the syntheses of spiritual and pragmatic experiences. "Meaning" has to do with the whole gamut of its members' existence and experiences in time and space--in their work and play, in their joy and sadness.¹⁰³ Two prominent members of the movement give the reason for the rapid growth of their movement as follows: "One of the causes of the rapid growth is the fact that when people run to the Brotherhood with all kinds of problems, including some problems which defied other solutions, these problems are solved in a way and manner which look too simple to be true."¹⁰⁴ According to members, the movement is therefore more concerned about the existential problems of its members than are the older mission churches. The problems of which these members speak here include, inter alia, concern about the future and one's lot in the here and now. Thus, people

¹⁰²C. Onyeka Nyanunobi, "Sects as an Urban Phenomenon in Contemporary Eastern Nigeria," Anthropos, 75 (1980), p. 124; cf. Enang, Salvation in a Nigerian Background, pp. 304-305, 337; Enang, "Community and Salvation in the Nigerian Independent Churches," Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft, 59, No. 4 (1975), p. 260; James W. Fernandez, "Politics and Prophecy: African Religious Movements," Practical Anthropology, 12, No. 2 (1965), p. 73.

¹⁰³See Mol, Meaning and Place, p. 21.

¹⁰⁴Umoh and Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star: Facts You Must Know, p. xvii; cf. p. 2.

experiencing distress of any kind, unemployment, petty jealousies, sickness, financial and family difficulties, fear of both physical and spiritual enemies like witchcraft and sorcery, flock into this movement in search of allegedly sure and usually immediate solutions to these problems. This experience of members of the BCS seems to authenticate Wilson's further observation that "all new (religious) movements of necessity offer something unavailable in older religions. . . . they offer a surer, shorter, swifter, or clearer way to salvation."¹⁰⁵ In that way, the BCS, like other new religious movements worldwide, helps its members to live meaningfully.

Quite often, Obu holds out certain incentives in the area of social needs in order to attract people to his movement. For instance, he would announce:

When you go to Brotherhood, no matter how poor you were, no matter how sickly you were, no matter how wretched you are, you would be changed instantly. You would become very wealthy, very healthy, and very happy. You would not lack anything. The reason is that when you come into Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, you come to your Father as a prodigal son. Consequently, all the angels will rejoice with you and will open the gates of heaven and all good things would be given unto you.... If you suffer today you have yourself to blame. . . . When you come into Brotherhood you do not have to think about how to get money, children, wealth, because in Brotherhood there is money, the dead are made to rise, the lame walk, the blind see, the sick are made whole.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵Wilson, "The New Religions: Preliminary Considerations," p.

Although Obu can say this, he seems, nonetheless, to be worried sometimes about the apparent greater attention some of his followers pay to these material things than to spiritual matters. In such worried moments, Obu would not spare the rod and spoil the child, but would reprimand them as follows:

It does not appear to me that you desire to receive the words of God. You are only coming here for bread and fish. You come here so that you may get children, money, wife, husband or so that you may not be sick and all such like carnal things. You do not really come here to practise the words of God.¹⁰⁷

Such a reprimand notwithstanding, the significance and apparent impact of such incentives (antagonists would call them ''baits'') become even clearer when one juxtaposes with them the following piece of spiritual advertisement from the pen of one of Obu's most prominent disciples, Apostle V.E. Ekpenyong: '' . . . whoever wants power, must come into the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star . . . the centre for all wealth, peace, life, progress, freedom, wisdom, and youthfulness. . . '' Apostle Ekpenyong continues his advertisement as follows:

Today it is a common belief and everywhere that if you want

Health -- You must come to the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star

(Footnote Continued)

¹⁰⁶ December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, No. 4. (1980), pp. 73, 74.

¹⁰⁷ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 21. He makes a similar complaint almost verbatim elsewhere where he says: ''It seems to me that you come to Brotherhood not to practise the words of God, but to have money, children, or wealth and that your sickness might be cured and your problems taken away.''--The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 144; cf. The Everlasting Gospel: April Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World, p. 41.

Money -- You must come to the
Brotherhood of the Cross and Star

Children -- You must come to the
Brotherhood of the Cross and Star

Popularity -- You must come to the
Brotherhood of the Cross and Star

Free(dom)
from court
cases -- Go the the Brotherhood of the
Cross and Star

Power -- You must come to the
Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. ¹⁰⁸

Naturally, thousands have responded positively to these spiritual advertisements in more than one thousand centres (bethels) in Nigeria alone, in many more stations in the Camerouns, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Great Britain, the United States, India, Japan, West Germany, and other places in the world. That this is so may be deduced from Obu's following remarks:

You come to Calabar for several reasons: Sometimes you have a serious case pending in the high court and somebody advised you, 'Go and see the Leader of Brotherhood of the Cross and Star that you will be discharged and acquitted.' Or maybe you want to go overseas and it is not possible for you to get your passport and visa, somebody advised you, 'Go and see the Leader and everything will be well with you.' Or maybe you have a sick man with chronic disease in the house

¹⁰⁸ V.E. Ekpenyong, "The Fate of Believers when the Leader is Wrapped," unpublished ms. (n.d.), pp. 5-6.

and you feel when you come here and receive the Father's blessings all will be well. Or maybe for a long time you have not been promoted in your place of work and you come to see the Leader in order to be promoted. Further still, things are very difficult with you; you are a businessman and your business is not progressing and the best thing for you to do is to go for the Leader's blessings so that everything will be well with you. It may be you are a contractor (and) for two years now you have not been awarded any contract and you feel the only remedy is to see the Leader and receive His Blessings and that will afford you many awards of contract. There is no other thing which has brought you here but for these reasons and so as you are in the Bible class, your attention is directed toward those things and not in the words of God.¹⁰⁹

Since Nigerians from all walks of life some time in their lives do want one or the other of the "blessings" mentioned in the above spiritual advertisements, that is, since many Nigerians often see themselves as "deprived" of many of life's good and desired things, such as health, wealth, friendship, different kinds of power, security, children, protection from witches and enemies, etc., we consequently find in the BCS and other movements people from all social strata, not only the poor and lonely, but also those whom one observer described as "the influential and affluent members of society,"¹¹⁰ or those whom Weber would refer to as "the smug and satisfied strata."¹¹¹ Thus, we

¹⁰⁹The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 97; see also April Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 106.

¹¹⁰Ray Ekpu in interview with Obu, see BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 104.

¹¹¹Max Weber, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, part II, ch. IV, par. 7
(Footnote Continued)

find in the BCS, for instance, lawyers, engineers, magistrates, medical officers, successful business- men and women, university professors, clergymen who have desaffiliated from other churches, etc. As Obu himself puts it, "If you go to the government, police or any place, throughout the nation, Brotherhood is there."¹¹²

In a sense, therefore, Nigeria's new religious movements serve as enclaves not only for the disenchanted and alienated but also for the well-to-do. Indeed, one could say that the experience expressed by Christians of the Middle Ages in the maxim "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus" ("there is no life outside the church"), may be said also to be the resounding maxim of members of Nigeria's new religious movements. Thus, as far as the membership of these movements is concerned, it is not necessarily always true, as Susan Budd says, that religion's impact "tends to be greatest among groups which are marginal to the obviously important political and economical aspects of modern society--women, the old, the very poor, the distressed and stigmatized."¹¹³

Another very important social function performed by Nigerian new religious movements is that they have provided a forum for national and international unity by bringing together people from different tribes and tongues under one umbrella of Christian fellowship. "One of the striking features of the independent religious movements," remarks

(Footnote Continued)

(1947), p. 278; cited in Werner Stark, "Max Weber's Sociology of Religious Belief," Social Analysis, 25, No. 1 (1964), p. 42.

¹¹²The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 100. Cf. Horton and Peel, "Conversion and Confusion," p. 494.

¹¹³Budd, pp. 17-18.

striking features of the independent religious movements," remarks Harold Turner, "is the extent to which so many have succeeded in transcending the limitations of language, tribe and region, and have achieved a wider community."¹¹⁴ As another observer has rightly noted, once a new religious movement has established itself in an ethnic group,

the character of the whole movement changes from tribal to universal; tribal differentia recede in importance; membership is extended to other tribes . . . city congregations become multi-tribal; the appeal becomes universal.¹¹⁵

This state of affairs is socially significant because it develops in the minds of Nigerians new kinds of social bonds and brotherhoods in which the larger community of faith fast replaces the community of blood or tribe. As Max Assimeng has said, these new religious movements have now taken over the functions of tribal groupings in moral re-generation.¹¹⁶ Leonard Barrett articulates much the same point thus: "What the new religious movements are trying to create . . . are communities which can function as substitute kinship groupings."¹¹⁷ In other words, Nigeria's new religious movements perform an important integrative

¹¹⁴Harold W. Turner, "The Place of Independent Religious Movements in the Modernization of Africa," Journal of Religion in Africa, 2, fasc. 1 (1969), p. 46.

¹¹⁵Quoted in Ibid.; cf. Barrett, African Initiatives in Religion, p. 156.

¹¹⁶Max Assimeng, "Crisis, Identity, and Integration in African Religion," in Hans Mol, ed., Identity and Religion: International, Cross-cultural Approaches (London: Sage Publications, 1978), p. 112.

¹¹⁷Leonard E. Barrett, "Religious Rejuvenation in Africa: Some Impressions from West Africa," Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 7, No. 1 (1970), pp. 30-31.

function in the ethnically and culturally diverse situation of the Nigerian society in that they are able to transcend tribal differences. That is why Obu can tell his multi-national, multi-tribal membership: "This Kingdom is your community, your village or town or city or family. In it you have brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers. You have no other country. This new world is your own country."¹¹⁸ While it may be generally true that these new religious movements do transcend tribal or ethnic boundaries and barriers, it may not always be true in every case, however, as is evident in the Aladura movement where the membership is as yet largely and strongly Yoruba in language and cultural orientation.¹¹⁹ But the fact that most (if not all) of these movements encourage interethnic or even international marriages, at least inter se, is a significant factor for social unity at both national and international levels. Thus, we see that these new religious movements also serve as useful agents in bringing about national and international solidarity at various levels.

Wilson has observed that "new religions indicate an area of need among the population."¹²⁰ This observation would seem to be true in regard to the emergence of new religious movements in Nigeria. For one of the reasons for their coming into existence in Nigeria and elsewhere is that the former religions of the society seemed to do nothing to

¹¹⁸ Revelation of the Holy Spirit: Special Release for Christ's Week, p. 7.

¹¹⁹ See, for instance, Hackett, "Nigeria's Independent Churches: Gateways or Barriers to Social Development?" p. 21.

¹²⁰ Wilson, "The New Religions: Preliminary Considerations," p. 24.

relieve Nigerians of their various spiritual and secular anxieties. For instance, a report published in 1960 by the Christian Council of Nigeria on the theme "Christian Responsibility in an Independent Nigeria" admitted that the Aladura groups have arisen

out of dissatisfaction with the life of the Church (or its lack of life) and, as so often happens in such circumstances, there is over-compensation for the felt lack, so that what was ¹²¹missing was elevated to undue importance.

J. Milton Yinger has said, ". . . a society that does not furnish its members with a system of beliefs and actions for handling the endemic anxieties of human existence and a system for modifying its inter-human conflicts will collapse from the load of personal anxiety and group action."¹²² This statement is tantamount to saying that religions that do not provide their devotees with the functions discussed above will be rejected and that new religious movements will spring up to cater for the spiritual as well as the social and economic needs of the people. This seems to be exactly what Nigeria's new religious movements have done. Nigeria should, indeed, consider herself fortunate to have a Christianity that takes profound interest in its adherents's historical situation, providing them with answers, permanent and tentative, to their political, economic and social questions, thereby helping Nigerian Christians to recognize more fully the role that they can play in their urgent task of nation building and national development. For in purely

¹²¹ Christian Council of Nigeria, 1961; quoted in Omoyajowo, "The Aladura Churches in Nigeria since Independence," p. 102.

¹²² J. Milton Yinger, Religion, Society and the Individual (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 38.

socio-economic terms, the new religious movements are without doubts agents of modernization and social development.¹²³

We have endeavoured to show in this chapter that Nigeria's new religious movements in their small way are making their impact felt by thousands of Nigerians and non-Nigerians, and that as religious movements they have become an integral part of the religious culture of the places into which they have penetrated. Their present achievements may not look too great or impressive, especially in the political and economic areas, but at least they are trying. Like the Apostle Paul, these new religious movements, especially the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, could declare: "... (we) do not consider that (we) have made it . . . but one thing (we) do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead . . ."¹²⁴ Such a declaration would be a statement of faith in the unlimited possibilities before them for greater accomplishments.

After examining in this chapter the political, economic, and social impact of the BCS in particular and other Nigerian new religious movements in general, we shall now turn to the next chapter to examine their religious impact on the Nigerian society and how that society responds to it.

¹²³For more on this view of the new religious movements in the so-called "Third World," especially Africa, see Turner, "The Relationship Between Development and New Religious Movements in the Tribal Societies of the Third World," pp. 84-110; cf. Turner, "The Place of Independent Religious Movements in the Modernization of Africa," pp. 49-56; rpt. in Turner, Religious Innovation in Africa, pp. 302-8. See also "African Independent Churches and Economic Development," World Development, 8 (1980), 523-33.

¹²⁴Paraphrase of Philippians 3:14.

their religious impact on the Nigerian society and how that society reponds to it.

CHAPTER VII

PUBLIC RESPONSE TO NIGERIA'S NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

In contemporary society, no religious movement can expect to be other than a source of contentions.

--Bryan Wilson¹

It is a matter of human psychology that the strange can evoke various reactions, fear curiosity, attraction.

--Margaret Chatterjee²

Even the most introverted and retreatist of the new religious cults which are currently at the centre of so much controversy can hardly fail to provoke some hostile responses from society at large. The very fact of their desire to withdraw from participation in the conventional order of things is sufficient to make them an object of sometimes intense suspicion.

--James Beckford³

It is unthinkable that Nigerians could afford to remain insouciant to the existence of new religious movements in their country--movements with their peculiar worldviews, new doctrines, new ideologies, new

¹Bryan Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 137.

²Margaret Chatterjee, "Religion, Understanding, and Sharing Insight," Religious Studies, 20, No. 1 (1984), p. 104.

³James A. Beckford, "Beyond the Pale: Cults, Culture and Conflict," in Barker, ed., New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society, p. 284.

concepts of reality and of the nature of God and man. We can learn much about a social movement from what the society within which it operates says or thinks about it. But Nigerian public response to her new religious movements is pluri-dimensional and for the most part highly ambiguous. There are those, for instance, who see the new religions positively not only as the best thing that ever happened to the country's religious history and to the people's spirituality, but also as architects of a new and more palatable spirituality, which have brought to an end the era of unexciting Western-style, mission-oriented kind of spirituality. Yet there are also other Nigerians who see the same movements negatively as the very perversion of religion qua religion.

Our task in this chapter is to attempt an analysis of the motives that lie behind both types of response to new religious movements in contemporary Nigeria. We believe that one useful way of understanding sociologically the phenomenon of new religious movements in any society is to examine carefully how that society responds to them. Again in this chapter, although we refer generally to other new religious movements in Nigeria for the purposes of comparison, our focus is on the object of our research, the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. Our discussion here is pursued under two broad headings, namely (a) positive response to the new religious movements and (b) negative response to them.

1. POSITIVE RESPONSE

(a) Members' Response

As would be expected, by far the most positive response to the existence and activities of Nigeria's new religious movements comes from Nigerians and (non-Nigerians) resident in Nigeria or abroad, who are themselves committed members of these movements. As far as these people are concerned, the coming into their lives of the movements is the best thing that ever happened to them. This positive attitude toward the movement is evident from the literally hundreds of oral and written testimonies that these members "share" publicly in their places of worship, during their daily dealings with fellow members and non-members, and in their responses to the researcher's interview questions about their experiences in the movements. In the BCS, for instance, such testimonies are so frequent and numerous that the movement has established a special quarterly journal called Living Testimonies through which they are disseminated to their members and non-members around the world. Sometimes some of the testimonies are so lengthy as to warrant being published separately as booklets. Others are often appended to various publications of the movement.

The actual contents of the testimonies vary with individual testifiers, but in general they include the extreme experiences of people

being raised from death,⁴ or of healing from what was hitherto considered incurable ailments by both Western and African traditional medical practitioners. At other times the testimonies are about some deliverance from witchcraft or from the machinations of evil men and women. Often they concern deliverance by some deus ex machina from fatal accidents; or they may deal with how God revealed "the truth" to them to join a particular movement or, as some members put it, how God "lifted me from darkness into his marvelous light," or how the Lord "liberated me spiritually." Frequently, some members testify about their victory in court cases, about a sense of security, of belonging, and of being loved and appreciated as persons since joining the movements. Others testify about success in business undertakings or in gaining a scholarship and admission into institutions of higher learning. Some testify about promotions in their places of work; still others about securing new jobs. Quite commonly, formerly barren women or impotent men testify about their regained fertility. All these successes and fortunes and others similar to these are invariably attributed to the spiritual power either of the founder/leader of a particular movement or of the beneficiaries themselves who, it is claimed, must by now have gained higher spiritual grounds. In either case, the founder/leader of the movement is always seen as the ultimate benefactor or bestower of the blessings said to be received. In BCS parlance, whenever some fortune smiles on a member, "it is the Father who has done it."

⁴ See, for example, Eyo, New Heaven and New Earth, pp. 107-110; see also the testimony of one Mrs. Ayo Michael in The Light of the World, vol. XVI (n.d.), pp. 46-48, both narrating stories of how individuals were raised from death.

The testimonies of which we speak here may take one of several forms of expression. They may, for example, take the form of songs in which the blessings of God or of the movement's founder/leader are vocalized, as illustrated by this song from the Brotherhood hymnal, Sure Foundation (No. 92, stanzas 3 and 4):

Olumba Obu is the King
Great Saviour and a helper
King of kings, Lord redeemer is on
Earth among men to dwell.

No more are there tears in our eyes
Olumba wiped them away
No more sorrows on our way, old things
Have been done away with.

Some members express their testimonies in regular poetry, as illustrated by the following poem, in which Obu is portrayed as the only refuge and anchor in whom man may always find rest for his troubled soul:

Come unto Olumba,
Ye who are weary and worn,
Bring unto Him your burdens,
And hearts with anguish torn.

...Come unto Him, ye toilers,
Tired of stress and strife,
Find in Him a resting place,
And calm for that troubled life.

Come unto OLUMBA,
Ye restless, homeless and friendless,
He will give you a resting place,
A place in HIS HOLY Home.

He knows what it is to be weary,
With no place to lay the head,
He shares the sorrows of many,
And wept beside the dead.

Come unto OLUMBA,
Ye who are in distress,
In HIM you will find

A sweet and perfect rest.⁵

Another enthusiastic votary of the BCS testifies as follows concerning the various ways through which people come to embrace the movement:

The wisdom of God cannot be compared with the wisdom of men. He calls his children in various ways and in diverse manner. It may be during a severe illness incurable in all other places. May be during an (sic) impending judicial proceedings. When married couples had stayed for many years without a child, they are sometimes called into Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. The white sutan (sic) of members and the wonderful songs communicated by angelic Choir, these are but some of the ways God uses to call his children at the fullness of time.⁶

Not surprisingly, literally thousands of men and women, both young and old, from all walks of life have responded positively to such spiritual advertisements both in and outside Nigeria, to such an extent that by 1979 the membership of this movement alone was estimated at over one million⁷ in a total of about two thousand branches, as of April 1981,⁸ scattered all over the world.

The positive response about which we have been speaking, as we have indicated, is always the consequence of tangible blessings which members claim to have received from the movements. One member of the

⁵ Alex Johnny, "A Resting Place," The New World Magazine, 1, No. 3 (1979), p. 7; reprinted in BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 27.

⁶ Pastor S. Etuk, "Brotherhood of the Cross and Star and the New Social Order," text of an address to Brotherhood Academic Students' Association, University of Calabar, May 7, 1983, p. 5. See also The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 149.

⁷ See Umoh and Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. xiii.

⁸ See BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 4.

Cherubim and Seraphim, for instance, is reported to have testified:

"Since I joined C. and S. I have always seen good things; if there is any difficulty, once you pray, it will go away. Since I joined I have enjoyed life."⁹

A member in another of the Aladura group of churches, the Christ Apostolic Church, is also reported to have "witnessed" thus: "If someone joins the C.A.C. he will have rest of mind. There is no need to use medicine if you join; if you ask something from God immediately you will get the result."¹⁰ One could go on and on citing examples of similar testimonies; but these few illustrations should be sufficient to show that there is no question about members' positive response to Nigeria's new religious movements. These testimonies are therefore a useful indicator not only of their positive attitude and commitment¹¹ to the movements, but also of the motives behind the rush into them by Nigerians of all social levels. Moreover, these testimonies serve as a very useful tool for further recruitment of new members into the movements. How this works is explained by two members of the BCS as follows:

It is people for whom Leader Olumba Olumba Obu have (sic) solved their problems who have been spreading the good tidings of what they have seen for themselves. Those who have heard others testify about the great miraculous performances in Brotherhood have themselves

⁹Quoted in Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba, p. 212.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Meredith B. McGuire has argued that testimony or "witnessing" "is the central commitment mechanism" among Catholic Pentecostal Prayer groups. See his article, "Testimony as a Commitment Mechanism in Catholic Pentecostal Prayer Groups," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 16, No. 2 (1977), 165-68.

joined the organization with their own problems to find out whether what they heard in others could be true. When their problems become solved, they too go about spreading what God has done for them.¹²

Obu himself has obviously been impressed by the results of his members' testimonies, hence he encourages them to continue the good work of bringing in new members through such testimonies. He, in fact, once told his audience: "I always beg you to give testimonies. You do not know the amount of work the testimonies which you give (do) to glorify the name of God throughout the world. . . . Testimonies . . . strengthen people's faith."¹³ Elsewhere he frankly admits that "testimonies, dancing, songs are meant to buy the heart of people."¹⁴

(b) Response from (Non-member) Secret Admirers:

It is not uncommon to find in Nigeria many who may be described as "secret admirers" of the new religious movements in the country--those who, according to James Fernandez, "in more casual search for healing, fortune, satisfying worship, or diversion are indirectly involved with religious movements."¹⁵ These are usually people who are well-placed in society, such as some State governors, business-men and women, university professors, and civil servants of various calibres. This

¹² Umoh and Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. 8.

¹³ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 5; cf. p. 113.

¹⁴ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 101.

¹⁵ James W. Fernandez, "African Religious Movements," Annual Review of Anthropology, 7 (1978), p. 195.

category of people constitutes what Enang calls the 'nocturnal members' who flow into the movements in search of 'security, warmth, fellowship and, to some degree, a guidance for living.'¹⁶ E.O. Bassey of the BCS describes these secret admirers as

some highly placed Nigerian crooks (who) sneak into . . . the headquarters of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star with their Benz and Volvo cars; with their white robes in the boot of their cars, prostrate before Him, receive blessings, dance OLUMBA to their satisfaction and then re-emerge in the streets only to deny by saying 'I went to drop someone there,' if the inquisitor dares confront them.¹⁷

It is true that many from these classes of Nigerians are also members of the various new religious movements. But a good number from this group have not openly declared their stand with any one of the movements, although some of them, especially among Nigerian politicians, are known to have paid private visits to some of the leaders/founders of the movements. For example, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a prominent Nigerian politician and the leader and executive presidential candidate of the now defunct Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), was known to have on a number of occasions secretly visited Obu in Calabar.¹⁸ Many, including members of the BCS, who happen to have known about this particular politician's secret visits, claim that he usually visited Obu only when the political goings in the country were tough--during electioneering

¹⁶Enang, 'Community and Salvation in the Nigerian Independent Churches,' p. 261; cf. Enang, Salvation in a Nigerian Background, p. 342.

¹⁷Bassey, 'What Do We Say He Is?' p. 2.

¹⁸See Umoh and Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, pp. 1, 2; cf. The Supernatural Teacher, Book, 2, p. 8.

campaigns, for instance--for the specific purpose of receiving Obu's blessings for political power and success. Indeed, one observer gives the following reasons as being the possible motives behind Chief Awolowo's regular visits to Obu:

(a) . . . the Chief genuinely wants the prayers of the Leader both for his personal and political salvation. (b) Since the Brotherhood has a large following, and . . . is a personalised institution of which Obu is the hub, and He is much revered and adored by His followers, if He (Obu) tells them, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, vote here,' there they will vote.¹⁹ In which case the visit was political.

If, indeed, the visits of Nigerian politicians to the leaders of the country's new religious movements should be viewed as 'political,' then there is something to be said here about the strong hold which African traditional religious thought still has on modern Africans. For one of the beliefs in African indigenous thought is that political power derives from spiritual power and that

political authority came not from men but from God and the spirits. Those who exercised authority on Earth could do so . . . only if they were accepted as speaking and acting with the good will of the departed ancestors. . . . Rulers could rule only if they were spiritually appointed to do so; and their subjects obeyed them not simply from respect for the courts of law, or for the king's power, but also for reasons of religion.²⁰

¹⁹ Ray Ekpu, 'Pray, What is Olumba Olumba Obu?' Interview with Obu, Nigerian Chronicle, March 17, 1978; reprinted in BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 104. Cf. Peter E. Enya, 'He Has Come to Reign,' in Who is This Man Olumba Olumba Obu?, p. 20.

²⁰ Basil Davidson, The Growth of African Civilization: A History of West Africa 1000-1800 (London: Longman, 1965), p. 157; cf. Turner, 'The
(Footnote Continued)

We indicated in the last chapter that there are at least a few modern Nigerians who still hold this view of the relationship between religion and politics.²¹

When we first heard about Chief Awolowo's secret visits to Obu, we were naturally curiously interested to find out if these visits might reveal something of Obu's political interests. So we were eager to take up the matter with him in one of our interviews. It was then that we learned that it was not only this particular politician and members of his Party who had been going for Obu's blessings; members of other Parties were also doing the same. As if to exonerate himself from any possible implied allegation of political partisanship, Obu confessed: "I pray for everybody who comes here for my prayers, whoever he or she may be, from anywhere, from any political Party. When people come here, I don't ask them to which political Party they belong. I am not interested in Parties but in people."²² Perhaps he was right, especially when one remembers that each of the six Parties of the last civilian rule in Nigeria had admirers, if not, in fact, active supporters, within his movement's membership. This shows that it is not always true, as Wilson would have us believe, that "the members of a new (religious) movement tend to take up similar attitudes to politics."

(Footnote Continued)

Hidden Power of the Whites," pp. 41-55; Turner, "The Place of Independent Religious Movements in the Modernization of Africa," p. 49; J.A. Anene, Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 325-28.

²¹ See footnote 66 of chapter six.

²² Interview with Obu, October 11, 1980.

...²³ For example, one or two State governors who were in opposition to Chief Awolowo's Party during the last civilian rule, were also known to be baptized, financially active "secret admirers" of the BCS. Indeed, two other presidential candidates in the last two general elections were also reported to have paid secret visits to Obu. They were Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim, leader of the Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP)²⁴ and Mr. Tunji Braithwaite, leader of the Nigerian Advanced Party (NAP).²⁵ Peel too reports that one civil servant he had interviewed had confessed that he "played the part of a Nicodemus," in the sense that he had occasionally attended Aladura churches secretly, because he liked their services (he was Anglican), and had in fact been secretly baptized by an Aladura minister.²⁶ Of this category of visitors to the new religious movements, Amadi writes:

Personal protection is (a) major cause for concern among politicians. Hence requests are often made for protection from spiritual attacks by opponents, or rivals within the party (and/or outside it). Similarly, (b) desire for promotion and protection are two main factors which attract senior civil servants and university and college teachers to the prophet (M.A.S. Wobo).²⁷

Of course, not all the "secret admirers" are as highly-placed in

²³Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 134.

²⁴See Umoh and Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. 2.

²⁵See BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 109.

²⁶Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba, p. 214; cf. George E. Okeke, "The Challenge of the Rising Christian Groups and Churches in Nigeria," Communio Viatorum, 22 (1979), p. 169.

²⁷Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 59.

Nigerian society as are the politicians. Indeed, as we have said, they come from all social levels. In general, however, it was not always clear during our interviews with these "secret admirers" why they chose to remain "secret admirers" of the movements. Nonetheless, one could easily tell that they were somewhat hampered by the generally negative attitude of the larger public toward these movements. For example, it was clear to us that they did not want to be thought of as joining the movements simply "to get rich," or for self-protection (in the case of the well-placed ones) against the evil eyes of enemies who were envious of their social positions. For some of the commonest allegations against the movements are that they are just a bunch of people who want to get rich overnight through the exercise of dubious spiritual powers, or who don't want to die, hence their resorting to self-protecting techniques through spiritual powers. Obu himself is of the opinion that those who come to him secretly do so "because they would feel that people would speak ill of them" if they went to him openly.²⁸

Some of the less influential Nigerians who were also found to be "secret admirers" reported that it was mainly the influence of either their churches or families that had restrained them from joining the movements of their choice. Having said that, one lady who was particularly interested in the BCS, but whose staunch Roman Catholic husband was in her way, regretted thus:

I could have been a member of that church for years now, but can't because of my husband. I

²⁸The Everlasting Gospel: April Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World, p. 39.

have always been a great admirer of the Brotherhood people ever since their leader healed my sister several years ago. We had taken her to so many doctors, traditional medicine-men everywhere but no hope. But when we eventually swallowed our pride and took her to Leader Obu, he healed her just like that. I couldn't believe what I saw! He didn't use any means. Only prayers. Since then, my parents and two younger sisters have been active members of the Brotherhood and are very happy now. But me? It's really hard being a married woman. You can't do what you want to do. I pray that when I come back I should be a man.

One finds here in this woman's story one of the commonest reasons members often give as to what first led them into the movements, namely the experience of some spectacular miraculous healing.

There were a couple of women, on the other hand, who threatened to divorce their husbands who had secretly admired the Cherubim and Seraphim, if they dared to join that movement, which one of the women described as "such strange people." In fact, one member of the BCS testifies that his wife actually divorced him for one year and seven months "on the grounds that I am a Brotherhood," although she herself later became a member.²⁹ One Presbyterian lady, in answer to the question as to why she had not joined the BCS, is reported to have "replied (that) her soul was in Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, but her physical body was in Presbyterian church."³⁰ Also, a young student in secondary school said: "I really like the Brotherhood, especially their singing. Well, I may not be one of them now, but who knows

²⁹ See Alhaji Dahiru Bigun's testimony in Duke, p. 112.

³⁰ See Etuk, Revelation of the Great World Leader, p. 3.

tomorrow?" But these secret admirers seem to be content with the fact that Obu accepts their faith in him and in his movement, and regards them as his own children. Indeed, Obu himself says to these secret admirers: "Do not forget Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea who were secret disciples of Christ. If you are a secret disciple, hold fast to your profession (of faith), for you will be saved."³¹

The problem expressed here by some Nigerians who would have liked to join the new religious movements but cannot do so, because of family or present church ties, says much about the difficulty in applying cross-culturally the theory of deviant behaviour, as postulated by Western (especially American) social scientists. What is often understood in the West as deviant behaviour is that kind of behaviour that is beyond the pale; that is, which deviates from the "normal" and therefore acceptable ways of doing things in a given society. Used in the context of the Christian religion, deviance has come to mean departure from Christian norms. But those who use this notion in discussions of new religious movements also extend the meaning of deviance also to refer to people who depart from the cultural norms of the societies in which they live. Hence, the term deviance in this sense is often used to mean counterculture, a term which has become a household word in America since the 1960s.

Membership in Nigeria's new religious movements of socially and culturally deviant persons, as such persons are defined in the West, is not yet a phenomenon that has been identified beyond doubt, as is often

³¹The Light of the World, vol. XII (1971), p. 34.

the case in the West. This does not mean, however, that one may not find a few isolated cases of "deviant" individuals in these movements; that is, people who, for one reason or another, may be considered to be countercultural. Indeed, it has been one of the important social functions of Nigeria's new religious movements to rehabilitate victims of such isolated cases. Our argument here, however, is that one cannot speak of "deviance" in Nigeria in exactly the same manner in which one may speak of it in permissive Western societies where husbands, wives, and even children under their teens are so free and independent as to "do their own thing," regardless of the feelings and wishes of members of the larger communities or families to which they belong. In other words, socially deviant behaviour, especially with regard to religious affiliation, has not yet become an acceptable phenomenon in Nigeria or, for that matter, in other African societies, as it is in the West. This, at least in part, seems to be what C.K. Meek had in mind when he, writing over four decades ago on the religions of Nigeria, said:

. . . in pagan tribes there is no room for diversity of religious doctrine and practice, since one of the main functions of the pagan religions is the preservation of the unity of the group.³²

Meek's observation here seems to be just as true today as it was when he wrote it more than forty years ago, when Nigerian society was still very much "pagan." Nigerians today are still being influenced, to a very large extent, by African traditional ideologies. For example, the belief that the communal way of life is still the best way to live

³²C.K. Meek, "The Religions of Nigeria," Africa, 14, No. 3 (1943), p. 1, note 2.

continues to exert a strong impact on modern Nigerians. According to this way of thinking, the individual African is still being educated to feel that in order for him or her to be happy, he or she must live in conformity with the ideals and wishes of his or her family or community. Only thus may the individual really live and come to know exactly who he or she is. The individual in African traditional community was further taught to know that his or her welfare is a function and consequence of the welfare of the community. John Mbiti spells out this philosophy quite clearly when he says:

To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements of life is to be out of the whole picture.

The situation which Mbiti describes here may be difficult to be fully grasped by the Westerner, because in the West, even before the official advent of mystic or privatized or the so-called "invisible religion,"³⁴ religion has often been considered as mainly concerned with personal quest for salvation, including salvation from the bondage of family connections! In other words, religion in the West is more often than not an individual affair. African religion, on the other

³³ John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), p. 2; my emphasis.

³⁴ See, for instance, Colin Campbell, "The Secret Religion of the Educated Classes," Sociological Analysis, 39, No. 2 (1978), 146-56.

hand, is often a communal affair. In fact, an important difference between African traditional religions and African new religious movements lies in the fact that the former were (are) a means of expressing community, while the latter are a means of seeking a new community to take the place of the old traditional community which has been destroyed at the advent of modern, atomized and structurally disjointed mass society.

In the African system, therefore, parents still have an enormous amount of control over their children, husbands over their wives, members of the extended family over individual members of the family, and so on. Such a cultural ideology and configuration of things, then, prevent individuals in African societies from choosing the deviant way of life, from "doing their own thing" even in matters of religious affiliation.

Indeed, even if what is usually meant by "deviance" is reduced simply to mean departure from the norms of orthodox Christianity, as is often done in discussions of new religious movements, one could still argue that in African families such deviance is not at the present time a popular mass phenomenon as it is in the West. In most of these families, it is more often the case than not that members of the same family belong to the same religious group. That this is so is given assent by Obu in the following remarks, for instance:

If you were born to meet your parents in a particular church denomination, would you have been able to break with the tradition of the family? If you did, would your parents take it kindly? You would find it difficult to set at nought what they believe to be important to them; forever they would want to belong to that particular denomination. . . . Really speaking, it will not be easy for you to convince them to break with the family tradition. If your family

had been a Presbyterian . . . and your mother . . . also a member of that church, and you were born into (that) church, . . . would you not find your way into (other) branches of the church?³⁵

The impression Obu gives here, however, is that there are none among his followers who have come into the BCS from other churches. That this impression is misleading is made abundantly clear in this chapter. For the main reason why the mission churches are at loggerheads with Obu's movement is that it has drawn into its membership thousands of members of those churches, as Obu himself, in fact, often admits. For instance, he once made this admission when he told his bible class:

Brethren, when you were in the various church denominations, your eyes were not opened. But now how have you found yourself? This is why the various church denominations have teamed up to fight against what they call 'strange teachings' about a strange God and these strange teachings have exposed them to ridicule and they are fighting tooth and nail to destroy Brotherhood . . . they complain that Leader O.O. Obu has³⁶ come to cause difficulties in their work.

The point we are making here about the familial or community-oriented nature of religious affiliation among Nigerian peoples, may be illustrated further by this other remark by Obu:

³⁵ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 30.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 44-45. These same remarks are made almost word-for-word by one of Obu's followers, M.D. Duke, in his The Supreme Being: Holy Father Olumba Olumba Obu, p. 62, and also in the editorial to BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 4. This very common practice of members of the BCS lifting whole passages from the sayings of their Leader (without acknowledging their sources or giving credit to their Leader) and incorporating them into their own writings, is an indication that the writings of the members are generally faithful to Obu's thoughts and, therefore, can be taken to be the expression of the Leader's basic teachings.

Many people would have become members of Brotherhood, having seen the light. But they claim that since they came from Presbyterian family, they cannot break the tradition of the family and so must continue to hold (the) staff of office of the family in the church. I am telling you that they will perish with the staff of office.³⁷

Obu's observation here is a good illustration of the point we are trying to make here. That is, in the African context, religious affiliation is more often than not a family or even a community affair. The philosophy behind this fact is that, for Africans, the family that prays together, stays together. That is why religion is still such a potent, cohesive, and integrating force among Africans today, and why Africans are proverbially said to be a notoriously religious people. If there is a change in the family's religious affiliation, it would most likely be the idea of the man of the family, that is, the father of the family, and in that case the whole family will most likely follow him. It is very rarely the case that the mother or children will lead the way in these matters. Here again, the Westerner may not comprehend all this, because, as Wilson tells us, "... in the West, the assumption that a family would be united within one religion has been eroded."³⁸ This assumption, as we have said, has not yet eroded in Africa. That this is still so is evident in the statements made above both by those informants who could not belong to movements of their choice, because of family connections, and by Obu himself. Hence, we conclude that "religious deviance" as a concept is still a rare occurrence in

³⁷ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 40.

³⁸ Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 137.

Africa, and so one must be careful in applying that concept to the African context.

(c) Response During the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970

The situation created by the 30-month Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) provided a platform from which many Nigerians flocked into the existing new religious movements, and from which new ones emerged. In fact, it was during this period that David Barrett, writing in 1968, observed in the mainland part of the Cross River State "the greatest concentration of separatist churches in Africa."³⁹ A period of acute anxiety, of social and economic uncertainty and depression, of insecurity and danger to life and property, these war years led thousands of Nigerians to seek refuge and protection in these movements. During this period, prayer meetings and sessions of fasting were a common sight all over the country, particularly in the urban areas which were the main targets of the warring factions. As a result of this influx of people desperately looking for protection and security in the midst of political and social upheavals, the new religious movements enjoyed tremendous increases in their membership and church buildings or places of worship. The Brotherhood headquarters in Calabar, for instance, became both a physical and spiritual bastion for hundreds of

³⁹ Barrett, Schism and Renewal in Africa, p. 121; cf. p. 291. Wilson's observation comes to mind here: "... it is empirically well established that sects proliferate in periods of social unrest." See Bryan R. Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development," American Sociological Review, 24, No. 1 (1959), p. 8.

Nigerians, and Obu himself was apparently a great moral and spiritual support for these people. He tells us, if exaggeratingly, that "throughout the duration of the civil war, here in Calabar no other church was operating. Not even the so-called prayer houses were operating."⁴⁰ Indeed, Obu is further of the opinion that had he run away from Calabar as many others did during the war years, "the whole town would have vacated." People, he claims, were only waiting to hear the bad news that Leader Obu had left the city before they themselves would take to their heels, because, says Obu, "all of them had their hopes on the Leader."⁴¹

Many of the people who ran into these movements at that time had vowed to God that they and their families would remain devoted members of the various movements in which they were seeking refuge, if they were protected from the destructions of the war. Indeed, many in the movements today are known to be people who have kept this vow.

(d) Government Response.

Some Nigerians will perhaps describe the attitude of the various governments of Nigeria towards the new religious movements as neutral or "uninterested." Our opinion is, however, that no government could afford to exhibit a neutral or "uninterested" attitude towards

⁴⁰The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 120.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 119; cf. pp. 117-20 for Obu's own account of how his movement canopied the entire population of the Cross River State capital during the civil war.

movements that have such tremendous social and religious consequences for its citizens. So we must seek Nigerian governments' attitude towards their new religious movements in the context of our broad positive/negative typology of responses toward the new religions.

Our research has revealed that, for the most part, the new religious movements in Nigeria are being viewed with considerable respect and tolerance by the various governments of the country. This generally favourable and impartial regard for the movements by government derives first of all from the provision made in the country's Constitution for the freedom of religious practice and expression. Thus, those who oppose and are antagonistic to the new religious movements in the country may therefore be seen as acting in deflection, rather than in reflection, of an explicit value--tolerance of others' religious beliefs and practices--which is supposed to be a revered and treasured part of the country's Constitution. So far, we know of no cases of persecution by government against any of the movements that have conducted themselves within the requirements of the nation's law and order. Indeed, as a token of their good will towards the movements, the various governments of the country at both State and Federal levels have been quite co-operative with the larger and better known movements by granting them, as in the case of the BCS, certificates of incorporation and recognition, for instance. In Nigeria today, religious bodies must have such governmental recognition before they can acquire property and also before their clergy may obtain government authorization to officiate at legally-registered marriages.

This favourable governmental attitude towards the new religions is facilitated by the fact that the movements have been known generally to

have "behaved themselves." For instance, they are not known to have as yet posed any social or religious problems that might disrupt the peace, law and order of the society.⁴² Neither have any of them been known to have directly played any major role in the political arena of the country, nor to have manipulated or exploited their members in any way that would court public criticism and government intervention. For instance, none of the movements have employed questionable means of fund-raising or dubious methods of recruitment. Hence the present official silence and unspoken approval on the part of government on the existence and activities of the country's new religious movements. Therefore, there seems to be a kind of unwritten concordat between the government and the movements to the effect that as long as the latter conduct their activities within the allowance of the laws of the land, the former will continue to co-operate with them and even protect their interest. Some, especially the older mission churches, have, however, criticized this government attitude as being responsible for the accelerated proliferation of new movements on Nigeria's religious scene. These older churches fear, in the words of one of their clergymen, that "continued and excessive proliferation of churches might reduce the position of Christian churches in general in Nigeria to absurdity and

⁴² An exception to this remark is the case of the Maitatsine (Islamic) movement in Northern Nigeria. We prescind this movement from our discussion for two main reasons. First, we are dealing here exclusively with Christian religious movements. Second, there are serious doubts in Nigeria as to whether the Maitatsine movement is genuinely a religious movement or a political movement. For a brief discussion of this movement, see Raymond Hickey, "The 1982 Maitatsine Uprisings in Nigeria: A Note," African Affairs, 83, No. 331 (1984), 251-56.

the 'Christ event' might become unidentifiable."⁴³ Incidentally, this circumstance of cordiality, co-operation and happy co-existence between government and the new religious movements in general seems to be largely responsible for the present lack of studies on these movements carried out from the criminological perspective, as opposed to such other perspectives as the sociological, historical, theological, anthropological, psychological, and so on.

2. NEGATIVE RESPONSE

For the most part, the single most important influence on Nigerians' negative attitude towards the new religious movements in Nigeria, are the older, mission-founded, so-called historic churches. The preachers and leaders of these older churches allow no opportunity to slip by but use it to impress upon the minds of their members how very dangerous to their spirituality these movements are. Most of the time, these members usually do not bother to find out for themselves the truth or otherwise of such affirmations by their churches before they begin to develop negative attitudes towards the movements. It is not that the antagonists do not know that there is power in the movements; rather, it is the source of the power that they question. Or as Obu puts it: "Others in the world confess that the power (in the BCS) is indeed great but that it does not come from God."⁴⁴ Nor is it that

⁴³ Edmund Ilogu, "Independent African Churches in Nigeria," International Review of Mission, 63 (1974), p. 497.

the movements do not preach the word of God and practise love; rather, it is simply that the mission churches do not want to think of them as Christian movements.⁴⁵ Obu paints the picture of this negative attitude of the historic churches against his movement as follows:

. . . cast your mind back to the various accusations, shame, temptations, abuses, blackmailing as such like, being meted on B.C.S. It is up to the climax which could have caused most of you (the members) to deny this New Kingdom . . . your family waging war, husband and wife against each other, people ridiculing you at offices and along the streets--all these only to threaten you to deny your faith. . .⁴⁶

Apart from the occasional, largely private warnings or "counsels" from the pulpits of the mission churches to their members to avoid having any dealings with members of the new religious movements, the official, more public response of these older churches towards the movements has generally been subtle and underground. Sometimes their attitude ranges from mere suspicion, indifference, discrimination, to occasional acts of intolerance in the form of open rejection and hostility.⁴⁷

Contrary to the opinion of their antagonists, Nigeria's new religious movements persistently, sometimes defensively, lay claim to their Judaic-Christian foundations. For example, one frequently hears

(Footnote Continued)

⁴⁴Easter Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Realm of the Holy Spirit (1982), p. 37.

⁴⁵See Obu, The Return of the First Begotten of God to the World, pp. 30-33.

⁴⁶Your Word is Truth, vol. 10 (n.d.), pp. 26-27.

⁴⁷Cf. Omoyajowo, Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church, pp. 222-25.

in Obu's sermons such claims as: "Whatever is done in Brotherhood is, extracted from the Bible, the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is the sure foundation stone."⁴⁸ Or, "You are living witnesses that I have never taught you anything on my own without quoting from the Bible what God says or confirming from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴⁹ In spite of such claims, the mission churches are still very suspicious of the movements' teachings and regard such teachings as being un-Christian. This suspicion is evident in the mission churches' discriminatory attitude of reluctance to accept or even constantly turning down the movements' applications to become members of such national bodies as the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

As a result of the embarrassment of having their applications frequently turned down, some of the new religious movements have gone ahead in their own initiative to form their own Christian Councils where they can "feel at home." One of the most powerful of these Councils of indigenous churches has been the Nigerian Association of Aladura Churches (NAAC), founded in 1960, with over 95 indigenous denominations as members and a total constituency of 1.2 million Christians.⁵⁰ Also,

⁴⁸ December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, No. 4 (1980), p. 25.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 34; cf; p. 64; Christmas Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Revelation of the Holy Spirit, p. 64; August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 69; The Everlasting Gospel: Pentecostal Special Message to the Entire World, vol. 1 (1980?), pp. 53, 61.

⁵⁰ See David B. Barrett, ed., World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World AD 1900-2000 (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 529.

out of the Christian Peace Committee (CPC) meeting summoned in Lagos by the Cherubim and Seraphim in 1965, in which five of its independent branches (the Morning Star, Ita Balogun, Abiodun, Ebute Metta, and Hotonu) were represented, emerged the Cherubim and Seraphim Council of the World in October of that year.⁵¹ A month later, these same branches formed the Assembly of Elders, followed by a general rally in Lagos of all their members. Out of these developments emerged the existing National Council of Cherubim and Seraphim.⁵² It is, of course, a different question altogether whether any lasting unity among these independent factions has really been achieved.

Similar developments occurred in the South-eastern State (now Cross River State) of the country where in 1968, during the civil war, a body known as the Christian Community of Nigeria (CCON) was established by the new religious movements in that State. This, indeed, was a bold adventure on their part, since the authorities had at this time of national crisis banned the formation of such bodies and all public assemblies, as a preventive measure against any sabotage. Here, too, Obu's charisma was at work, for the formation of the CCON was the child of his brain. He it was who had conceived and articulated the need for such a body, and because of his charisma was able to rally the other new religious movements to his support. He was thus able to lift the other movements out of what looked like petty preoccupations, carry them above

⁵¹ Cyril O. Nwanunobi, "The Significance of Separatist Movements (Indigenous Sects) in Contemporary Eastern Nigeria," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1976, p. 376.

⁵² Ibid.

conflicts that could tear a society apart, and unite them in the pursuit of objectives worthy of their best efforts. Even to this day, most of the financial backing for the CCON comes from the BCS, one of whose senior pastors, at the time of this writing, serves as the Community's honorary secretary, following another pastor of the movement who had also served in that capacity. This Community even became recognized and registered by the Federal Government in 1977, seven years after the civil war.⁵³ It is worth mentioning here, in order to draw attention to the characteristic willingness of the new religious movements to participate in ecumenical programmes, that, unlike the Christian Council of Nigeria which restricts its membership to only the mission churches, the CCON throws its doors open to "all Churches, Prayer Houses and Assemblies professing faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour."⁵⁴

One of the main objectives of the CCON, according to its Constitution, is "to engage collectively in various welfare activities and projects in demonstration of practical Christianity."⁵⁵ Or, in the words of the Community's secretary at the time of this research (a pastor in the BCS), the purpose of the Community is "to care for the destitute, the hungry for material and spiritual food."⁵⁶ The actual implementation of these noble objectives was certainly a welcome relief

⁵³ Interview with the Community's Hon. Secretary, Pastor B.J. Etuk, February 22, 1984; cf. Umoh and Ekānem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. 7.

⁵⁴ The Constitution of the Christian Community of Nigeria (Calabar: Rio Press, 1971), p. 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Interview with Pastor B.J. Etuk, February 22, 1984.

for hundreds of war victims and displaced persons in the Cross River State, and demonstrates once again the usual humanitarian spirit of Nigeria's new religious movements. As of now, the operation and administrative machinery of the Community are restricted to the Cross River State with the BCS carrying most of its financial and staff burden. But plans are under way to expand its activities to other places in the country. Its members also plan to "participate in the building of the National Cathedral at Abuja by all Christian Churches."⁵⁷

A further instance of discrimination against the new religious movements by the mission churches in the Cross River State, for example, was when the media houses in that State were initially monopolized by members of the Christian Council (made up, as pointed out earlier, of the mission churches), to the complete exclusion of the new religious movements. It took some "fighting" and threatening from the new religions before the Christian Council in the State reluctantly allowed them some room to participate in the relaying of religious programmes over the State t.v. and radio networks. For instance, in a protest paper entitled "The Influence of the Christian Council of Nigeria in the Cross River State," Pastor Kenneth Bassey of the BCS decried what he described as "religious discrimination" in the following minatory words:

. . . for some time now the Christian Council of Nigeria has taken complete control or monopoly of a section of the Cross River State Broadcasting Corporation 'The Religious

⁵⁷ Ibid. Abuja, in Northern Nigeria, is in the process of becoming the country's new national capital.

Programmes.' This monopolistic attitude of the believers in Christ's Religion could lead to Religious conflict between this body and the Christian Community of Nigeria, if the situation is not arrested in time by the Government. No one is happy with what is happening in Northern Ireland and Lebanon because of Religious conflict. . . . The State Government should not wait until the conflicts erupt into the open before it takes appropriate⁵⁸ action . . . There is limit to human endurance.

Apparently this and similar threats from the new religious movements in the Cross River State have had some effect on the State Government and the management of the State media houses, because we have recently begun to see and hear, if infrequently, religious programmes of the new religious movements coming from the various t.v. and radio stations in the State. But the incidence of monopolizing media houses in the Cross River State by the mission churches is only a miniature of the kind of subtle, underground victimization and discrimination which these churches can condescend to carry out against their "separated brethren."

Sometimes, fantastic stories have been fabricated about the BCS by antagonists, with a view to causing Nigerian society to execrate the movement and thereby stay away from it, or with a view to confusing and discouraging the movement's members. For example, there is a story, now widely circulated in the Cross River State and other parts of the country, that Obu was caught in a fisherman's net in a river near Calabar. According to the story, Obu is said to have gone into the water to carry out some of his usual mystical rituals, out of the

⁵⁸ Kenneth E. Bassey, 'The Influence of the Christian Council of Nigeria in the Cross River State,' unpublished ms. (1981), pp. 1, 4.

performance of which he allegedly gets his spiritual powers. He is reported to have been caught by the fisherman while in the process of transforming himself into a mermaid. From his waist to his head, so the story claims, was Obu as he looks in real life, while the rest of him had already been transfigured into a mermaid.⁵⁹ But tried as he did, this researcher was neither able to confirm the truth of this story nor locate the fisherman in question.

Of course it was not difficult for Obu to see through the motives for such fabulous stories. In his view, such stories were

a plan by some church denominations.⁶⁰ They felt that with the trend of events every person would become members (sic) of Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, so they thought that what they would do to scare people away would be to declare the Leader dead. When that shall have been done, people would be compelled to stop from attending Brotherhood. They started giving the false information everywhere. Up till today when you go to many churches, you would hear people saying that the man had died since 1977. . . . Again when they see members of Brotherhood they would say 'I am sorry, I have heard what has happened.' If you tell them that such a story is not true they would argue with you. . . . Brethren, you find it very difficult to convince people even in Calabar that the Holy Father is still living.⁶¹

At other times, the mission churches would accuse Obu of using his evil spiritual powers to cause road accidents which take away lives, or of

⁵⁹ See a version of the story in Etuk, Revelation of the Great World Leader, pp. 66-69; cf. Eyo, The Truth Olumba Olumba Obu and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, pp. 37-38.

⁶⁰ That is, the phenomenal conversion of members from the mission churches into the BCS.

⁶¹ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 32; cf. p. 90.

destroying human lives in other dubious ways, all in an effort to enrich himself through metaphysical means.⁶² Such allegations, as Obu sees them, are simply attempts by these churches "to bias the minds of the Government and the authorities of Government against Brotherhood of the Cross and Star."⁶³

Quite often the hostility of the older churches towards the new religious movements has given birth to open confrontations involving physical exchange of blows between the two groups. A case in point was the public commotion in the streets of Calabar in 1977 in which the Apostolic Churches there, reportedly led by a breakaway member of the BCS, physically attacked Brotherhood members all over the city and in other places in the Cross River State and even in some places in Lagos.⁶⁴ Members of the BCS in their white soutanes in particular became the targets of such brutality anywhere they were seen by the attacking churches. A prominent member of the BCS recalls the 1977 incident as follows:

During this period some Brotherhood members could not wear white soutanes along the streets because people would attack them by throwing stones at them, abuse them, spit on them and disgrace them openly, only for the name of Olumba.⁶⁵

Several local newspapers carried a number of articles confirming this

⁶²See footnote 112 of chapter three.

⁶³The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, pp. 52-53.

⁶⁴Interview with Pastor Kenneth E. Bassey, February 21, 1984.

⁶⁵E.B. Eyo, The Truth About Olumba Olumba Obu and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. 38; cf. Eyo, New Heaven and New Earth, pp. 85-86, 155.

Calabar conflict. For instance, in its June 2, 1977 issue (p. 1), the State-owned The Nigerian Chronicle reported that a Brotherhood pregnant woman in her white soutane was "chased and molested by the (attacking) group around Mbukpa, Calabar." On another occasion, the attackers were said to have thrown stones, sticks, broken bottles, etc. at a Brotherhood congregation gathered for their evening prayers.⁶⁶ At another time during the conflict, the attackers allegedly "went to stone the Leader (Obu) at the altar."⁶⁷ As if all this was not enough, Brotherhood buildings and property were also destroyed by the antagonists.⁶⁸ It should be noted that in all this the Christian Council of Nigeria neither intervened nor said a word of disapproval of the cruel activities of the Apostolic Churches.

At the beginning of all these insurrections, members of the BCS, eager to demonstrate to their attackers in particular and to the general public at large that Brotherhoods were better Christians, remained relatively calm and cool-headed without fighting back. Pastor Kenneth Bassey tells at what stage of the conflict they could bear no more and began to fight back:

When we had been taxed to a melting point, we did everything to make our presence felt. We fought back. There was fighting everywhere. We began to march around Calabar, in our white soutanes, singing and dancing. And when we saw anyone trying to open his or her mouth rounded as if he or she was going to say 'O', we assumed that that person was

⁶⁶ The Nigerian Chronicle (Calabar), June 2, 1977, p. 1; cf. The Nigerian Chronicle, June 15, 1977, pp. 7, 13.

⁶⁷ Eyo, New Heaven and New Earth, p. 86.

⁶⁸ Interview with Pastor Kenneth E. Bassey, February 21, 1984.

going to say 'Olumba' or 'Obu' in derision of the holy Name of our Father. So we would descend on such a person. I tell you, it was really quite a show in the streets of Calabar. When the situation was getting out of hand, the police stepped in. There were some arrests from both sides of the conflict. But they kept on adjourning the case until the whole thing died a natural death. From that time to this day, there has been nothing of that⁶⁹ sort again anywhere in this country.

Although there may not have been any further incidents against the BCS or any of the other new religious movements in the country of the kind described here, except, perhaps the case of the Maitatsine,⁷⁰ one cannot deny the fact that, for the most part, the mission churches are still subtly hostile and unkind in the kind of language they use in talking about the new religions. For example, it is not uncommon to hear these churches refer to the movements derogatorily as "the deceivers and the deceived," "the false prophets in sheep's clothing," "the occultists," etc. Obu puts it this way:

Have you not heard what people say about Brotherhood? They call Brotherhood of the Cross and Star the church of evil doers, the church of infidels and that membership is drawn from persons who have never (genuinely)⁷¹ attended any church denomination.

Elsewhere Obu makes the following complaint: "The so-called spiritual churches/or Christian churches are those who persecute, hate and plan

⁶⁹Interview with Pastor Kenneth E. Bassay, February 21, 1984.

⁷⁰See footnote 42 above.

⁷¹The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 29.

evil against Brotherhood of the Cross and Star."⁷² On another occasion he observed: "Many people in the world are praying and calling on Jesus to kill the Leader of the Brotherhood fold."⁷³ Obu further notes in one of his sermons that "it is generally said that Brotherhood is 'Satan,' 'Ghost,' 'Devil.'"⁷⁴ But he is optimistic that "it will not be long before all the blasphemous words they spoke against Brotherhood of the Cross and Star be proved false and a mere hear-say."⁷⁵

A further instance of the mission churches' negative and uncharitable attitude towards the new religions may again be illustrated from the kind of language used in a report written in 1963 on some of the new religious movements for the Inter-Church Study Group meeting (an outgrowth of the Christian Council of Nigeria in the Cross River State) held in Uyo. The report on the BCS, allegedly prepared by a Pastor of the Apostolic Church, said in part:

This club or society as it is called is a terrible combination of spiritualism, occult science, mysticism, and allied subject with Christianity. Poor Christianity, as a close study of this cult reveals, is nothing short of a camouflage to the evil machinations of this secret society.⁷⁶

⁷²The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 75.

⁷³Ibid., p. 39; cf. The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 76.

⁷⁴See Obu, in Kevin, p. 127; see also Duke, p. 82; The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, pp. 50, 111;

⁷⁵The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3, p. 114.

⁷⁶Report presented by I.B. Ita to the Uyo Inter-Church Study Group, June 1963, p. 1.

In a similar vein, Edmund Ilogu, a Nigerian academic and clergyman, includes the BCS among those Nigerian new religious movements which, according to him, "are characterized by strange theological teaching and very elementary organization with small membership."⁷⁷

But why all the persecution, hostility, vilification, and general negative and unkind attitude towards these new religious movements, particularly against the BCS, one may ask. It appears that the answer to this question is not as easy to arrive at as some may suppose. However, one has to listen to both sides of the conflict in order to have some idea as to what the bone of contention might be. Members of the mission churches who carry out their attacks on the new religious movements will argue, for instance, that they are fighting to salvage the gospel of Christ from the corruption and distortion into which it has fallen in the congregations of the new movements. They decry, for example, some of the doctrines and teachings of the movements which they judge to be false, un-Christian or the very perversion of the Christian faith, or, in the words of Ilogu, speaking of Nigeria's new religious movements in general, "the more grotesque elements in their teaching and practices."⁷⁸

A good instance of the doctrinal dispute which has incensed the hostile attitude of the mission churches against the BCS, for instance, is the latter's insistence that Obu is very God in human form and that,

⁷⁷ Ilogu, "Independent African Churches in Nigeria," p. 497; but Ilogu must by now have changed his mind about the organization and membership of the BCS.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

as God, he is eternal and immortal. In the view of the mission churches, this doctrine of Obu's divinity is not only contrary to Christian faith but also shameless blasphemy outright. As pointed out in chapter four of this work, members of the BCS themselves are not unaware of the controversial and incendiary nature of this particular doctrine and its possible consequence. This was why, as pointed out earlier, Obu himself initially tried, apparently without success, to discourage his followers from publicizing it. At that time he felt that the time was not yet ripe for his deity to be "revealed" to "the world."

After analyzing the reasons why the BCS is so passionately disliked by many Nigerian Christians, especially in the Cross River State, one member of the movement said insightfully:

It seems obvious that the world would not have bothered so much if only the Leader is revealed to be the great prophet; or a great healer or a great preacher or a great magician. . . . But what is disturbing and what seems very unacceptable to many in the world today is (sic) the face of His glory is that He the Leader being a man, has spiritually revealed Himself to many all over the world as God's incarnate in the most United⁷⁹ Trinity--Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, whatever other reasons there were for the 1977 opposition to the BCS, their doctrine of the deity of their leader was no doubt one of the major ones. Of the 1977 incident one reporter wrote:

Perhaps the greatest threat to law and order is the disturbing rumour that Olumba Olumba Obu.

⁷⁹ Udoumoren, "The Profile of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star," p. 34. Cf. Amadi, "Power and Purity," p. 399.

claims to be 'God' or 'the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost' or 'the way, the truth and life'.

This Brotherhood teaching, continued the reporter, "'which borders on heresy might not be appreciated by a less tolerant public.'"⁸⁰ This feeling of uneasiness about this particular Brotherhood doctrine may further be emphasized by referring to the following remarks made by an apparently angry member of one of the mission churches:

... my concern, and that of most good Christians is that some members of this sect including Apostle V.E. Ekpenyong declare that Olumba Olumba Obu is God. Will members of this sect stop making and publishing provocative statements which are disturbing to the Christian world.

But members of the BCS appear not in the least shaken or feel intimidated by such public reactions to this particular doctrine of theirs. Rather, they seem to feel strengthened and encouraged to continue in this belief by the fact that such persecution has always been the fate of God's true followers.⁸² They say, for instance:

... as those who had acclaimed Jesus as the Son of God were hated and persecuted in the olden days, those who acclaim Olumba Olumba Obu as God in human form are denounced by other religious organizations as blasphemers. They have been hated and persecuted.⁸³

In encouraging his followers not to panic in the face of persecution,

⁸⁰The Nigerian Chronicle, June 15, 1977, p. 13.

⁸¹The Sunday Chronicle (Calabar), March 5, 1978.

⁸²The booklet What Is Cross? was written just to make this point.

⁸³Umoh and Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. xiii.

Obu holds up to them the example of the prophets before him who were similarly persecuted. He would tell them, for instance:

. . . they arrested John the Baptist and killed him. . . . They also arrested and killed our Lord Jesus Christ and now they feel they are coming to do the same thing they did to both John the Baptist and our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Which man of God did they not persecute and kill beginning from Jeremiah?⁸⁴

Then he would refer them to the following passage in 1 Peter 2:20-21:

. . . when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Or he would try to encourage them by referring them to the words of 2 Timothy 3:12: "Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

Indeed, for Obu the testimony of those who sought to get rid of Jesus, could as well be the resounding averment of the mission churches in Nigeria which persecute the BCS: "It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you being a man, make yourself God" (John 10:33). On that score, Obu's further remarks which follow are appurtenant:

Is the same thing not happening today? The people say O.O. Obu is the real servant of God. He does the work of God without comparison. But that we say He (Obu) is God is not acceptable to them, as that (to them) is human worship. They cannot afford to worship man. And, brethren, I ask, what is the difference? Hear what they say: 'For preaching He is second to none; for power He is the most powerful person; for love He alone shows the expression of love.' They continue to count

⁸⁴ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, vol. 1: The Spirit of God, p. 24.

the numerous virtues and have concluded that He is without comparison. But the snag in the whole affair is that we refer to Him as God, which is unacceptable to them.⁸⁵

Perhaps one should point out here that Nigerian Christians' angry reaction to Brotherhood doctrine of Obu's deity does not seem to be against polytheism as such,⁸⁶ as orthodox Judaic-Christian reaction would be. For Nigerian Christians, coming from and still being influenced by the African traditional religious background in which gods are galore, the concept of the co-existence of many gods is not a new and totally objectionable concept. More than anything else, what seems to be objectionable to Nigerian Christians who oppose Obu, is perhaps the fact that members of the BCS should make their human Leader a God. However, when members of the movement think about the constant harassment and persecution they are experiencing from the Nigerian public, they find it "impossible to understand some people who are saying that people in Brotherhood will end up in hell because they are worshipping a human being."⁸⁷ If those who oppose them for believing in the deity of Obu are themselves true Christians, these members argue, how could they ever miss the "revelation of the great world leader"--the manifestation of the God-man presently living on earth

⁸⁵ The Return of the First Begotten of God to the World, pp. 28-29.

⁸⁶ One is not suggesting here that Brotherhoodism is officially polytheistic pure and simple, although one may easily come away with such an impression if one does not study the movement's teachings carefully enough, as most orthodox Christians and antagonists in Nigeria have not done. For more on the appearance of polytheism in Brotherhood teachings, see section 3 of chapter three above.

⁸⁷ Etuk, Revelation of the Great World Leader, p. 12.

among men? But on their part, members of the mission churches in Nigeria see themselves as playing the role of defenders of the Christian faith and, without compunction, their attitude towards the new religious movements as the natural reaction of crusaders against falsehood.

To give yet another instance of how some of the doctrines of the new religious movements may be said to have been somehow responsible for the hostile attitudes of the older churches against the new movements, we recall here the Cherubim and Seraphim's identification and comparison of themselves with the supposed Seraphim in heaven. This movement's choice of the Archangel Michael as its "captain" and Jehovah as its "Founder" is said to have "sparked off a series of press attacks on the Society. Archdeacon Ogunbiyi criticized the explicit comparison of the members with the Seraphim in heaven . . .",⁸⁸

One must admit, however, that sometimes some of the new religious movements themselves have been directly responsible for much of the hostile attitudes the mission churches have toward them. For instance, the incendiary and condemnatory preaching and holier-than-thou/we-know-better attitude of the God's Kingdom Society specifically towards the Roman Catholics and the Jehovah Witnesses (from which itself emerged) have frequently brought this particular movement and the two mission bodies to loggerheads. Indeed, this very movement is known generally to be

militant and aggressive towards the teachings and beliefs of other churches (and) could not allow any church teachings that appear to it wrong to go unchallenged. . . . This attitude

⁸⁸ Omoyajowo, Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church, p. 11; cf; p. 17.

would explain why the G.K.S. sermons are all written in a defensive way against the teachings of other churches.

In fact, the God's Kingdom Society's holier-than-thou and bellicose attitude is not directed against the mission churches only, but even also towards other new religious movements. Because of that kind of attitude, this movement, it is said, "does not practise interfaith or interdenominationalism which she believes is nothing but religious hypocrisy and a union of contraries."⁹⁰ Moreover, due to its attitude towards other churches, the God's Kingdom Society has faced in its history a series of confrontations, some physical, with these churches, especially with the Roman Catholics and the Jehovah's Witnesses.⁹¹ Harold Turner reports that the founder of this particular movement, Gideon Urhobo, "was twice imprisoned on charges such as public preaching without a permit and insulting Roman Catholics."⁹²

⁸⁹ Ilega, p. 474. On the whole issue of the G.K.S. vs. the Watchtower Society and Government relationships in the 1930s, see chapter 5 of Ilega's work (pp. 147-70). See also the movement's publication "Why Does the G.K.S. Always Attack the Roman Catholics?" in Weekly Sermons, 11, No. 29 (n.d.).

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 475; cf. How Much Do You Know About G.K.S. (Warri, Nigeria: G.K.S. Press, n.d.), p. 7.

⁹¹ See, for instance, the founder's "An Open Letter to His Excellency the Governor of Nigeria" (then Sir Bernard Bourdillon), dated 10th February, 1950, in which he appealed to the Governor "to issue a special warning to all religious leaders in Nigeria and their conspirators to stop interfering with my God-given work . . ."; cited in Ilega, Appendix E, p. 485.

⁹² Turner, Religious Innovation in Africa, p. 135.

Even the generally tolerant and accommodating Olumba Olumba Obu could sometimes succumb to the temptation of making unguarded statements that may not be taken kindly by other Christian bodies. For example, he can injudiciously say: "There is no church (or) denomination which practises His (God's) words, nor is there any of them which preaches His word;"⁹³ or "... you will discover that the so-called spiritual churches and other churches have betrayed themselves. They show themselves as worldly people but profess to be godly people. The real name for them should be satanic or demonic churches."⁹⁴ On another occasion, he made this direct attack on the Jehovah Witnesses:

There are some people who mistakenly call themselves 'Jehovah Witnesses.' They do not witness anything for Him. You are the real witnesses, because you are the people who have seen what God has done, how God has raised the dead, how He has made the blind to see, the dumb to speak, and the deaf to hear; how God has performed wonderful miracles; and so you should bear the name 'Jehovah Witnesses,' God's witnesses. You should go and tell those people who erroneously call themselves 'Jehovah Witnesses' that they have not seen anything which God had done.⁹⁵

Further, the mission churches, especially the Roman Catholics, find some of the beliefs and practices of many of the new movements unappealing, thereby deterring them from joining such movements. For example, many members of the mission churches appreciate, and expect it in their last day on earth, the practice of carrying corpses into

⁹³ Our Lord Jesus Christ the Mouthpiece of God, p. 33.

⁹⁴ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 75.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 17, 18.

churches for a final ritual blessing before interment. This practice is frowned upon by a number of the new religious movements, such as the BCS, the God's Kingdom Society, and Samuel Wobo's Spiritual Healing Church of the Lord. Those Nigerians who would like this final honour and blessing from their churches are therefore discouraged from joining the new movements that teach against this practice. That the teaching against this particular practice is a common reason why many Nigerians stay away from the BCS, for instance, is recognized by Obu himself, as is evident in his following remarks:

From the existence of man, he dwells under the influence of 'TRADITION,' that is, the act of what my great-grand-father had been doing. Because of this same belief, the problem now facing the world is that Brotherhood of the Cross and Star has come to stamp out Tradition; that if someone dies, there will be no mourning houses to be observed, even no ringing of (church) bell notifying such death; that drinks will not be allowed during the funeral celebrations; that as members in Ekpo, Obon, or any other secret cult, counting their losses (i.e. for not having good time during such festivities), they then objected never to join Brotherhood, which they term 'society of deceivers'.⁹⁶

Moreover, some female members of the mission churches are also deterred from becoming members of some of the new religious movements, because of the movements' beliefs and practices which the women find disagreeable, for instance the taboo which bars menstruating women and nursing mothers from entering or even going near the church or any of the movements' sacred places. The Celestial Church of Christ and some of the Aladura group of churches are good examples of those movements

⁹⁶ Your Word is Truth, vol. 10 (n.d.), p. 24.

which still stick to this vestige of African traditional religious practice.

We have so far been considering, from the perspective of members of the mission churches, the reasons or motives why these churches are hostile or even literally persecute the new religious movements in Nigeria. It remains for us to listen now to the new religions themselves as to why the mission churches are responding to their existence and activities in the negative ways we have tried to delineate here. This researcher once asked Olumba Obu why he thought the mission churches were antagonistic toward him and his movement. His answer, which, in fact is representative of the answer other Nigerian new religious movements give, was: "Jealousy; that's all I can say. They are jealous because they are losing their members to us." He gives the same reason for the jealousy of the mission churches as follows:

The bishops and pastors of various denominations have met several times to discuss how they will destroy Brotherhood because if it is allowed to continue to spread like wild fire, their very existence would soon be determined and all their members would be absorbed by Brotherhood and their churches will remain empty. . . . The church dignitaries have seen their relative positions and are now praying that God and Jesus should kill Leader Obu for misleading His children and for withdrawing all their members into his own fold.⁹⁷

Asked why he thought the mission churches were losing their members, Obu replied:

⁹⁷ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, pp. 46-47. The reference here to "the bishops and pastors of various denominations" is most likely the Inter-Church Study Group, an outgrowth of the Cross River State wing of the Christian Council of Nigeria. See footnote ⁷⁶ above.

Simply because they are not satisfying the needs of their members. Those members come here for help; they find the help they need and decide to stay here, on their own accord.⁹⁸ We don't press anyone to become a Brotherhood.

Pastor Bassey of the BCS expressed almost a similar opinion this way:

"It is the spiritual decamping from the orthodox churches into the Brotherhood that annoys the orthodox churches. While they retrogress, we progress, because we practise 'love one another' but they don't. They sow hatred and reap the same. We sow love and reap love."⁹⁹

This same theme of jealousy as the motive behind the hostility and persecution from the mission churches against the new movements was also mentioned by the founder of the God's Kingdom Society as early as 1951 when he wrote in his autobiography concerning his conflict with the Jehovah Witnesses: "... when Brown saw that many young men had joined the G.K.S. and the Lord was blessing His Kingdom, he became jealous and took action against me."¹⁰⁰

As we saw in chapter six in which we discussed Obu's attitude to African traditional culture, it is not only the mission churches that show hostility towards the new religious movements in general, and in particular to the BCS. Other religious groups are also threatened by the teachings and tremendous expansion and influence of some of these new religious movements. For example, the practitioners of African

⁹⁸ Interview with Obu, October 11, 1980. Cf. The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, pp. 46-47; see also ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁹⁹ Interview with Pastor Kenneth, E. Bassey, February 21, 1984.

¹⁰⁰ Gideon M. Urhobo, "Eighteen Years Kingdom Service" (Yaba, Lagos: Sankey Press, 1951), p. 21; cited in Ilega, p. 161.

traditional religions, especially the native doctors (healers), occultists, witches, and members of the various secret societies within these native religions 'who have lost (their) clients and customers to the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star,' are not happy with this particular movement. As Umoh and Ekanem put it: 'These categories of critics feel very strongly aggrieved against the Brotherhood and Leader Olumba Olumba Obu, because people who had been spending considerable amount of money to patronise them have now joined the Brotherhood and their problems have been solved there free.'¹⁰¹ In fact, Obu says that the mere hearing of Brotherhood singing in the villages, where these indigenous religions are still mostly practised, unnerves the practitioners who 'complain that the powers of their gods have been destroyed by the singing.'¹⁰²

It may be concluded from our discussion thus far that the primary reason or motive for the negative attitude towards Nigeria's new religious movements on the part of the mission churches and the practitioners of African traditional religions in that country, is jealousy--jealousy for the fact that many of the new movements are attracting unto themselves hundreds of members, especially their 'financial members,' from both the missions churches and the traditional religions. This being so, it seems to us that the mission churches' self-imposed role as the defenders of the Christian faith is in part a holy cover-up.

¹⁰¹ Umoh and Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. 3.

¹⁰² Revelation of the Holy Spirit: Special Release for Christ's Week, p. 68; cf. p. 76.

One would have thought, though, that the rather excessive amount of hostility and antagonism directed especially by the mission churches against the new religious movements would have intimidated the movements or at least discouraged and thwarted their progress and the emergence of new ones. But this has by no means been the case. Rather, it appears that the stronger and more intense the persecution, vilification and accusation, the more fervent and vigorous in their conviction, commitment and mission these movements become, and the more frequently new ones emerge. As Obu has said about his own case, "it is this persecution that has strengthened me and I always walk with boldness."¹⁰³ He further claims elsewhere that "the more people try to obstruct Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, the more it grows in leaps and bounds."¹⁰⁴ Indeed, it is reported that amidst the hostility towards this particular movement, and in the very heat of the great controversy over the genuineness of their leader, "many more people joined the Brotherhood. More and more important visitors called to see Leader Olumba-Olumba Obu."¹⁰⁵

Anyone familiar with the programmes and progress of the BCS will certainly agree that the claims made here are not merely rhetorics and polemics. In fact, one can say that the BCS speaks here for the rest of Nigeria's new religious movements which continue to do very well in terms of increases in their memberships and physical accomplishments.

¹⁰³ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 4, p. 111.

¹⁰⁴ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, vol. 1, Nos. 1 & 2 (1981), p. 82.

¹⁰⁵ Umoh and Ekanem, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. 4.

How do we explain this continuing success and progress of Nigeria's new religious movements in the face of the mounting hostility of the mission churches? The explanation seems to lie in what Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine call the psychology of persecution.¹⁰⁶ According to this theory, ridicule, non-acceptance, opposition and persecution, rather than discourage, strengthen and reinforce the internal cohesiveness and solidarity of the members of groups against whom these are directed. In the case of Nigeria's new religious movements, if the opposition of the mission churches were not there, perhaps the internal solidarity and cohesiveness in them, which in turn are conducive to growth and progress, might not have been there either, at least not to the same degree one finds them at the present time. Which means, in the end, that the mission churches might be unconsciously doing these movements a world of good.

¹⁰⁶ See Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, "Five Factors Crucial to the Growth and Spread of a Modern Religious Movement," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 7, No. 1 (1968), p. 36; cf. the case of the Jehovah's Witness in Nazi Germany in Christine King, "The Case of the Third Reich," in Barker, ed., New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society, pp. 125-39. See also Roy Wallis, "Should Academics Attend Moonie Conferences?" Queen's News, No. 83/03 (1983), unpaginated.

CHAPTER VIII

BROTHERHOODISM IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The theorizing mind tends always to oversimplification of its materials. This is the root of all that absolutism and one-sided dogmatism by which both philosophy and religion have been infested. Let us not fall immediately into a one-sided view of our subject, but let us rather admit freely at the outset that we may very likely find no one essence, but many characters which may alternately be equally important to religion.

--William James¹

In the preceding chapters, we often consciously (sometimes unconsciously) hinted at some issues that might be of interest to theoretical social scientists. Except in a few cases, we did not engage in much theorizing in those chapters, as our concern there was mainly descriptive, classificatory, and analytical. In this final chapter, we wish to attempt some theoretical interpretation of a selected number of those issues that are of particular theoretical interest to us. We undertake this exercise as far as possible in the spirit of the wise exhortation offered by James in the above epigraph.

¹William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature, with a new Introduction by Reinhold Niebuhr (1902; rpt., New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 39.

1. Why the Emergence of New Religious Movements in Contemporary Africa?

In our study of contemporary Africa's new religious movements over the years, we have become a little uncomfortable with the Marxist theory (in its true economic reductionist fashion) that these movements are a consequence of socio-economic and political dissatisfaction on the part of Africans under colonialism and apartheid. Our discomfort with this theory arises from the fact that most (i.e. well over 90%) of these movements have come into existence after the days of colonialism and cannot, therefore, be said to have emerged because of and in protest against the colonial situation--that is, the situation of racial conflict, economic exploitation, or political and cultural repression.

Take the Nigerian scene for an example. This country has never had the problem of apartheid; neither has she anymore the need to fight under the garb of "religious revolution" against colonialism. In this connection, we cannot but agree wholeheartedly with Enang whose extensive and in-depth study of the new religious movements among the Annang of the Cross River State of Nigeria (a stronghold of the BCS) led him to the following conclusion:

In a serious consideration of our situation in Annang, political factors cannot hold as there is no political struggle between a foreign political oppressor and a hidden or open gang of frustrated nationalists who find outlets for their political self-expression in the AIC (Annang Independent Churches).² Political independence went smoothly in Nigeria.

²Enang, Salvation in a Nigerian Background, p. 328.

Yet Nigeria witnesses the greatest permutation and proliferation of new religious movements in West Africa, especially in those areas of the country in which the bulk of our research was conducted, the Calabar and mainland areas of the Cross River State, to the extent that one politician from another part of the country some years ago remarked sarcastically that the main industries of the Cross River State were prayer houses and churches. He was referring specifically to the proliferation of new religious movements in that State. In fact, David Barrett had also observed in 1968 (eight years after Nigeria's political independence from Great Britain) that it was in this very part of the country that one witnessed what he described then as "the greatest concentration of separatist churches in Africa."³ This observation was to be confirmed years later, according to Caroline Ifeka-Moller, by "Harold Turner's survey of the geographical distribution of Aladura churches in eastern Nigeria during the mid-nineteen sixties (which) showed that there is a concentration of Aladura members . . . around Uyo, Eket, Ikot Ekpene (all major cities in the Cross River State)."⁴

It is true, however, that in central and southern Africa there have been religious movements that came into existence in response to the oppressive conditions of colonialism. One has in mind here, for instance, such movements as Kinbanguism in the former Belgian Congo (now Zaire) and other Zionist and Bantu/Zulu movements in South Africa, such

³Barrett, Schism and Renewal in Africa, p. 121; cf. p. 291.

⁴Caroline Ifeka-Moller, "White Power: Social-structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity, Eastern Nigeria, 1921-1966," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 8, No. 1 (1974), p. 63, Table 1, note 7; see also p. 65.

as the Nazirite Baptist Church in Natal and the Original Church of the White Bird in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). But these are only very isolated examples, and do not justify in any way the practice of lumping together holus-bolus all African new religious movements as a bunch of protest movements.

In the place of the above theory of causation, we have found to be empirically more relevant to the African scene the theory which emphasizes the religious factor in the emergence of African new religious movements. Two contemporary advocates of this interpretation are Harold Turner and Lamin Sanneh. We agree with the former, in our opinion, probably the foremost authority in the study of the phenomenon of new religious movements on a world-wide scope,⁵ when he suggests that the religious motive for the birth of Africa's new religious movements remains "the profoundest clue" to understanding these movements, and that all other considerations are "inadequate signs of their inner religious reality."⁶

In the same vein, Sanneh stresses the religious foundation and dimension of African new religious movements, and observes that "even in that volatile political atmosphere" of the colonial and early post-colonial days, "it is a striking fact that African Christian spokesmen were concerned with the religious implications of the threats

⁵For a world survey of new religious movements in the so-called tribal societies, see H.W. Turner, "Tribal Religious Movements," in Encyclopedia Britanica (1974 edition), Macropaedia, 18: 697-705.

⁶Turner, Religious Innovation in Africa, p. 38.

that confronted them."⁷ He goes on, in fact, to propose the caveat that

to fuse the theme of the African religious response with the political theme and annex it as a sub-plot of the great nationalist cause is to overlook the explicit religious concerns of those involved. An indigenous Church, for which many strove, was to precede the nationalist state with which it was not identical.⁸

Sanneh further stresses that

religious dissent seems to have been the result of genuine disagreements over religious issues, which we need to bear in mind when we make religious movements the byproducts of social and political forces.

We realize, of course, that the religious dimension as a causal factor for most African religious movements is itself a very complex matter. In general, however, it has had to do with discrepancies between Western missionary cultures and African traditional cultures, especially in the areas of family life (e.g. the question of polygyny), ethics, church or religious leadership, theology and liturgy. As John Taylor has maintained, speaking of African new religious movements in general, "it is good that we should see in the sects the expression of a demand for the church to be more African, but it may be more important to recognize in them the demand for the church to become Christian."¹⁰ Where African Christians could no longer cope with the strains and

⁷ Sanneh, West African Christianity: The Religious Impact, p. xiii.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁰ John V. Taylor, "Saints and Heretics," Basileia (1959), p. 312.

stresses imposed on them by the guest cultures and cultus, they felt the need to "separate" from the parent mission churches to establish churches or movements in which they could feel at home. For example, Peel, speaking about the founding of early African churches among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, observes that "the real motive of the founders was the conviction that the (mission) churches were still exotic institutions, and would remain so until, led by Africans, they purged themselves of their adventitious and inessential European cultural trappings."¹¹

In this connection, the case of the BCS is a little difficult to theorize about since, unlike most new religious movements in Nigeria, it did not originate as an angry, disgruntled movement out of an existing mission (parent) church. True, most of its members are now being drawn from the three corners of Nigeria's religious heart--Nigerian traditional religions, Christianity and Islam--but that fact cannot be said to be the foundation of the movement's coming into existence. Indeed, one could even venture to say in this regard that the BCS came into existence ex nihilo. This fact is important to bear in mind for a full appreciation of the origin, development and progress of this particular movement. It is also important for one to remember this fact in trying to understand the psychology, self-image, public image, and purposes of the movement. Obu's statement about the independent origin of his movement is also significant in this regard:

If I had been a member of any church (or) denomination, I would have been tied to the apron-string of my church. I would not have found

¹¹ Peel, "Syncretism and Religious Change," pp. 128-29.

it easy to cut the string to establish afresh. If I had been brought up in the strict Presbyterian way, I would have attended the Presbyterian school, Sunday school, I would have gone into the Presbyterian secondary school or the Presbyterian Teachers' college after which I would have been sent into Trinity college at Umuahia to train as a priest, I would have held my allegiance to the Presbyterian church, I would not have withdrawn from it. Under such a circumstance, it would not have been possible for me to resign from my post of a priest to establish a new faith.¹²

If the BCS had emerged in the heydays of Nigerian pre-independence nationalism of the late 1940s and most of the 1950s, and if after its emergence one found its leader to be active and vocal on the country's political stage, one would naturally have sought political reasons for the movement's coming into existence. But nothing on the pages of Nigeria's political history--past or present--points to any political causes for the appearance of the BCS on Nigeria's religious scene. Moreover, if the movement had broken away or separated from an existing mission or African church, one would have sought the cause(s) for the separation in possible discrepancies or disagreements over such issues, for instance, as church leadership, polity and policies, beliefs and practices, etc., between the parent church and the child movement. However, the history of the BCS shows no such development. What, then, can one say were the causal factors for the emergence of the BCS?

To ask such a question is to assume that there must always be "causes" before a new religion is born. But is that kind of

¹²The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 40. The historical background to Obu's specific reference here to the Presbyterian Church is that his home village was missionized by this Church, and even to this day remains predominantly Presbyterian. Hence Obu himself grew up in a Presbyterian environment.

assumption theoretically and empirically sound? - Hardly. Indeed, we know from the history of religions that not all religions of the world have had concrete causal factors for their coming into existence. Take the case of Christianity, for example. There may have been theological and political causes for the birth of Protestant Christianity, but the political, economic or even cultural factors that gave birth to incipient Christianity as a new religion are not so obvious. True, primitive Christianity was born into existing political, social and cultural structures, and from its very beginning interacted with these structures. But it would not be correct to say, without any further ado, that it was these structures that brought Christianity into existence. One can, in fact, put forth the same argument about the beginnings of Islam and the major Oriental religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. It seems to us that the only "causes" for the emergence of these religions were (a) the birth of charismatic individuals who, because of their intrinsic charisma, developed their leadership potentials to the degree that they were able to win (b) the recognition and acceptance of groups of people who became their followers. This mystery of charisma, as Weber has amply demonstrated, operates not only in the religious realm but also in other areas of human activities, as can be illustrated by the existence of political and other social movements which have emerged as a result of the presence of charisma-endowed personalities. We see the emergence of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star in Nigeria exactly in the same way. Thus, the BCS has come into existence through the first of the three principal methods through which, according to Wilson, new religious movements emerge,

namely, (a) spontaneous development around a charismatic leader; (b) by schism; and (c) by organized revival.¹³

As we argued in chapter one, in order for a charismatic leader to maintain his or her charisma and thereby retain the confidence and trust of his or her followers, he or she must constantly demonstrate to the followers that he or she is still in control of his or her charismatic powers. The charismatic leader may do this in a number of ways. For example, in the case of the religious charismatic leader, his or her followers will naturally expect him or her to fulfil their spiritual as well as physical needs or to solve their problems in some supernatural or miraculous ways. For instance, the charismatic leader may be expected to heal the allegedly incurable diseases that his or her followers may bring to him or her, or to intervene in their favour in difficult and intricate court cases, or to protect them from fatal accidents or against the evil powers of enemies or witches, etc. If the charismatic leader is a political one, he or she may be expected by the followers to keep on demonstrating his or her charisma by maintaining his or her original popularity both at home and abroad and thus increase his or her followership, or constantly and regularly to win elections, and always to defend successfully his or her party and policies against the opposition.

As pointed out earlier, Obu has without question been able to maintain his personal charisma and popularity and the popularity of his movement among thousands of Nigerians and non-Nigerians at home and

¹³ Bryan R. Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development," American Sociological Review, 24, No. 1 (1959), p. 7.

abroad. He has been able to do this by reportedly providing the necessary physical and spiritual protection, however that is defined, to his followership. We shall show later in the present chapter that his alleged ability to provide for the physical and spiritual needs of the masses of Nigerians is the major "cause," though not of the emergence of the movement in the first instance, but of its increasing popularity, progress and rapid expansion.

2. The Question of Typology

Partly as a way of paying deserving tribute to those sociologists of religion who pioneered in the area of the typology and development of religious organizations--for instance, Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, H. Richard Niebuhr, Howard Becker, Liston Pope, John Milton Yinger, to mention only a few names here¹⁴--we wish to continue our discussion in this chapter with the old question of typology, and to indicate where the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star fits in this regard. This approach naturally and necessarily links our research to the founding

¹⁴ See, for example, Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (London: Unwin University Books, 1930), esp. pp. 144-54; Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, Harper Torchbooks ed., 2 vols. translated by Olive Wyon with an Introduction by H. Richard Niebuhr (1931; rpt., New York: Harper and Brother, 1960), esp. vol. 1, pp. 331-82; Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism; Howard Becker, Systematic Sociology: On the basis of the Beziehungslehre and Gebildelehre of Leopold von Wiese (New York: John Wiley, 1932); Liston Pope, Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia, with an Introduction by Richard A. Peterson and N.J. Demerath (1942; rpt., New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1965); J. Milton Yinger, "The Sociology of Religion of Ernst Troeltsch," in Harry Elmer Barnes, ed., An Introduction to the History of Sociology (1948; rpt., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 309-15.

spirits of sociology in general and to the foundations of its sub-discipline, the sociology of religion, in particular. The subtle hyperbole in it notwithstanding, there is some truth in what N.J. Demerath said two decades ago: "No field is more indebted to its predecessors than the sociology of religion, and none of its legacies is more enduring than the church-sect dichotomy."¹⁵ In somewhat the same vein, Lorne Tepperman has also rightly said recently: "The sociology of religion shows not only great persistence but also great continuity with past concerns. . . . debates that are centuries old, that have been carried on across continents and across disciplines by the best minds of their times."¹⁶ But as Tepperman also hastens to add, these concerns and debates are "still unresolved . . . about the nature of social reality and of sociology itself."¹⁷ We endorse this latter observation, too, in order to underscore the fact these issues and concerns may still remain "unresolved" after one has finished reading the present chapter.

(a) Is the BCS a Sect or a Denomination?

It was Niebuhr who first came up with the hypothesis that a sect-type religious organization can exist for only one generation after

¹⁵ N.J. Demerath, Social Class in American Protestantism (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1965), p. 37.

¹⁶ Lorne Tepperman, "Editor's Introduction," in O'Toole, Religion: Classic Sociological Approaches, p. vi.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. vii.

which period it becomes either a church or a denomination.¹⁸ However, Wilson has argued, on the contrary, that "... some sects persist as such over several generations," and that the development of a sect into a church or denomination or its persistence ("retardation") as a sect depends on a number of circumstances or factors.¹⁹ Among these factors Wilson lists the following: the circumstances of sect emergence; the internal structure of sect organization, the degree of separateness from the external world, the coherence of sect values, and group commitments and relationships.²⁰

Following Becker, Yinger, Pope and Brewer, Wilson proceeds to list ten characteristics of a sect as follows:²¹

1. Voluntary association (by conversion).
2. Acceptance to membership based on proof to sect authorities of some claim to personal merit (e.g. knowledge of doctrine, affirmation of a conversion experience, or recommendation of members in good standing).
3. Exclusivity
4. Expulsion of members who contravene doctrinal, moral or organizational precepts.
5. Self-conception as an elect, gathered remnant, possessing special enlightenment.

¹⁸ See Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism, p. 19.

¹⁹ See Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development," p. 3.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

²¹ Ibid.

6. Aspiration of personal moral perfection.
7. Priesthood of all believers.
8. High level of lay participation.
9. Spontaneity of expression in worship.
10. Hostility or indifference to the secular society, and to the State.

If one applies this ten-point yardstick to the BCS in order to determine whether or not it is a sect, one is left with the impression that it is probably not. The reason for such an impression is that, strictly speaking, only three (30%) of the above criteria apply to the BCS. Those that apply to it are numbers 5, 6, and 8. Number 1 does not apply, because the children who have been born into the movement since its emergence nearly thirty years ago cannot be said to have become members by "voluntary association." Further, the BCS does not practise criteria 2 and 4. Neither can it be characterized by criteria 3 and 10, in view of its involvements in the social, economic and political activities in Nigeria as pointed out in chapter seven above. In Troeltsch's words, the BCS does not possess "the radicalism and the exclusiveness with which the sect can set aside the State and economics, art and science."²² Moreover, as we showed in chapter three, only the ordained members of the BCS may serve in sacerdotal capacities (and not all members are so ordained). Therefore, characteristic number 7 does not strictly apply to this movement. Nor does number 9 apply to it, because BCS order of worship services is fixed and very highly structured. So also are its administrative procedures.

²²Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, vol. 1, p. 381.

Even in terms of the very size of the movement and its international expansion, it seems to us that the BCS has passed the sectarian stage. This criterion of size was first hinted at by Weber and later by his colleague, Troeltsch. Weber had argued that in order for the sect authorities to know whether or not a prospective member was fully qualified (see Wilson's second criterion above), it was necessary for them to get personally acquainted with and investigate that prospective member, and that, Weber thought, was only achievable if the total membership of the sect was small. This same criterion (of small numbers in membership) as a characteristic of sects was also applied by Simmel, a contemporary of Weber and Troeltsch, in an essay in which he was reflecting on "The Significance of Numbers for Social Life."²³ According to Simmel, the sociological structure and ideology of sects made it impossible for them to accommodate and support large memberships since they insisted on regulating their members' personal behaviour and relationship with the wider society. This idea that the size of a religious group determined whether that group was a sect or a denomination was also not far from Niebuhr's mind when he formulated his thesis on the process of a sect's transformation into a denomination.

Furthermore, the sectarian aversion to dominating the world and to universalism, as pointed out by Troeltsch, is, on the contrary, the very aim and goal which the BCS shares with all those sects which Wilson describes as evangelistic or conversionist. This goal, therefore, excludes the BCS from the category of narrow sectarianism by definition.

²³ See Wolff, The Sociology of Georg Simmel, pp. 89-90.

Moreover, we pointed out in chapter seven that Nigeria's new religious movements in general and especially the BCS, have in recent years taken colossal and very successful strides in entrepreneurial directions. Following Niebuhr's observation that one of the factors that propel sects to denominationalize is their increasing prosperity,²⁴ one can justifiably ask whether the BCS can still be considered to be a sect in the traditional sense of the word. As also pointed out in that chapter, religious sects typically emerge with members who are generally poor and who withdraw into their little "spiritual enclaves" where no active economic, social or political activities take place. We know that this sectarian characteristic is, in the main, not true of the present status of the BCS.

So judging from Wilson's ten-point sectarian characteristics, of which only 30% applies to the BCS, we are compelled to suggest that the BCS probably does not qualify to be called a sect on the basis of its poor performance on Wilson's scale. Yet some sectarian characteristics still remain in the movement. We have already pointed out, for instance, its insistence that itself is "an elect, gathered remnant, possessing special enlightenment," its "aspiration for moral perfection" (this in spite of its situation ethics), and the "high level of lay participation" among its membership. Additionally, the BCS shows the characteristics of such sectarian sub-types which Wilson further classifies as conversionist sects which centre their activities on evangelism or converting others into themselves. We showed in

²⁴ See Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalization, pp. 54-55.

chapter two that the main concern of all the officers of the movement, according to the movement's ideology, is itinerant evangelism. This category of sects, Wilson notes, are "hostile to clerical learning."²⁵ Although one should probably not use so strong a word as "hostile" to describe BCS attitude toward professionally or academically (college or seminary) trained ministry, one must admit, however, that the movement is at least suspicious and disdainful of such ministry, dismissing it as lacking the direction of the Holy Spirit and consequently a waste of time. All truth, the BCS claims, is embodied and symbolized in the person of Obu and transferable from him to those who learn at his feet. For that reason, the movement does not at the present time show any concrete evidence of leadership training in theology as an articulated thought system. Nor does it have any immediate plans for the establishment of a regular Bible or theological college. Obu does not see the need for such an undertaking since he is the very source and embodiment of all theological truth. But the crucial question is: what happens when (if?) he dies? How will his followers continue to learn this truth now rolled up in his person?

Part of the reason for the BCS's general non-acceptance and for the disrespect shown the movement by the older churches in Nigeria has been the movement's deficiency in sound training in theology and biblical studies. For instance, one Presbyterian academic/minister colleague of this writer habitually refers to Obu and his preaching team as "illiterate" simply because they have no formal training commensurate

²⁵Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development," p. 6.

with their claim to biblical knowledge and interpretation. Another Nigerian academic and ordained minister of one of the "orthodox" churches in Nigeria speaks of this deficiency in theological education in Nigerian new religious movements in general as "their greatest weakness," adding that "lack of formal training for the clergy and other leadership cadres is bound to lead to unstructured religious life," and that "... the absence of some definite guidelines related to time-tested practices will continue to estrange the independent churches from the rest of world Christianity."²⁶

Further, a conversionist sect, Wilson also asserts, "disdains culture and the artistic values accepted in the wider society."²⁷ We showed in chapter five that this observation is true, at least in part, of the BCS.

Moreover, the BCS also possesses the characteristics of those sectarian sub-types which Wilson describes as adventist or revolutionist because of their focus on the imminent overthrow of the present world order. We indicated this focus on the part of the BCS when we discussed its dated eschatology and utopian vision in chapter three (section 13). However, the term adventist as used in this context is an inappropriate description of the BCS, because this movement does not believe in the Second Advent of Christ which is basic to the ideology of adventist sects. So the term revolutionist is a more fitting label for the BCS in this connection, though here the term is not to be understood in

²⁶ Ilogu, "Independent African Churches in Nigeria," p. 494.

²⁷ Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development," p. 6.

strictly political terms²⁸ or in terms of violence, but in the sense that the movement does revolutionize, as was often indicated above, basic religious (especially Christian) teachings. Wilson further observes elsewhere that the revolutionary sect "tends to explain the world in determinist terms, just as it tends to consider the fate of individuals as pre-determined."²⁹ When one recalls Obu's teaching on predestination, one cannot but agree with Wilson here.

Also, to the extent that the BCS gives new interpretations to familiar Christian doctrines, such as the nature of God, Christ, good and evil, ethics, etc., and claims access to special revelation unavailable to others, the BCS may be described loosely as a gnostic sect. We say loosely, because, according to Wilson, several more features characterize gnostic sects which are not readily observable in the BCS, such as the emphasis on gnosis as a means of salvation, subordination of the Bible to it (gnosis), and relegating Christ to the position of only a wayshower, an exemplar of truth, rather than a saviour. The BCS, as we have shown is extremely Christo-centric, whether one sees Christ in this context as the Christ of the New Testament or his incarnation in Obu.

²⁸ Of course there is a sense in which the BCS can also be seen as revolutionary in political terms, especially if one takes seriously its claim that the world will eventually be ruled by it during the anticipated utopia. We recall here Obu's statement to that effect: "... members of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star will rule over the universe." December Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, No. 4 (1980), p. 73.

²⁹ B.R. Wilson, "A Typology of Sects," in Roland Robertson, ed., Sociology of Religion: Selected Readings. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 365.

Furthermore, because of its declared intention to reform the world (especially world morality), the BCS may also be described as a reformist sect which, says Wilson, "takes unto itself the role of social conscience. . . . associates with the world but keeps apart from it."³⁰ Wilson further points out another characteristic of reformist sects thus: "Their doctrinal position is mitigated, subsumed" by their humanitarian orientation and their reformist tendencies towards the outside world."³¹ This description also fits the BCS in many respects.

A further characteristic of the reformist sect is the intention to be in the world without being of the world. This type of sect sees its specific role in the world to be that of the reforming, transforming and purity-preserving salt of the earth or, as Wilson puts it, "the leavening lump." Because of this unique position in the world, the reformist sect is in many ways simultaneously world-affirming and world-rejecting. It affirms what it considers to be the positive and good in the world while rejecting that which it considers to be negative, evil or sinful.

The BCS portrays this dual response to the world. As we have shown, in his teachings Obu constantly refers to "the world," in the familiar sectarian derogatory manner of contrasting the sect with the corrupt, impure world, and regards (and therefore rejects) as "worldly" much that goes on outside its ambience. For instance, his teachings quite often condemn the prevailing Nigerian social order,

³⁰ Ibid., p. 369.

³¹ Ibid.

especially its moral order, as having departed far from God's prescription and plan, resulting in the country's many social, economic and political woes. That is why he constantly reminds his followers: "You have left the world; you should not associate with them. Separate yourself from them. But you should not hate them."³² Also, Obu sees in human (Nigerian) society nothing but vice, conflict, greed, insecurity, materialism, spiritual poverty, and despair. This is why he talks so much about moral transformation which, he says, is his main task on earth. He hopes that some day his "new kingdom" will rule the world under himself as the King of kings and Lord of lords. At that time, he expects, a new world order will be ushered in, in which all evil and wickedness will be no more, and which will therefore be more spiritual, more loving, more equitable, and more human. At that time the utopia will have begun.

Yet for all that negative, world-rejecting attitude toward the wider society, the BCS cannot be said to be world-rejecting through and through. For one thing, its members do not live in secluded communes as is usually the case among strictly world-rejecting sects. Moreover, in many of its practices and mode of social organization, the movement can be seen as being world-affirming in so far as it employs modern administrative, organizational, and business techniques. We recall here Obu's statement about the basis of his movement's organizational structure: "As the secular government is hierarchically arranged, so is the government in the Kingdom of God arranged. In the house of God

³² From Cross to Star: The Glorification of the Holy Spirit, p. 45; my emphasis.

the same system of government is adopted. . . . the church officers are hierarchically ranked."³³

Moreover, members of the BCS have neither altogether shunned the world nor the things of the world--its business and politics, for instance. As we have shown in this study, many prosperous professional business men and women and many political enthusiasts are in the movement. These members employ the usual commercial means of generating income--printing presses, book and record stores, restaurants, plantations, buying and selling companies, etc. Indeed, only a word-affirming movement could propose Odu's kind of economic manifesto which we discussed in chapter six. Furthermore, many of the educated members of the movement are in orthodox civil employment. In fact, as we have indicated, thousands in the movement have been attracted to it precisely by this-worldly instrumental considerations and promises of religion, such as prospects for getting well-paid jobs, for earning promotions at those jobs and for becoming wealthy, for the relief of anxiety, for the increase of self-esteem and self-confidence, for the improvement of health and welfare, and, of course, for protection against anything or any person that will cause the very opposite of these conditions.

But such a combination of settarian and denominational tendencies as we have observed in the BCS is neither new nor peculiar to it. This dual-trait of any religious institution has been pointed out by a number of typologists, including, for instance, Yinger who says that "many

³³ The Elders' Handbook, pp. 30, 31.

denominations started out as sects and have not completely escaped their origins;³⁴ D.A. Martin who makes the following two propositions: (a) "sects generally succeed in maintaining their sectarian character, and may even reinforce it;" (b) "denominations have normally possessed their denominational character from their very beginnings;"³⁵ Demerath who points out that church-like as well as sect-like tendencies can manifest themselves in the same religious organization or even in the same congregation;³⁶ and David Millett, who agrees with Demerath, adding: "The label of 'church' or 'sect' refers only to the kind of behavior which appears to be dominant."³⁷ That is to say, what determines whether a given religious institution is a church, a denomination or a sect, is the dominance of "churchly" or denominational or sectarian (as the case may be) tendencies or characteristics in that institution.

In the light of the above sociological distinctions between a sect and a denomination, we are inclined to think that the BCS is turning, perhaps unconsciously, into something similar to institutionalized religious organizations which it often refers derogatorily to as "church denominations" without differentiating between the two terms. Just as the incipient Christian sect in ancient Palestine evolved into

³⁴ Yinger, Religion, Society and the Individual, p. 149.

³⁵ D.A. Martin, "The Denomination," British Journal of Sociology, 13, No. 1 (1962), p. 2; cf. p. 4.

³⁶ See Demerath, esp. pp. 37-54.

³⁷ David Millett, "A Typology of Religious Organizations Suggested by the Canadian Census," Sociological Analysis, 30, No. 2 (1969), p. 110, note 3.

the medieval Roman Catholic Church, the BCS is becoming steadily institutionalized, slowly bureaucratized, and gradually denominationalized. Its rapid growth and ambitious involvement in such "secular" affairs as social activities, entrepreneurial investments and concomitant prosperity resulting in the laying up of more and more treasures and treasuries on earth, and consequent upward social mobility, and, more indirectly and more unofficially, political inclination (at least on the part of individual members), are clearly contrary to the thrift, sobriety, simplicity, and exclusivity which traditionally characterize "pure" sects. Involvement in these activities would seem to increase BCS' probability of compromise and "worldly infection" which are typically the marks of a denomination.

But these denominational tendencies cannot of themselves automatically make a religious organization a denomination if that organization has within its structure strong built-in mechanisms for the conservation of its original ideologies and worldviews. In the case of the BCS, however, due to its policy of not disciplining or disfellowshipping its members who contravene its doctrinal, organizational or ethical precepts (since doing so, to it, would seem to be against the spirit and principle of brotherly love and contrary to the belief that, ultimately, one is not responsible for what one does or for how one behaves--everything is predestined!), the movement does not seem to have at its disposal effective mechanisms for enforcing strict group conformity and conservation of tradition. Because of the movement's weakness in this very crucial area, its members seem to enjoy far more freedom than is conducive to the maintenance of the movement's initial sectarian character.

Then again, it seems to us that whether a sect denominationalizes (and how fast it does that) or remains a sect depends on, among other factors such as those suggested by Wilson (see pp. 456-57 above), the magnitude and rate of social change going on in the society in which the sect moves and has its being. The more conservative and impervious to change a society is, the less likely or the more slowly the process of denominationalization. There is no doubt that post-independence Nigeria is changing at an alarmingly and irresistibly rapid rate, and seems to have carried her new religious movements, especially the BCS, along in this race towards new social, economic and political vistas and horizons. With such a development, it is hardly surprising that the BCS should, within only a short period of thirty years, move so fast to the stage of becoming a denomination.

In suggesting that the BCS is in the process of denominationalizing, one makes no claim here to any infallibility. In fact, another student of the movement may come to the conclusion that the movement has already attained the status of a church; while yet another may see it as being still in the sectarian stage. But as Yinger has rightly pointed out, each typology or classification of religious organizations has its shortcomings. In Yinger's words,

Classifications are in one sense arbitrary. They oversimplify the data by disregarding what are held to be minor differences in order to emphasize what are thought to be major similarities. They are constructs of the mind, not descriptions of total reality.³⁸

³⁸J. Milton Yinger, The Scientific Study of Religion (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970), p. 251.

One may, however, not wish to be so radical as to declare with Wilson: "It is a futile occupation to spend time on deciding whether a particular movement should be called a 'sect' or not."³⁹ Nonetheless, when all has been said (if indeed all can be said) about the church-sect-denomination typology and the sub-types thereof, we are reminded by Hill that all these typological constructs are inventions by Westerners for the discussion of types and sub-types of Western Christianity, especially, as he further indicates, European and North American perspectives. Hill goes on to point out that "it may well be that the sub-types and hypotheses derived from them may only be applicable within that context."⁴⁰ We agree with this remark, because if one tries to apply all the Western-derived "types" of religious organizations to non-Christian traditions or even to the Christian tradition outside of the Western context, one may encounter many difficulties. As we have tried to show in the case of the BCS, for one example, many African Christian organizations simultaneously contain within themselves the traditional characteristics of the sect, the cult, the denomination, and the church in varying degrees. In such instances, strict and clear-cut typological distinctions become very difficult indeed, if not utterly impossible. For another example, how would the Western typologist typologize African traditional religions in which the line between religion and society or between the sacred and the secular is often too thin to be discerned? Or, how would he

³⁹Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 105.

⁴⁰Hill, p. 75.

typonymize these religions and those of the Orient in which there are no 'churches' in the sense the West conceives of the term 'church'? Indeed, it was in awareness of such practical typological questions that Wilson more than two decades ago wrote:

If the sociology of religion is to move forward, we must create categories which allow us to study comparatively the social functions and development of religious movements. As a consequence, such studies must shun categories dictated too specifically by the characteristics of a particular theological tradition. Obviously, the types we can use are still drawn mainly from the material at our disposal, especially from Christian movements. But it is imperative that we should try to enlarge their application, and, if needs be, modify their formulation in the light of this extension of their meaning, so that we shall have a series of analytical instruments which will no longer be centred on a particular civilization and religion (in this case, Christian.)⁴¹

Speaking of the term 'church,' we may point out here that we have rarely used this term in the present work to refer to the BCS. The reason for this is that the movement insists, often defensively, that itself is not a church and, therefore, does not want to be compared or

⁴¹Wilson, 'A Typology of Sects,' p. 361. See also Wilson's recent diatribe against typological dogmatism in chapter four ('The Sociology of Sects') in his Religion in Sociological Perspective, pp. 89-120, where he says, among other things: 'Ideal types are not empty boxes into which the sociologist drops appropriate cases; they are, rather, to be used to make us aware of the specific historical, organizational, compositional, or other features of a sect that depart from our hypothetical system of logical relationships. The type should always turn us back to historical or empirical data so that we can explain those features of a case that contradict our hypothesized common-sense assumptions.' (p. 105).

confused with the church in the sense the term church is conceived of in the Christian tradition. Indeed, as pointed out in chapter seven, the older Christian (mission) churches in Nigeria do not regard the BCS as a church either, since they question the latter's claim to be Christian. We have throughout this work referred to the BCS not as a church but as a "movement," not because of the reasons it gives for not wanting to be so designated, nor for the reasons the mission churches give for denying it that designation. Rather, we call the BCS a movement first of all because the word movement, for all practical purposes, is more comprehensive and more appropriately underscores the dynamic nature of the BCS. Moreover, many elements in the BCS make it inappropriate to refer to it strictly as a church in the Western (Christian) conception of a church. For instance, the practice of spiritual and physical healing (and the modes thereof) which, as we have pointed out, is central in the movement, does not receive the same degree of, or sometimes any, emphasis in traditional Western-style churches. Finally, and more importantly, the movement, in our opinion, has not as yet attained the status of a church as that institution is typologically (sociologically?) defined. If, therefore, we hesitate to call the BCS a church for these reasons, perhaps we may have to invent another term to replace the word "sect," because it would probably make no sense to talk of a "movement-sect typology" following Western typological criteria.

(b) A Suggested New Classificatory Label for African New Religious Movements

Apart from the broad church-sect typology and its sub-types as invented and used by typologists referred to at the beginning of this discussion, later social scientists have invented many more specific classificatory terms or labels aimed at placing modern religious organizations or movements in different categories. Here one has in mind such descriptive doldrums as syncretic, separatist, messianic, millenarian or chiliastic, nativistic or perpetuative, prophetic, neo-Pentecostal, revivalistic, revitalistic, therapeutic, manipulationist, neo-Christian, post-Christian, schismatic, adjustment, accommodative, denunciatory, reformatory, etc. Indeed, the list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive of other possibilities. Most of these labels are obviously borrowed from social and cultural anthropology without much revision. The first of these labels, "syncretic," is particularly vulnerable. In fact, one finds this particular label especially disturbing when used to describe African new religious movements, because of the rather pejorative aura which is often created around the term. One has to wonder whether those who use the term in such a derogatory manner in referring to African new religious movements have forgotten that all religions are to one degree or another syncretic.

We realize, however, that some of these terminologies are attempts to locate the causal factors for those movements which they are intended to describe, while others attempt to stress the main features of some movements. But, as many students of these movements know only too well,

there are infinite difficulties in trying to explain the emergence of a given religious movement in Africa, or anywhere for that matter, by appealing to mono-causality. Even those labels which attempt to stress the main features of some of the movements often grossly miss the mark.

Even if we had space here to do so, we would not consider it necessary to rehash popular stock arguments pro or con the usage of any of those terminologies. One thing seems certain, however: whatever merit each of the above terms may have as a descriptive idiom for some of new religious movements in Africa, such merit is at best limited in its usefulness, because each of the terms can describe only an isolated aspect and not the complex totality of a given new religious movement. For instance, while some movements may have, say, millenarian or nativistic dimensions, it would be wrong to categorize them in those terms only. Perhaps it would be more useful, as Peter Heelas has sagaciously suggested, to characterize features of a given movement which may happen to fall into the description of each label, instead of supposing that any single "type-term" will describe fully and completely the multi-dimensionality of that movement.⁴²

In the place of the above terminologies, therefore, we wish to propose here a term which we believe to be more comprehensive and methodologically more empirical in classifying Nigerian new religious movements in particular and African new religions in general. That term is protectionist.⁴³ It is our strong conviction that the theme of

⁴²See Peter Heelas, "New Religious Movements in Perspective," Religion, 15 (1985), pp. 93-94.

protection is one that runs across all new religious movements in Africa as a whole and in Nigeria in particular. That is to say, protection is the common, ultimate goal of those movements, in spite of any dissimilarities in their methods of attempting to achieve that goal. In sociological terms, this means that the search for protection is a major and sufficient condition for Africans who join the new religious movements. "Protectionism," we contend, most appropriately qualifies for what Turner refers to as "a typology of tendencies and emphases rather than of individual religious bodies or movements."⁴⁴

Our argument here is that members of Nigeria's new religious movements are in the movements first and foremost because they feel a need to be protected against life's undesirable circumstances and believe with all their hearts that they will find such protection in the new movements. Here, in fact, lies part of our answer to the crucial question as to why Nigerians flock into the BCS, for instance. Apart from the second generation members born into the movement who are therefore members by chance rather than by choice, most of the first generation members go to the BCS for one form of protection or another. In fact, even the children born into the movement soon get socialized into thinking that their self-protection against life's undesirable situations is the reason why they should remain in the movement.

We are persuaded that the maladies diagnosed in the religious therapy of Nigeria's new religious movements, especially in the BCS, are to be attributed largely to witchcraft practices and to the dangerous

⁴⁴ Harold W. Turner, "A Typology for African Religious Movements," Journal of Religion in Africa, 1, fasc. 1 (1967), p. 1.

use by the wicked of spiritual powers through a phenomenon commonly referred to in African as "black magic." The main purpose of this religious therapy is to secure for members of the movements healing, health, happiness, protection and assurance. This being so, we conclude that problems of personal life drive people to the new religious movements in Africa in general.

The protection usually sought includes physical protection, spiritual protection, political protection, economic protection, and socio-cultural protection. For instance, individual members may go into the movements in order to seek refuge or protection from, for example, unemployment, childlessness, sickness, loneliness and anonymity. In fact, even the employed, the healthy and wealthy still feel a need to join the movements in order to protect their jobs, their health and wealth against the envious eyes of enemies who, they fear, might bewitch them out of envy of their fortunes in life. In this connection, Obu says to the rich in his movement: "When you are rich, your problem is security from the hands of your enemies."⁴⁵ Obu's statement here is indeed a reflection of the belief of many Africans that "people who are successful in life are easily envied by others and liable to be attacked by witchcraft or other evil."⁴⁶ Also, of the late Christianah Olatunrinle, one of the early pillars of the Cherubim and Seraphim, Omoyajowo writes:

She was a successful trader, and . . . like many successful Nigerians, she had a deep-seated fear

⁴⁵ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 54.

⁴⁶ Sjaak van der Geest, "The Image of Death in Akan Highlife Songs of Ghana," Research in African Literatures, 11, No. 2 (1980), p. 157.

of the malice of the envious. She lavished money on traditional religious specialists⁴⁷ and charms, to acquire supernatural protection.

Such a belief system is obviously pinned to a cosmological system in which the co-existence of lesser spiritual forces or beings and the Christian God is taken seriously by the believers. Indeed, the fear of falling victim to the witchcraft of evil men and women and the need for healing are the two strongest motives for most Africans who join the new religious movements.⁴⁸ People in the West may join their new religious movements for other reasons, but in Africa the main reason, we repeat, why Africans join the new religious movements is because they want physical and spiritual protection from these movements. We refer to this motive for adherence as the culturo-ideographic dynamic of African new religious movements. Obu is clearly aware of this main reason why people join his movement. That is why he can assert, for instance:

Today many people are rushing into the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star with the intentions of being healed of their sicknesses or to have an improved condition of life.⁴⁹

Elsewhere he says: "Many people who come to the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star are here to have their problems solved and to be

⁴⁷ Akin Omoyajowo, "Mother in Israel: Christianah Olatunrinle in Ondo (c. 1855-1941)," in Elizabeth Isichei, ed., Varieties of Christian Experience in Nigeria (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 142.

⁴⁸ Cf. Enang, Salvation in a Nigerian Background, p. 339; Sundkler, Bantu Prophets, p. 237; M.L. Daneel, Zionism and Faith-Healing in Rhodesia: Aspects of African Independent Churches (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), p. 12.

⁴⁹ Those Who Will Go To Hell, p. 19.

protected by the Holy Spirit."⁵⁰ Referring specifically to the reason why pregnant women flock into his movement, Obu says:

A pregnant woman is not sure of what will happen to her till the day she delivers her child. She continues to live in fear till that day. When a pregnant woman goes to church it isn't for the love of God but (for) God's protection against that day of uncertainty.⁵¹

Obu's observation here is of course true not only with regard to why pregnant women go to his movement, but also with regard to the fact that an accelerated frequency to churches and prayer houses on the part of pregnant women is a common daily sight in Nigeria. Such women are usually afraid, not so much of possible biological complications during the pregnancy and eventual childbirth, but mostly of the wickedness of their enemies who might bewitch them possibly causing their death or mystically inducing a still-born child. The religio-cultural belief here is that pregnant women are especially vulnerable to the machinations of witches, hence their intensified effort to be closer to God for protection against witchcraft during those precarious nine months. Additionally, some of these women may also go to traditional religious specialists for protective charms against witchcraft.

Obu further tells us that even "some of the native doctors who swore never to go to Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, request to be

⁵⁰ August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 3 & 4, p. (1981), p. 67.

⁵¹ Those Who Will Go to Heaven, p. 33.

Obu further tells us that even "some of the native doctors who swore never to go to Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, request to be taken down there whenever death approaches them."⁵² Speaking of why people are attracted to the BCS, Amadi writes as follows:

There is ample evidence that by far the highest proportion of the B.C.S. membership were drawn into the movement because they, or their relatives, had benefitted at one ⁵³time or other from Obu's wonderful healing power.

Having said that, Amadi goes on to describe his master (Obu) as being "probably the most sought-after prophet in the country," and to say that Obu's healing power "has . . . made his movement the fastest growing prophetic body in modern Nigeria."⁵⁴

In fact, Obu, seeing himself as the Christ incarnate on earth, also sees his work as consisting of "protecting, saving, giving assistance, warding off evil, healing all ailments and maintaining every person and everything."⁵⁵ He calls upon his followers to compare their state of security now that they are in the BCS to when they were not:

Brethren, think of this situation: when you were in the world, initiated into various cults, you were not protected even when you wore talismans all over your bodies. Immediately you destroyed all your concoctions and talismans and subjected yourself to the baptism of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star you became ⁵⁶supreme and controlled all elementary spirits.

⁵² August Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospel, 1 & 2 (1981), p. 78.

⁵³ Amadi, "Power and Purity," pp. 240-41.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

⁵⁵ The Mystery of Death, p. 36; emphasis added.

⁵⁶ The Supernatural Teacher, Book 2, p. 77; emphasis added.

Elsewhere he reprimands those of his followers who seem not to seek after the things of the Spirit but simply say: "Let me go to Brotherhood in order to amass wealth, get children and acquire protection."⁵⁷ In the same vein, one of his closest disciples has this to say as to why people join the BCS:

In the whole Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, the world over, there is no single man who goes there on his own simply because he has love for a church as is in many other cases of one attaching himself to a church, but must be there after all available measures to free himself from the entanglement and ordeals of persecution of evil spirits had failed. Sometimes he is brought unconscious. Some (come) through sickness of wife, husband, brother, sister, child and what-have-you. And in less than no time all these evil devices get cleared.⁵⁸

Another BCS devotee says that Obu "protects them against any scorching heat (evil forces?) . . ."⁵⁹ Another faithful of the movement refers to the uplifted hands of their Leader in prayer as "the mighty wings of protection, wings of love, wings of peace."⁶⁰ Yet another member of movement testifies that his previous involvement with the Rosicrucian Society "could not afford me the power and the protection which I am now enjoying in the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star."⁶¹

⁵⁷ April Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels, 3 & 4 (1981), p. 68; emphasis supplied.

⁵⁸ Bassey, "What Do We Say He Is?", pp. 4-5.

⁵⁹ Eyo, The Truth about Olumba Olumba Obu and Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, p. 39; cf. SCC Minutes, December 29, 1979, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Senior Prophetess I.S. Etuk, "The Comforter Is Here," BCS Journal, No. 2 (1983), p. 33.

⁶¹ Richard Thompson, in a testimony reported in Duke, p. 114.

- (a) Members who comply to (sic) the teachings of Brotherhood and are active members both in words and in action have the full support of the organization.
- (b) Such members are protected by the Brotherhood in cases of sickness and poverty. They are entitled to material as well as spiritual help which extends to their children.⁶²

In the same manner, one observer sums up the motives why people join the Celestial Church of Christ by saying: "Nobody ever joins the sect out of sheer happiness. They always have one problem or the other and once the church helps them, they join and remain members."⁶³ The late founder and leader of the Celestial Church, Pastor S.B.J. Oschoffa, is reported to have said that his church was established for problem solving and that "that was the reason why there are many people with problems attending the church."⁶⁴

Nathaniel Ndiokwere writes as follows as to why Nigerians join the country's new religious movements:

The sense of insecurity is perpetuated in the African milieu by fears of evil spirits, the phenomenon of 'poisoning' . . . the unlimited anxiety over fruitfulness in marriage. . . . It is the urge to have these problems solved which drives people to the doors of the Aladura prophets. . . . if there were no healing mission there would be no meaningful Independent Churches; if there were no sick

⁶²BCS, The Memorandum of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, (n.d.), p. 3.

⁶³Anon., "'Oschoffa's Legacy of Miracles,' Newswatch (Lagos), November 4, 1989, p. 18.

⁶⁴Ibid.

Independent Churches; if there were no sick people or individuals craving for security, there would be no followers.⁶⁵

Similarly, Omoyajowo gives this trenchant description of the situation:

Africans generally fear the power of witches and the evil spirits, who beset them in their dreams; they worry about their future and want to know what it has in stock for them. Christianity repudiated this practice and substituted abstract faith for it. The Aladuras take the problems as genuine and offer solutions in the messages of the Holy Spirit given through the prophets and visioner. They give candles for prayers, incense to chase away evil powers and blessed-water for healing purposes. Consequently, the Christian suddenly finds himself at home in the new faith, and Christianity now has more meaning for him than before, for it takes special concern for his personal life, his existential problems and assures his security in an incomprehensively hostile universe. That is what has endeared the Cherubim and Seraphim to the hearts of the cross-section of our society, irrespective of creed, status and class.⁶⁶

Likewise, Sheila Walker, writing of why people join the Harrist Church of the Ivory Coast, notes:

Some people suggest that most people who are Harrists have joined the church mainly in order to be protected from witchcraft. One non-Harrist suggested that probably eighty percent of the people who are Harrists are members of the church in order to be prosperous, have large families and to protect themselves from witchcraft, because the Harrist Church . . . puts a great deal of emphasis on protection from witchcraft.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ndiokwere, pp. 279, 256.

⁶⁶ J. Akin Omoyajowo, "The Cherubim and Seraphim Movement: A Study in Interaction," Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies, 4, No. 2 (1970), p. 134.

⁶⁷ Sheila Suzanne Walker, "Christianity African Style: The Harrist Church of the Ivory Coast," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1976, p. 258; emphasis supplied.

Also, Leonard Barrett observes that in African new religious movements
 "... there is a heavy dependence on African mythology, for example,
 an inevitable guarantee against witchcraft, one of the perennial fears
 of Africans. Anyone who sets up a movement on these bases has a chance
 of succeeding."⁶⁸

The need for personal protection may thus be seen as essentially
 physical, spiritual, social, or economic in nature. An individual may
 sometimes go to the new religious movements to seek spiritual power as a
 bulwark against life's adversities such as witchcraft, sickness, death,
 childlessness, the menace of evil forces, joblessness, poverty, failure
 in business or economic ventures, or even against political defeat and
 frustration.

We find, then, that related to the primarily religious motive for
 the emergence of Nigeria's new religious movements is the concept of
 protection. In fact, "protectionism" is first and foremost a
 religious or spiritual experience, and on it hang all other forms of
 security and well-being.

Ultimately, the whole concept of protection as a religious goal is
 not new in the history of African religious thought. In fact, Africans
 are known always to conceive of religion, especially the Christian
 religion, instrumentally--for what they can get out of it in terms of
 this-worldly goals.⁶⁹ In the African traditional religious system, the

⁶⁸ Barrett, "Religious Rejuvenation in Africa," p. 32.

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Friday M. Mbon, "Response to Christianity in
 Pre-colonial and Colonial Africa: Some Ulterior Motives;" cf. Peel, p.
 292.

deities and ancestral spirits were (are) looked upon as protecting parents watching over their worshipful children all the time, listening to their every wish-fulfilment, and supplying their every need. Thus, one might say that when both the leaders and members of Nigerian new religious movements, especially the BCS, stress the concept of protection in their beliefs and practices, there is to be seen in such emphasis some congruence and continuity between these new religions and African traditional religions.

Thus, the term protectionist is certainly more comprehensive and empirically more appropriate as a descriptive label for most African new religious movements. That, of course, does not in any way mean that this term is perfect in its utility. There is no such perfect label. The special merit of the term protectionist lies in the fact that it immediately indicates both the raison d'être--the intents and purposes--of most Nigerian religious movements, and the main reason why Nigerians are attracted to the BCS in such large numbers.

3. Dated Eschatology and Utopian Vision: What if Prophecy Fails?

We pointed out in chapter three that the BCS expects the present social order to come to an end in 1999, and a new social order--an utopia--to arrive in the year 2001. According to this utopian vision, the BCS will rule the world under "the Supreme King of the Universe," Olumba Olumba Obu.

The history of religions has shown not a few cases when the prophecies of chiliastic religious movements failed. Perhaps the most memorable examples in the last and present centuries are the end-of-the-world prophecies of the Jehovah's Witnesses which failed not once but five times respectively in 1878, 1881, 1914, 1918, and 1925. After the fifth failure, this particular movement abandoned the further issuance of dated chiliastic prophecies, and their millenarian stance began to assume only "a diffusely imminent form detached from any specific point in time."⁷⁰ No doubt, when the Witnesses' prophecies failed, there were precipitated in the group, among other things, "crises of faith in the broader belief system on the basis of which the prophecies had been ventured,"⁷¹ crises of mission, and a disfiguring of the movement's public image and self-conception as a divinely-directed group. This disappointment also affected, at least for a time, the rate and regularity of the movement's proselytizing activities.⁷²

Another example of prophetic failure in the last century was the Seventh-day Adventists' "Great Disappointment" of October 22, 1844, on which date the movement had expected Jesus Christ to return to earth the second time (the Second Advent).⁷³ More recently, Sun Myung Moon's

⁷⁰ See Joseph F. Zygmunt, "Prophetic Failure and Chiliastic Identity: The Case of Jehovah's Witnesses," American Journal of Sociology, 75, No. 6 (1970), pp. 926-48.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 933.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ See, for instance, Ellen G. White, Early Writings, 4th ed. (1882; (Footnote Continued)

predicted date for the realization of the millenium in 1981 has now been pushed back beyond the year 2000.⁷⁴

In the light of these precedents of prophetic failures in those religious movements, one cannot resist the temptation to raise the question about the possibility of the BCS experiencing such a disappointment come 1999. In other words, what if the expected Brotherhood utopia does not begin in 1999? How will members of the movement respond to that unfulfilled prophecy?

It is clear from our research on and acquaintance with the BCS as a movement that it itself is not asking this kind of question, which would obviously sound stupid to them--a question, they would contend, that can only come from a damned unbeliever. But such a possible reaction to this question can hardly be surprising to the one who may ask it. Then again, which prophet or followers of a prophet ever prepared for disappointment--for the failure of their prophecies?

Our concern as unbelievers, however, is that unless the BCS gives some thought to the possibility of the utopia not coming as predicted, not a few of the members might be so shaken in faith that they may at that time begin to look more closely and critically at the general basis of their belief system and at the authority of their Leader who has announced the prophecy in the first instance. Indeed, the crises which

(Footnote Continued)

rpt. Washington, D.C.: The Review Herald Publishing Association, 1945), pp. ix-xx; cf. Francis D. Nichol, The Midnight Cry (Washington, D.C.: The Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1944), pp. 263-89; see also P. Gerard Damsteegt, Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 78-135.

⁷⁴ See Shupe, Six Perspectives on New Religions, p. 198, note 5.

a failed prophecy or even a delayed utopia might precipitate for members of the movement might be so unnerving to some of them that the very foundation of the movement (an indefatigable faith in Obu as an omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent God) may be so shaken that many saints in the movement may lose their patience. The question and fear expressed here are not at all baseless but related to the very real issue of the precariousness of the legitimacy of the prophet whose prophecies may fail to come to pass.

But being shaken in faith may not be the end of the world or the end of a movement. The examples we cited above were obviously so shaken, yet they have survived to this day. However, the survival did not come easily. It took great amounts of effort, patience and ingenuity on the part of the founders/leaders of the movements concerned to look at their prophecies again, reinterpret them, and to convince their followerships that the prophecies did not fail but were either partially fulfilled or providentially delayed (as in the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses), or that there was a slight miscalculation of the prophetic mathematics (as in the case of Seventh-day Adventists' recalculation and reinterpretation of the so-called 2300-day prophecy of Daniel chapters 8 and 9, on which chapters the predicted 1844 Second Advent was based).⁷⁵

If the BCS utopia fails to commence in 1999, there is thus the possibility of prophetic recalculation and reinterpretation and of convincing and encouraging members not to give up the hope of their

⁷⁵ See White, Early Writings, pp. ix-xx; cf. Damsteegt, Foundations, pp. 122-35.

great expectation. But the large question is: When (if) Obu dies, who among the present membership will be charismatic and ingenious enough to rebuild this hope and confidence in the membership? That question leads us to our next topic, the question of succession in the BCS.

4. The Question of Succession in the BCS

The question of a successor to the leader of a social group is of sociological interest because it has to do with the survival potential of that group. As Joachim Wach observed many years ago, "the immediate crisis which marks the birth of a new epoch in the development of the infant religion and causes its structural transformation is the death of its founder."⁷⁶ The issue of succession is also of interest to the sociologist because it deals with the bureaucratic ways and means of choosing that successor, which ways and means go back to the structure and organization of the group or movement.

In the BCS, however, the sociologist finds nothing here to arouse his or her interest in regard to this important matter, because there are at present no concrete plans or procedure for ensuring the leadership continuity of the movement should (or if?) Obu no longer physically walk this earth. That this is the present situation in the BCS is hardly surprising when one remembers the movement's doctrine of the deity, eternity and immortality of their Leader. If Obu is indeed immortal, there is no sense in planning for or even thinking about a

⁷⁶ Joachim Wach, Sociology of Religion, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 137.

possible successor. Here, in fact, is a good instance of how a religious belief can affect a people's practice or organizational structure. That is to say, the twin doctrine of Obu's deity and immortality has logical and practical implications for the movement's administrative structure and foresight or lack of foresight.

It is not that the possibility of Obu's physical absence (one may call that absence death, ascension, translation, etc.) and the consequent need for guidelines for choosing a successor have been too far from or absolutely unthinkable in the minds of at least some of the movement's members. There is ample evidence that the thought of this matter has crossed the minds of not a few of them. For example, Pastor Kenneth Bassey told this writer that he and another faithful of the movement were discussing this matter privately as far back as 1967. He claimed that this private conversation was metaphysically overheard by Obu who, though not physically present at the time and place of the conversation, is said to have heard every word of it.

Obu is said to have called these two disciples to reprimand them for their apparent lack of faith in his immortality which that conversation obviously indicated. He is reported to have ended reprimanding the two with this reassurance of his immortality and unsucceedability:

If your life will be spared to live for the next 2000 years, you'll see me getting younger and younger. In any case, when Jesus was here he did not prepare anyone to take his place after his death, and his death did not stop the spread of God's word and work. I have come with a plan and must follow that plan. When the time comes, if it will come, God will take care of matters. Our immediate concern is to love one another and to do the work of God and leave the unknown and

unanswerable questions to God. Leave the unknown alone.⁷⁷

A further evidence which shows that the thought of Obu's demise has crossed the minds of some of his followers may be deduced from the following remarks which Obu himself is reported to have made in 1974 at a session of the Spiritual Council of Churches:

A lot of people in B.C.S. and outside still ask what would be our plight if our Leader should die today. Our Father reassuringly told us how the Children of Israel mourned for 40 days and 40 nights the death of Moses; but God in his mercy raised up Joshua who ruled the Israelites just as efficiently as did Moses. Only fools should believe that the death of the Leader would be the end of B.C.S. and all that it stands for. Just as the death of Jesus Christ, the killing of the Apostles by the Romans, the burning of bibles and the great fights to stop the spread of Christ's teachings had no impact on Christianity, the same will happen to Brotherhood of the Cross and Star.

At the present time, however, the BCS is so leader-centred and leader-controlled organizationally and administratively, and Obu has so completely dominated the movement from its very inception that one fears that it might be very difficult for the movement to find a Joshua large and charismatic enough to succeed him. Apparently not all members are happy about Obu's absolute control over the movement. Indeed, we are told that already there are among the membership some 'unwary members (who) grumble that the Leader is doing everything alone and does not

⁷⁷ Personal interview with Pastor Kenneth E. Bassey, February 21, 1984.

⁷⁸ SCC Minutes, August 10, 1974, p. 5.

want to show others what He is doing."⁷⁹ In fact, Obu himself is not unaware of such "grumbling." That is why he makes the following remarks:

Sometimes you gather yourselves and start to discuss and would say: 'This type of power, where does He get it (from)? Supposing after some years He is no more, why has he not initiated somebody into that power so that when He is no more in the world that person can take over from Him?' Why do you like to have that type of thinking? Some of you think that it is important that I should teach somebody how to produce the Holy oil. They feel that if I am no more there is nothing that can be done without holy oil, and so I should teach how to produce holy oil. Why do you engage yourselves in that type of thoughts?⁸⁰

It is quite obvious from these remarks that at least some members of the movement, while struggling to believe in their Leader's deity and concomitant immortality, do occasionally think about the question of leadership succession, even at the risk of being stigmatized unbelievers for expressing such thoughts. For as far as Obu and his truly faithful followers are concerned, to ask questions or talk about who will succeed the immortal and irreplaceable God is definitely a mark of unbelief, as pointed out by one of such faithfuls who says: "The onlookers outside the fold ask who will carry on the work when the Leader dies. These controversies stem from unbelief in God and ignorance of the scriptures."⁸¹ It is also clear from Obu's remarks above that he himself is not concerned about the question of succession now. He seems

⁷⁹Sam J. Umoh, Faithful Witness (n.d.), p. 16.

⁸⁰The Supernatural Teacher, Book 3 (1980?), p. 128.

⁸¹Umoh, Faithful Witness, p. 16.

to be too profound a believer in his immortality to be concerned about that matter. Why should he, if he is not going to die? Indeed, his very silence on this crucial issue seems to be a further strategy which he uses to continue to imprint on his followers' minds the doctrine of his divinity and immortality.

Our prognostication, however, is that unless Obu begins now to see the need of laying down some guidelines for the choice of a successor after him, members of the movement might wake up one morning to face the unhappy situation of power tussle among some of their power-hungry members. Obu should, in fact, learn from the history of those religious leaders who, like him, claimed immortality and consequently made no provision for succession. When they died, in spite of their claimed immortality, their movements were catapulted into series of leadership crises resulting from power struggle among their ambitious followers. It happened to Prophet Muhammad. It also happened in the 1930s and 1940s to the Peace Mission Movement centred around the black charismatic, Father Divine who, like Obu, also had claimed to be God Incarnate and immortal, and therefore had made no plans for a successor. In the case of Father Divine, his movement became demoralized and disintegrated immediately after the death of its leader.

The problem of inadequate succession guidelines also led, though not to disintegration and disappearance, to turmoil which erupted within the movement of another black messianic figure, Bishop Charles Emmanuel "Daddy" Grace, also in the United State. Although "Daddy" Grace's movement had a constitution, bylaws, and a General Council of Elders for the United House of Prayer, these were weak in that they did not specify

the electoral procedure for a successor to "Daddy," hence the succession problems that ensued after his death.⁸²

To take another example that is closer to home: Obu should learn from what is now happening in the Celestial Church of Christ in Nigeria after the death of its founder and leader, Pastor S.B.J. Oschoffa, who passed away in September 1985. Although the Celestial Church's constitution has made the provision that succession should be by "divine order," several key members of the church are now arguing that it should be through the church's promotional process. The result is that there are now two factions in the church--those who insist on "divine succession" and those who maintain that the hierarchical structure of the church should be followed in selecting the next leader. The main problem facing those who insist on the "divine order" procedure is how the divine choice should be made, especially as there has been no precedent in the matter. Already one of the leading members of the church has claimed having seen a vision as far back as 1977 to the effect that he himself would become the new leader of the church. Indeed, it is feared that other such self-prophecies might follow this one thus complicating the matter even more. However, Oschoffa is reported to have given some hint on his deathbed that his successor "must come from the top hierarchy so as to avoid a split," and that

⁸² See John Robinson, "A Song, A Shout, and A Prayer," in C. Eric Lincoln, ed., The Black Experience in Religion (Garden City, New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1974), p. 215.

this person must be chosen 'by divine inspiration.'⁸³ At least there is some guidance here in the dying man's words.

But must Obu also wait to say something on his deathbed? Might it not be too late then to set up a proper bureaucratic electoral procedure that will prevent possible splits and schisms within the BCS? One only hopes that Obu and his lieutenants will not consider these crucial questions as mere rhetorical questions from a damned unbeliever, but will give some serious thought to them before the evil days overtake the young and progressive movement.

5. Brotherhood Syncretism

We have indicated all along the preceding chapters examples of eclecticism and syncretism in Obu's teachings, that is, his conscious and unconscious borrowings from other religious and cultural sources, especially from the Christian belief system, African traditional religio-cultural worldviews, and Oriental philosophico-religious thought. Such syncretism is hardly surprising to the student of religion, for he or she knows that every movement--religious or non-religious--emerges out of an existing religious and cultural environment, and from its very beginning is in direct contact with that environment. Although the BCS was born within a specific Nigerian milieu, it has over the years come in contact with the world's religious

⁸³See the whole account of the struggle for power in the Celestial Church in Dele Omotunde et al., 'Passage of Oschoffa,' Newswatch (Lagos), November 4, 1985, p. 17.

and cultural environment and has ever since been acting and reacting with this global environment. Sometimes this interactional meeting of the new and the old has resulted in consort, at other times in conflict between the two. What determines the longevity and uniqueness of a given new movement, ultimately, are its selective as well as its creative capacity to adapt and synthesize in its systems of thought and worldviews elements from the host milieu which it considers meaningful and beneficial to its very existence; its ability to reject those elements from the environment which it considers antithetical to its conceptions of reality; and its ability to work out or create its own unique ways of looking at the world.

So long as ideas from various sources continue to diffuse and influence people, the course of eclecticism and syncretism--religious, ideological, political--cannot be arrested. But if we are to remain correct in calling Obu a syncretist, defined by Peel, as we pointed out in the last chapter, as "a man (sic) who sees some good . . . in his traditional religious practices and beliefs, identified as such, and attempts to synthesize them with new beliefs in a harmonious religious system,"⁸⁴ we must qualify his kind of syncretism. It seems to us that Obu's syncretism is largely, though not exclusively, implicit rather than explicit syncretism. The difference between the two lies in this: an explicit syncretist borrows from other sources more consciously, more freely, more openly and, quite often, uncritically, and admits that he or she does thus borrow. An implicit syncretist, on

⁸⁴ Peel, "Syncretism and Religious Change," p. 129.

the other hand, borrows but not often so consciously, so freely, or so openly. He or she is more critical in borrowing, but often denies (because he or she is not always conscious of the fact) that he or she is indeed borrowing. Obu's syncretism is certainly of this second kind. Indeed, Burridge's observation of the syncretistic teacher/prophet applies to Obu in this connection. Says Burridge:

. . . because he has to use traditional ideas to formulate the new, however radical the thought of a teacher might be or be thought by himself or others to be, in after years it is bound to look like some kind of synthesis. Even where a form of syncretism is farthest from the thought of an innovator, in the years to come his work assumes the form of a synthesis. It cannot appear as anything else. Not only is authenticity born of tradition, but an acceptable prophet is an innovator who synthesized, not simply an innovator.

If we understand clearly what Burridge is saying here, it means, then, that a covert but important mark of prophetic or pedagogical acceptability is the prophet's or teacher's ability to syncretize and synthesize in his or her system of thought ideas from traditions or sources outside his or her own system or tradition. Burridge further implies here that the prophet's or teacher's ability to borrow from other sources, consciously or unconsciously, lends "authenticity" to that teacher's or prophet's teachings. But, Burridge hastens to add, the prophet or teacher must not only be a borrower; he or she must also be an innovator if he or she must be fully accepted by his or her audience or followers. We have demonstrated throughout this work that

⁸⁵ Burridge, pp. 91-92.

Obu does indeed qualify as a true syncretistic prophet/teacher on both accounts.

One should further point out that in Obu's case, syncretism does not mean what some have taken it to mean--"an untidy muddle of elements drawn from more than one tradition at once."⁸⁶ There is certainly no 'untidy muddle' in Obu's syncretism. In fact, quite the contrary appears to be case. His seems to be a well-woven, well-synthesized and harmonious bringing together in one system elements from different expressions of religion (singular).

Furthermore, Obu's syncretism involves a process of neat synthesis in which the old is somehow re-ordered in such a way as to permit elements of the new, in an adapted form, to enter. The outcome of this synthesis is a fusion of the old and the new into a third type of religious culture--Brotherhoodism. Indeed, to use a rather apt expression which Humphrey Fisher has used in quite a different context, Brotherhoodism is but the outcome of "a reconciliation between divergent norms. It moves not always toward the African, but sometimes away, according to the imbalance that needs to be righted."⁸⁷ One might add here that in this reconciliation Brotherhoodism, as we have shown above, also sometimes moves away from (or re-interprets) orthodox Christian worldviews in an attempt to keep the old and the new in

⁸⁶ See Sharpe, Understanding Religion, p. 82; cf. Johannes Fabian, "Anthropological Approaches to Religious Movements," in David A. Halperin, ed., Psychodynamic Perspective on Religion, Sect and Cult (Boston: John Wright, 1983), p. 136.

⁸⁷ H.J. Fisher, "Muslim and Christian Separation in Africa," in Religion in Africa (Edinburgh: Centre for African Studies, 1964), p. 9.

doctrino-ideological equilibrium. Obu's genius lies in his ability to handle this reconciliation process in a way that is palatable and acceptable to well over one million followers from all over the world and from all walks of life.

It must be further pointed out, however, that in Brotherhood syncretic synthesis, it is not easy to say with any degree of accuracy and certainty exactly what percentage of Obu's teachings belongs to this or that religio-cultural tradition. The main difficulty in making such a judgment arises from the fact that religious ideas and concepts do cross-fertilize. Thus, what one may suppose to be, for instance, a Christian idea or concept in essence and substance may turn out, after all, to have originated from elsewhere. For example, the notion of a saviour or redeemer which seems to have assumed an exclusive Christian provenance can be traced to pre-Christian Gnosticism. Or, for another example, the concept of rebirth or reincarnation cannot be so easily traced to a single source or origin.

Furthermore, this difficulty is accentuated by the fact that even when Obu deals with those teachings that may on the surface appear to be Christian, he still introduces into them elements or ideas that may at the same time easily be recognized as foreign to traditional Christian concepts. Examples that readily come to mind here include Obu's doctrines of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the nature of human beings, good and evil, and ethics. As pointed out in chapter three, Obu's God is not a photocopy of the Christian God who is all-good, all-benevolent, all-male, and exclusively spiritual. Rather, his God is both good and evil, bisexual, and present in all things in nature--animate and inanimate. Similarly, unlike the Christ of orthodox Christianity who

was sinless, an exemplar of moral perfection, and lived only once in history, Obu's Christ had human weaknesses and moral failings, and lived seven previous times in history through the process of reincarnation, and now lives on earth the eighth time in the person of Olumba Olumba Obu. In like manner, for Obu the Judaic-Christian Bible, claimed by Christians to be inerrant, is full of errors of fact, translation, and interpolation.

Moreover, whereas in traditional Christianity the Holy Spirit is another name for the Holy Ghost, in Obu's pneumatology the two names belong to two different personalities. Also, whereas in historical Christianity human beings are completely other from God, in Obu's anthropology they are essentially divine. Further, as far as Obu is concerned, the negative or evil experiences in life are but the workings of God, not of the devil as is usually assumed in orthodox Christian thought. Finally, we recall that Obu's ethics, unlike traditional Christian ethics which is absolute, is relative and situational.

In view of such unproportional admixture of non-Christian ideas and viewpoints in ostensibly Christian doctrines, it is difficult to express in percentage how much of Obu's teachings are strictly Christian and how much are strictly something else. Indeed, the same unproportional admixture of ideas and concepts in those Brotherhood teachings that resemble both African and Oriental religio-cultural elements, also makes it difficult to say with any amount of precision and certainty how much of these teachings are traditional African and how much are strictly Oriental. In spite of these statistical difficulties, however, judging from its greater christocentric emphasis and the fact that most of its teachings are New Testament-based, one

could conclude (with tongue in cheek) that Obu's BCS reflects more Christian doctrines than anything else. Whatever else one finds in BCS doctrinal system seems to reflect Obu's own originality and reinterpretation, African traditional religious heritage, and Oriental philosophico-religious thought, roughly in that quantitative order.

The theoretical issues discussed in this chapter were selected in relation to their important bearing on the object of our research. It is hoped that they have in some way helped to clarify certain basic questions that have arisen from this study, such as why the BCS has come into existence, the "type" of religious organization it is, why thousands of Nigerians and non-Nigerians are flocking into it, the question of succession, and, finally, the nature of Obu's doctrinal or ideological syncretism. These issues do not, of course, exclude or exhaust other interesting theoretical possibilities which can emerge from a study of the movement. However, since our main interest in this work was not to theorize merely for the sake of theorizing but to present and analyze sociologically the BCS, its ideologies and social activities "as is," we shall leave other theoretical matters that may arise from this study to those whose interest and expertise lie in the area of the purely theoretical. But sociological theorists may do well always to remember James' admonition in the epigraph above and this wise advice from Bryan Wilson:

Today, even though the theoretical issues remain important to the sociologist of religion, increasingly the test of the discipline is not in its broad theoretical (and often--it may be

admitted--speculative) generalizations, but in
the work that is done in the field.⁸⁸

⁸⁸Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, p. 11.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions are not often reached by talk (or writing!) any more than by private thinking.

--Robert Louis Stevenson

One of our objectives in carrying out this study was to discover the factors responsible for the birth of the Brotherhood of the Cross. But contrary to our expectation, we failed to locate such factors directly in the socio-political situation of pre-Brotherhood Nigerian society. Neither did we find any direct connection between the colonial situation in Nigeria and the emergence of the BCS. Instead, we have traced the origin of this new religious movement to the charismatic personality of its founder and leader, Olumba Olumba Obu. The BCS exists today because of the birth sixty-eight years ago of this miracle man of Biakpan, and because of the mystery of charisma which has caused his followers to recognize and accept him and his teachings as having divine or supernatural origin. As we argued in the last chapter of this work, these "causes" for the emergence of the BCS are perfectly legitimate sociological "factors" for the genesis of a religious movement independent of any direct socio-political motives. In other words, barring any direct social, economic, or political motives, or any schism within an existing religious group, the BCS has emerged as a spontaneous development around a charismatic religious leader. Therefore, one cannot facilely classify this movement, as Marxist analyses tend to do with every new religious movement, among those

isolated cases of new religious movements in Southern and Central Africa to which socio-political and economic grievances gave birth.

We have shown also that the BCS is a good case of religious syncretism and that Obu himself is a syncretist par excellence, defined by Peel as "a man who sees some good . . . in his traditional religious practices and beliefs, identified as such, and attempts to synthesize them with new beliefs in a harmonious religious system."¹ In discussing Obu's syncretism we have emphasized two points. First of all, Obu's syncretism is not simply the bringing together in a loose collection of ideas from various religious and cultural sources but a coherent and organic amalgamation of concepts and perceptions from those sources, resulting in a neat synthesis at the level of imagination. Here, in our opinion, lies Obu's genius as a syncretist. Secondly, Obu's is implicit rather than explicit syncretism. That is, through the twin processes of selection and adaptation (reinterpretation), he borrows from other sources less consciously, less freely, less openly, and generally more critically than does an explicit syncretist, and often denies, because he is not always conscious of the fact, that he has indeed borrowed at all. An explicit syncretist, as we have said, often admits that he or she has indeed borrowed from other sources.

Since the BCS claims to be Christian through and through, it was also one of our aims to indicate how much of its beliefs and practices are similar to those of traditional Christianity; how much of them resemble African autochthonous religious beliefs and practices; how much

¹ Peel, "Syncretism and Religious Change," p. 129.

are peculiar to the movement, and how much are syncretistic. We ran into conceptual-methodological difficulties here. The main difficulty here was how to decide with any degree of certainty and accuracy, in view of the fact of the cross-fertilization of religious ideas and concepts, what belongs intrinsically to this or that religious tradition. This problem was accentuated by another: the fact that when Obu deals with those teachings that on the surface appear to have originated from this or that religious tradition, he follows that tradition only thus far, then departs from it and introduces into it elements or ideas that are ostensibly foreign to that tradition. We gave as examples of this kind of syncretic phenomenon Obu's theology, christology, pneumatology, anthropology, axiology (ethics), and his doctrines of good, evil, and the eight reincarnations of God (Christ), which are not exactly photocopies of the Christian doctrines of these subjects. The same unproportional admixture of ideas and concepts was likewise shown to be evident in Obu's doctrines which resemble both African traditional and Oriental religio-philosophical thought forms, as reflected, for instance, in his straddling between rejection and reinterpretation or partial acceptance of elements of traditional African religio-cultural practices, and introducing the notion of eight incarnations of God whereas Hinduism has ten Avataras.

As pointed out in the last chapter, in view of such doctrinal/ideological conglomeration, it was difficult to determine percentage-wise how much of Obu's teachings strictly belong to this or that religious tradition. Despite these difficulties, however, judging from Brotherhood greater christocentric ideological emphasis and from the fact that most of its teachings are New Testament-based, one could

conclude (tongue in cheek) that Obu's teachings reflect more Christian doctrines than anything else. Whatever else one finds in BCS' credo seems to reflect respectively Obu's own originality and reinterpretation, African traditional religious heritage, and Oriental philosophico-religious thought, roughly in that quantitative order.

Another of our tasks in this study was to indicate the reasons for the tremendous popularity of the BCS; that is, why teeming numbers of people from all social classes are flocking into the movement daily both in Nigeria and abroad. From our findings, we conclude that while there are many members who may be regarded as poor and "deprived" (as indeed one may find in any religious group), poverty and deprivation in themselves are not prima facie the most propelling forces that drive people to the BCS. If that were the case, we would not find the hundreds of economically well-to-do and well-placed people who make up a substantial proportion of the movement's membership. Instead of accepting the theory of poverty and deprivation as the explanation for adherence in the BCS, we have suggested that the main reason why people flock into the movement is the search for personal protection. That is to say, those who go to the BCS are in search of protection against such social and spiritual incubi as witchcraft, death, illness, childlessness, joblessness, the evil machination of enemies and the envious, etc. In sociological terms, this means that the search for personal protection against these ills is the major and sufficient condition for most Nigerians who join the BCS. In that case, we see the BCS serving as a "sacred canopy" or religious prophylactic for its members. Of all the feared evils, the most dreaded in the Cross River State of Nigeria, the seat of the BCS, is witchcraft, because there it

is believed to be the mother of all the other calamities in life. The wicked can use it at will to cause other tragedies.

Since Obu is believed to be able to protect people against and salvage them from this most dreaded social evil, and is indeed reported to have on many occasions demonstrated that ability, it is hardly surprising that a people who have lived all their lives under the constant fear and threat of witchcraft, would see Obu's movement as a God-sent bastion or refuge from this deadly enemy. As we have pointed out, even the healthy and wealthy of Nigerian society still feel the compelling need to find refuge under Obu's protective wings from the evil eye of the envious who, they fear, might use witchcraft to tamper with their health and wealth. Indeed, quite often it is this category of Nigerians that is most regular in seeking private audience with Obu for the purpose of obtaining special protective blessings and prayers.

Of course, the sick also go to the BCS to have their sicknesses cured. Here again, the motive for adherence is not unrelated to the problem of witchcraft, for most of the sicknesses reported to have been cured by Obu are said to be metaphysical in nature for which attempted regular medical attention (Western or traditional African) is said to have proved abortive. In such cases, witchcraft is invariably named as the causative agent. Even non-Nigerians, for whom the fear and threat of witchcraft may not pose a psycho-spiritual and social problem as they do for Nigerians, have confessed that they joined the BCS because it was able to heal them from what was hitherto regarded as incurable ailments, or because Obu was able to solve their religious and socio-economic problems.

Many members of the BCS also claimed that they were attracted to the movement because they had noticed in it a practical demonstration of brotherly love, warm fellowship, and genuine altruism. Those who gave this reason for joining were mostly the young, the elderly, the unemployed, and the hitherto lonely, especially those of them who had received some form of material assistance from the movement.

We conclude, therefore, that the fear of falling victim to the witchcraft or the evil spiritual powers of the wicked and the need for physical healing are the two strongest motivations for most Nigerians who join the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. From the perspectives of its founder and adherents, the raison d'être of the BCS is first and foremost to provide for its members and patrons physical, spiritual, and sometimes socio-economic protection against those evil forces. In fact, for most members of Nigerian new religious movements, religion begins and ends with men and women in search of healing and protection against witchcraft, ill-health, and all kinds of misfortune.

In that connection, we have suggested that this dual motive (healing and protection) for joining the BCS is pinned to indigenous African cosmological mental picture, and constitutes what we have described here as the culturo-ideographic basis and dynamic of Nigerian new religious movements. Because of the tremendous accent on physical and spiritual protection in the BCS in particular and all Nigerian new religious movements in general, and because these movements see their role as providing such protection for their votaries and patrons, we have suggested that the term protectionist (without its economic connotations) be used as a typological label or 'type-term' for these movements in general and the BCS in particular. That term, in our view,

immediately indicates and best describes the movements' goals, aspirations, and cosmological underpinnings.

Speaking here of a typological label reminds us of a related question which we raised also in the last chapter, namely: is the BCS to be typonymized a sect? We argued in that chapter that the answer to this question is not simply yes or no; rather, it is yes and no. Yes, because the movement still exhibits certain sectarian characteristics such as its self-conception as an elect, gathered remnant, possessing special enlightenment; its aspiration of personal moral perfection; high level of lay participation; emphasis on conversion through evangelism, hostility to clerical learning, and partial scornfulness toward the traditional culture (characteristics of the conversionist sect); focus on an imminent overthrow of the present social order at the advent of an expected utopia--a characteristic of the revolutionist sect. We also indicated that to the extent that the BCS claims access to a special body of knowledge and revelation, it may be described loosely as a gnostic sect, and that so long as one of its aims is to reform world morality, it could be described as a reformist sect.

The second part of our answer to the question is negative, because the very opposite of the following major sectarian characteristics are manifested in the BCS at the same time: exclusivity, strict membership requirements, disfellowshipping of members who contravene the movement's ethical code or organizational precepts, priesthood of all believers, spontaneity of expression in worship, hostility or indifference to the secular society or State, small membership size, and aversion to dominating the world and to universalism. In addition to the absence of these sectarian characteristics in the BCS, one also finds in the

movement itself and among many of its members evidence of increasing material wealth. Furthermore, unlike typical sects, the BCS affirms and appropriates much that is in the secular world--modern administrative, organizational and business techniques, etc.

The absence in the BCS of all the sectarian features pointed out here and the simultaneous presence in it of the very opposite of these features, in addition to the presence of those other characteristics that are said to be typical of denomination-type or church-type organizations, shows clearly that the BCS does combine both sectarian and denominational/churchly characteristics at once, with the pendulum swinging more to the side of the denomination or church. But as we pointed out above, such a combination of sectarian and denominational characteristics in a single religious organization is neither new nor peculiar to the BCS; rather, this trait seems to apply to all religious organizations. However, since, as we have said, the pendulum of characteristics in the case of the BCS swings more to the side of the denomination, we have suggested, therefore, that this movement is either already denominationalized or is at least currently undergoing that process. We have also suggested that the BCS has been aided in this process by the rapid rate of social change in post-independence Nigeria. We argued, too, that the BCS, because of its accent on brotherly love and its doctrine that, ultimately, one is not responsible for one's behaviour and actions, lacks effective mechanisms for enforcing strict group discipline, conformity and conservation of tradition. Because of that weakness in this very crucial area, its members seem to enjoy far more freedom than is usually allowed in a typical sectarian setting,

thus suggesting that the BCS can no longer be typologized a "pure" sect.

We have also indicated in this work (especially in chapter seven) that for the most part Nigerian Christians in the mission-founded, so-called historic churches still look upon the activities of the BCS with suspicion and as those of mad people and a deceived and misled followership. However, on the basis of the movement's demonstrated rational social programmes, economic manifesto and its actual implementation within the movement itself, and on account of the movement's generally sophisticated doctrino-ideological system of thought (its occasional contradictions and inconsistencies notwithstanding), we suggest that Obu and his movement are essentially rational, religiously and philosophically sound, creative and innovative. The movement's ideological and doctrinal uniqueness and reinterpretations are, in our opinion, a definite contribution not only to Christian thought but to religious thought in general, and should therefore be appreciated and commended, not condemned.

Finally, viewed within the context of the global phenomenon of new religious movements in this and past centuries, the concerns of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star are new only in their content and particularity, not in the general characteristic or focus, which is an attempt to create an environment or community where men and women know who they are and their place in the universe. In other words, the BCS falls naturally into that category of social movements the main aim of which is to help men and women to come to grips with the ultimate meaning of the human condition. Only the means or roads to accomplishing this aim differ from movement to movement. The

differences, in spite of some common features and functions, are what underscore the uniqueness or particularity of each movement. This particularity of each new religious movement makes it very difficult to construct a general theory of new religious movements, since the movements are too diverse for such a general formulation, and their functions vary from one society to another in accordance with both the needs of individuals in each society and that society's social, cultural and historical circumstances.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Primary (BCS) SOURCES

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all Brotherhood publications are published either by the Brotherhood Press or their Everlasting Gospel Centre, both located at the movement's present headquarters at 34 Ambo Street, Calabar. These publications are generally not dated, because they are believed to contain "eternal truths" which transcend dates. Only the names of authors (when known) and the titles of their works are given in this section of the Bibliography. Where the dates of some publications are known, these are indicated accordingly.

Agwu, Dominic Ogbonnaya. Leader Olumba Olumba Obu: The Fulfilment of the Hope of the Gentiles. (1983).

Akpan, O.E. Destiny and Brotherhood of Life. n.d.

----- The Gospel of Reincarnation. n.d.

----- Life After Death and the Mastery of Life. n.d.

Rassey, E.O. et al. Who Is This Man Olumba Olumba Obu? n.d.

Duke, M.D. The Supreme Being: Holy Father Olumba Olumba Obu. n.d.

Edet, S.E. Where Do We Go from Here? n.d.

Edienigbmi, Ayamaebene. How Great Is Thy Name, Olumba Olumba Obu. n.d.

Etuk, Sidney Ikpe Udo. Revelation of the Great World Leader. n.d.

Eyike, Uzorma. Irresistible Call. n.d.

Eyo, E.B. New Heaven and New Earth. n.d.

----- The Truth About Olumba Olumba Obu and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. 1981?

----- The Truth Has Come. n.d.

Inyangibom, Assassu. Beyond Prejudice. 2 vols. n.d.

----- Events Around the World: Revelation. n.d.

----- I Rise to Defend. n.d.

Kevin, S.A. The Universal Love. 1st ed. n.d.

- Monye, Theo. The Reign of the Holy Spirit in the Midst of Man. n.d.
- Olumba Olumba Obu. Chastity and Celibacy. 1982?
- The Comforter Has Come. n.d.
- The Concept of Equality Revisited: The Third Step to God. n.d.
- The Crucifixion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. n.d.
- The Elders' Handbook. n.d.
- The Everlasting Gospel: The Transcendent Teachings of the Holy Spirit. n.d.
- The Everlasting Gospel: Unveiling the Past Events of the Crucifixion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. n.d.
- The First Step to God. (1967).
- From Cross to Star: The Glorification of the Holy Spirit. 1982?
- Gospels for Destined 144,000 Virgins. n.d.
- Gospels of Total Liberation: From Cross to Star. (1982).
- Humility Is the Foundation of Greatness. 1982.
- I am Not God But Olumba Olumba Obu. n.d.
- Key to Successful Marriage Life. n.d.
- The Kingdom of Jehovah God and His Christ. n.d.
- The Light of the World. 16 vols. n.d.
- My Father Worketh and I work. n.d.
- The Mystery of Death. n.d.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ: The Alpha et Omega. n.d.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ: The Mouthpiece of God. n.d.
- Parents' and Children's Successful Life. 1st ed. 1980.
- Pathway to Godliness. n.d.
- Pentecostal Assembly Weekly Gospels. (Series), 15 vols.
- Powerful Ambo Sermons: Gospels of Love, Life, Faith, Hope. n.d.

- . The Return of the First Begotten of God to the World. n.d.
- . Revelation of the Holy Spirit: Special Release for Christ's Week. n.d.
- . The Second Step to God. n.d.
- . The Supernatural Teacher. 4 vols.
- . Those Who Will Go to Heaven. n.d.
- . Those Who Will Go to Hell. n.d.
- . What Is Brotherhood? n.d.
- . What Is Cross? n.d.
- . What Is Star? n.d.
- . Your Word Is Truth. (Series), 13 vols.
- Orok, Efiang. Mysteries in Brotherhood. n.d.
- Smith, M. The Root of Jesse. n.d.
- Udoh, E.U. Unsearchable Riches. (1976?)
- Udoh, Emmanuel Ndarake et al. Biakpan: Paradise Regained and Epistle to All Elects of God. (1973).
- Udo, Sunday Joe. Biakpan Town: A New Nazareth. n.d.
- Ukpai, E.K. Biakpan, Emon Anneyeng Ewai: The New World Language. 1985.
- Umoh, Sam Joseph. Faithful Witness. n.d.
- Umoh, James Umoh and Asuquo Ekanem. Brotherhood of the Cross and Star: Facts You Must Know. Lagos: W. & H. Commercial Arts Practitioners, 1979.
- . Spiritual X-Ray: The Day I Vomited a Padlock in Calabar. n.d.
- et al. God Glorifies His Holy Name: First Evangelical Tour of the United States of America. 1983?

Miscellaneous

The Beauty of Brotherhood. n.d.

BCS Journal. 2 vols. 1982 and 1983.

Christ's Healing Stream in Biakpan Town. n.d.

Christ's Universal Spiritual School of Practical Christianity: Students' Handbook. n.d.

The Christ's Practical Students' Handbook: The Qualities of Christ's Practical Students. n.d.

The Eternal School of Melchizedek. n.d.

Events of the Holy Week in Pictures. April Pentecostal Assembly 1981.

Faithful Ambassadors of the New Kingdom. n.d.

The Handbook. n.d.

His Deity Is Revealed. n.d.

InsightOut Magazine (Monthly), 1981-1984.

Living Testimonies, Dreams and Revelations. 5 vols. n.d.

Marriage According to God's Purpose. n.d.

The Memorandum of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. n.d.

Minutes of the Spiritual Council of Churches. 1972-1983.

More Than Bread: Simple Rules of Health and Happiness. n.d.

Murder. n.d.

The New Kingdom Deaconess: A Journal of the Deaconess' Fellowship. 1985.

The New World Magazine. 1978-1979.

The New World Missionary: A Journal of the New World Missionary Fellowship. 1985.

Obufa Nwed Ikwo. 1983.

Olumba Olumba Obu: The Mystery Man of Biakpan. n.d.

O.O. Obu: The Great Cosmic Teacher. n.d.

O.O. Obu: The Universal Leader. n.d.

The Other Wise Man. n.d.

Prophets' Handbook. 1965.

Revelations and Appearances. 2 vols. n.d.

The Sacred Order of Nature. n.d.

Songs for Special Occasions. 2nd. 1982.

Sure Foundation Hymnary. First Impression, 1977.

Text and Lessons. n.d.

The Truth About the Christ's Servants. 1984?

The Way. n.d.

Why Seek Ye the Living among the Dead? n.d.

Witnessing for Christ. n.d.

The World Will See Me No More. n.d.

B. Secondary Sources

Adas, Michael. Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Prophet Movements against the European Colonial Order. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

Adeyemo, T. Salvation in African Traditional Religion. Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1979.

Agossou, Médéwalé-Jacob. "'Pour un christianisme africain.'" Cahiers des religions africaines, 12, Nos. 21/24 (1977), 221-38.

----- "'Foi chrétienne et spiritualité africaine: notre réponse et notre responsabilité.'" Cahiers des religions africaines, 17, Nos. 33/34 (1983), 303-310.

Aguessy, H. "'La religion africaine comme valeur de culture et de civilisation.'" Cahiers des religions africaines, 12, Nos. 23/24 (1978), 7-20.

Alli, Billiamin A. "'Acculturation in Post-Traditional Society.'" Missiology, 2, No. (1975), 71-75.

Alo, Oladimeji I. "'Contemporary Convergence in Sociological Theories: The Relevance of the African Thought-System in Theory Formation.'" Présence Africaine, No. 126 (1983), 34-57.

Amadi, Gabriel I.S. "'Power and Purity: A Comparative Study of Two Prophetic Churches in Southeastern Nigeria.'" Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, 1982..

----- "'Healing in the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star.'" In The Church and Healing. Ed. W.J. Shiels. Oxford: Blackwell, 1982. 367-83.

Amucheazi, E.C. "'The Church as a Pressure Group in African Politics: The Case of Eastern Nigeria.'" Africa Quarterly, 13, No. 1 (1973), 43-65.

Angang, D. Atal Sa et al. Rédacteurs. Christianisme et Identité Africaine: Point de vue Exégétique. Actes du 1er Congrès des Biblistes Africains, Kinshasa, 26-30 décembre 1978. Kinshasa: Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio-Aachen, Faculté de Théologie Catholique de Kinshasa, 1980.

Antweiler, Anton. "'Religion and Technology.'" In Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Vol. 1: The Impact of Modern Culture on Traditional Religions. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968. 135-40.

Appiah-Kubi, Kofi. "'Indigenous African Christian Churches: Signs of Authenticity.'" In African Theology en Route: Papers from the Pan

- African Conference of Third World Theologians. Eds. Kofi Appia-Kubi and Sergio Torres. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979. 117-25.
- Arinze, Francis A. Sacrifice in Ibo Religion. Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1970.
- Assimeng, Max. "Crisis, Identity, and Integration in African Religion." In Identity and Religion: International, Cross-Cultural Approaches. Ed. Hans Mol. London: Sage Publications, 1978. 97-118.
- . "A Sociological Analysis of the Consequences of Some Christian Sects in Selected African Countries." Unpublished D.Phil. thesis, St. John's College, University of Oxford, 1968.
- Avery, Allen Wade. "African Independency: A Study of the Phenomenon of Independency and the Lessons to be Learned from It for Greater Church Growth in Africa." M.A. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission, Pasadena, Calif., 1969.
- Awolalu, J. Omosade. Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites. London: Longman, 1979.
- Ayankop, E. "The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star." M.Litt. thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1975.
- Bainbridge, William S. and Rodney Stark. "Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models." Sociological Analysis, 40, No. 4 (1979), 283-95.
- Banton, Michael. Ed. Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion. London: Tavistock Publications, 1966.
- Barber, Bernard. "Acculturation and Messianic Movements." American Sociological Review, 6 (1941), 663-69.
- Barker, Eileen. Ed. New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society. New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1982.
- Barrett, David B. Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- . Ed. African Initiatives in Religion. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971.
- . Ed. World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World AD 1900-2000. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982. (Especially pp. 526-32 on Nigeria).
- Barrett, Leonard E. "Religious Rejuvenation in Africa: Some Impressions from West Africa." Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 7,

No. 1 (1970), 23-36.

Barrett, Stanley R. The Rise and Fall of an African Utopia: A Wealthy Theocracy in Comparative Perspective. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1977.

Batende, Mwene. "Christianisme et mouvements prophétiques africains." Cahiers des religions africaines, 11, Nos. 21/22 (1977), 239-48.

Becker, Howard. Systematic Sociology: On the Basis of the Beziehungslehre and Gebilderlehre of Leopold von Wiese. New York: John Wiley, 1932.

Beckford, James A. "Beyond the Pale: Cults, Culture and Conflict." In New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society. Ed. Eileen Barker. New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1982. 284-301.

----- "Explaining Religious Movements." International Social Science Journal, 2 (1977), 235-49.

----- "Sociological Stereotypes of the Religious Sects." Sociological Review, n.s. 26, No. 1 (1978), 109-23.

Berger, Peter L. The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979.

----- The Sacred Canopy. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967..

----- "The Sociological Study of Sectarianism." Social Compass, 21 (1954), 467-85.

Bimwenyi, K.O. "Inculturation en Afrique et attitude des agents de l'évangélisation." Cahiers des religions africaines, 14, Nos. 27/28 (1980), 47-60.

Bird, Frederick. "The Pursuit of Innocence: New Religious Movements and Moral Accountability." Sociological Analysis, 40, No. 4 (1979), 335-46.

Blau, Peter M. Exchange and Power in Social Life. New York: Wiley, 1964.

Bond, George et al. Eds. African Christianity: Patterns of Religious Continuity. New York: Academic Press, 1979.

Booth, T.T. "We True Christians." Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1984. (On the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Birmingham.)

Boulaga, F. Eboussi. Christianity Without Fetishes: An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity. 1981. Translated from the French by

- Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984.
- Bourdillon, M.F.C. "'Pluralism and Problems of Belief.'" Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions, 54, No. 1 (1982), 21-42.
- Brewer, Earl D.C. "'Sect and Church in Methodism.'" Social Forces, 30, No. 4 (1952), 400-408.
- Bromley, David G. and Anson D. Shupe. Strange Gods: The Great American Cult Scare. Boston: Beacon Press, 1981.
- Brothers, Joan. Ed. Readings in the Sociology of Religion. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1967.
- Budd, Susan. Sociologists and Religion. London: Collier-Macmillan, 1973.
- Bududira, B. "'Christianisme et spiritualité africaine.'" Cahiers des religions africaines, 17, Nos. 33/34 (1983), 293-301.
- Buijtenhuijs, R. "'Messianisme et Nationalisme en Afrique noire: une remise en question.'" African Perspectives, No. 2 (1976), 25-44.
- Burridge, Kenelm. New Heaven New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969.
- Campbell, Colin. "'The Secret Religion of the Educated Classes.'" Sociological Analysis, 30, No. 2 (1978), 146-56.
- Chatterjee, Margaret. "'Religion, Understanding, and Sharing Insight.'" Religious Studies, 20, No. 1 (1984), 99-112.
- Clarke, Peter B. "'The Religious Factor in the Developmental Process in Nigeria: A Socio-historical Analysis.'" Genève-Africa, 15, No. 1 (1979), 45-64.
- Cohn, Norman. The Pursuit of Millenium. London: Secker and Warburg, 1957.
- Comhaire, J.L. "'Religious Trends in African and Afro-American Urban Societies.'" Anthropological Quarterly, 26 (1955), 95-108.
- Comstock, Garry Lynn. "'The Yoruba and Religious Change.'" Journal of Religion in Africa, 10, No. 1 (1979), 1-12.
- Coulon, Ch. "'Prophètes de Dieu ou prophètes de l'histoire? Messianismes musulmans et anticolonialisme: Quelques réflexions à partir d'exemples Sénégalais.'" African Perspectives, No. 2 (1976), 45-60.
- Cox, Harvey. The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective. 1965. Rev. ed. New York: Macmillan, 1971.

Curley, Richard T. "Dreams of Power: Social Process in a West African Religious Movement." Africa, 53, No. 3 (1983), 20-37.

Damsteegt, P. Gerard. Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977.

Davidson, Basil. The Growth of African Civilization: A History of West Africa 1000-1800. London: Longmans, 1965.

Davis, J. Ed. Religious Organization and Religious Experience. London: Academic Press, 1982.

De Craemer, Wiley et al. "Religious Movements in Central Africa: A Theoretical Study." Comparative Studies in Society and History, 18, No. 4 (1976), 458-75.

Deikman, Arthur J. "The Evaluation of Spiritual and Utopian Groups." Update: A Quarterly Journal on New Religious Movements, 9, No. 2 (1985), 2-12.

Demerath, N.J. Social Class in American Protestantism. Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1965.

Dougall, J.W.C. "African Separatist Churches." International Review of Mission, 25 (1956), 257-66.

Durkheim, Emile. The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. 1915. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964.

Dynes, Russell R. "Church-sect Typology and Socio-economic Status." American Sociological Review, 20, No. 5 (1955), 555-60.

Eidhamar, Levi Geir. "Rajneesh's Understanding of Jesus." Update: A Quarterly Journal on New Religious Movements, 9, No. 2 (1985), 21-28.

Eisenstadt, Samuel N. Charisma, Institution Building and Social Transformation: Max Weber and Modern Sociology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Ekechi, Felix K. "African Polygamy and Western Christian Ethnocentrism." Journal of African Studies, 3, No. 3 (1976), 329-49.

Enang, Kenneth. "Community and Salvation in the Nigerian Independent Churches." Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft, 59, No. 4 (1975), 255-68.

----- "The Concept of Baptism in African Independent Churches." Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft, 60, No. 4 (1976), 276-90.

----- Salvation in a Nigerian Background: Its Concept and Articulation in the Annang Independent Churches. Berlin: Verlag

- von Dietrich Reimer, 1979.
- . "'The Impact of the Independent Churches on the Nigerian Society.'" Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft, 64, No. 4 (1980), 307-15.
- Epelle, E.M.T. "'The Sects.'" West African Religion, Nos. 13 & 14 (1974), 42-51.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. "'The Nuer Conception of Spirit and Its Relationship to the Social Order.'" American Anthropologist, 55 (1953), 201-14.
- . Nuer Religion. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.
- Fabian, Johannes. "'Anthropological Approaches to Religious Movements.'" In Psychodynamic Perspectives on Religion, Sect and Cult. Ed. David A. Halperin. Boston: John Wright, 1983. 131-62.
- . "'Six Theses Regarding the Anthropology of African Religious Movements.'" Religion, 11 (1981), 109-26.
- Fairchild, Henry Pratt. Ed. Dictionary of Sociology. Paterson, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1964.
- Fasholé-Luke, Edward et al. Eds. Christianity in Independent Africa. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; London: Rex Collings, 1978.
- Faulkner, Joseph E. Ed. Religion's Influence in Contemporary Society: Readings in the Sociology of Religion. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1972.
- Fenn, Richard K. "'Toward A New Sociology of Religion.'" Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 11, No. 1 (1972), 16-32.
- Fernandez, James W. "'African Religious Movements.'" Annual Review of Anthropology, 7 (1978), 195-234.
- . Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- . "'The Ethnic Communion: Inter-ethnic Recruitment in African Religious Movements.'" Journal of African Studies, 2, No. 2 (1975), 131-47.
- . "'African Religious Movements--Types and Dynamics.'" Journal of Modern African Studies, 2, No. 4 (1964), 531-49.
- . Microcosmogony and Modernization in African Religious Movements. Occasional Papers of the Centre for Developing Area Studies. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1969.
- . "'Politics and Prophecy: African Religious Movements.'" Practical Anthropology, 12, No. 2 (1965), 71-75.

- . "'Rededication and Prophetism in Ghana.'" Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, 10, No. 38 (1970), 228-305.
- Fichter, Joseph H. Ed. Alternatives to American Mainline Churches. Barrytown, N.Y.: Unification Theological Seminary, 1983.
- . "'Youth in Search of the Sacred.'" In The Social Impact of New Religious Movements. Ed. Bryan Wilson. New York: The Rose of Sharon Press, 1981. 21-41.
- Foster, Peter G. "'An Evaluation of Approaches to the Study of Some Modern Religious Movements in Africa.'" M.A. thesis, University of Manchester, 1967.
- Geest, Sjaak van der. "'The Image of Death in Akan Highlife Songs of Ghana.'" Research in African Literatures, 11, No. 2 (1980), 145-74.
- Gerlach, Luther P. and Virginia H. Hine. "'Five Factors Crucial to the Growth and Spread of a Modern Religious Movement.'" Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 7, No. 1 (1968), 23-40.
- Glock, Charles Y. "'The Role of Deprivation in the Origin and Evolution of Religious Groups.'" In Religion and Social Conflict. Eds. Robert Lee and Martin E. Marty. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. 26-36.
- et al. Eds. To Comfort and to Challenge. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.
- Goldberg, Carl. "'Courage and Fanaticism: The Charismatic Leader and Modern Religious Cults.'" In Psychodynamic Perspectives on Religion, Sect and Cult. Ed. David A. Halperin. Boston: John Wright, 1983. 163-85.
- Gorsuch, Richard and Craig S. Smith. "'Attributions of Responsibility to God: An Interaction of Religious Beliefs and Outcome.'" Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 22, No. 4 (1983), 340-52.
- Grimley, J.B. and G.E. Robinson. Church Growth in Central and Southern Nigeria. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1966.
- Hackett, Rosalind I.J. "'An Aladura Healing Revival.'" The Nigerian Field, 46, Nos. 1 & 2 (1981), 52-56.
- . "'From Ndem Cults to Rosicrucians: A Study of Religious Change, Pluralism and Interaction in the Town of Calabar, South-Eastern Nigeria.'" Ph.D. dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1985.
- . "'Nigeria's Independent Churches: Gateways or Barriers to Social Development?" Africana Marburgensia, 14, No. 1 (1981), 9-25.

Hallen, B. and J.O. Sodipo. Knowledge, Belief & Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy. London: Ethnographica Publishers, 1985.

Hargrove, Barbara W. Reformation of the Holy: A Sociology of Religion. Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1971.

----- The Sociology of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Approaches. Arlington Heights, Ill.: AHM Publishing Corporation, 1979.

Hastings, Adrian. A History of African Christianity 1950-1975. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Hayward, Victor E.W. Ed. African Independent Church Movement. London: Edinburg House Press, 1963.

Heelas, Peter. "New Religious Movements in Perspective." Religion, 15 (1985), 81-97.

Hekman, Susan J. Weber, the Ideal Type, and Contemporary Social Theory. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.

Hick, John. God Has Many Names: Britain's New Religious Pluralism. London: Macmillan, 1980.

Hill, Michael. A Sociology of Religion. London: Heinemann, 1973.

Hinchliff, Peter Bingham. "African Separatists: Heresy, Schism, or Protest Movements?" In Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest. Ed. Derek Baker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972. 391-404.

Horton, Robin. "African Conversion." Africa, 41, No. 2 (1971). 85-108.

----- and J.D.Y. Peel. "Conversion and Confusion: A Rejoinder on Christianity in Eastern Nigeria." Canadian Journal of African Studies, 10, No. 3 (1976), 481-98.

Hoult, Thomas Ford. The Sociology of Religion. New York: The Dryden Press, 1958.

Idowu, E. Bolaji. African Traditional Religion: A Definition. London: SCM, 1973.

----- "The Challenge of Witchcraft." Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies, 4, No. 1 (1970), 3-16.

----- Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief. London: Longman, 1962.

----- Towards An Indigenous Church. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Ifeka-Moller, Caroline. "An Aladura Church in Eastern Nigeria." Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1968.

----- "White Power: Social-structural Factors in Conversion to Christianity, Eastern Nigeria 1921-1966." Canadian Journal of African Studies, 8, No. 1 (1974), 55-72.

Ilega, Daniel Iwayo. "Gideon M. Urhobo and the God's Kingdom Society in Nigeria." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1982.

Ilogu, Edmund. "Contribution of the Church to National Unity in Nigeria." International Review of Mission, 53 (1964), 271-80.

----- "Independent African Churches in Nigeria." International Review of Mission, 63 (1973), 492-98.

----- "The Religious Situation in Nigeria Today: A Sociological Analysis." Présence Africaine, 96 (1975), 504-24.

Iwe, N.S.S. Christianity, Culture and Colonialism in Africa. Port Harcourt: R.S.N.C., 1979.

Iwuagwu, A.O. "The 'Spiritual' Churches in the Eastern States of Nigeria." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1971.

James, William. The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature. With a New Introduction by Reinhold Niebuhr. 1902. New York: Macmillan, 1967.

Johnson, Doyle Paul. "Dilemmas of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of the People's Temple." Sociological Analysis, 40, No. 4 (1979), 315-23.

Johnstone, Ronald. Religion in Society: A Sociology of Religion. 2nd ed. 1975. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983.

Jules-Rosette, Bennetta. Ed. The New Religions of Africa. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1979.

Kastfelt, Niels. "African Prophetism and Christian Missionaries in Northeast Nigeria." Journal of Religion in Africa, 8, No. 3 (1976), 175-88.

Kenny, Joseph. "Religious Movements in Nigeria, Divisive or Cohesive? Some Interpretative Models." Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies, 16, No. 2 (1984), 111-28.

Kiernan, Jim. "Authority and Enthusiasm: The Organization of Religious Experience in Zulu Zionist Churches." In Religious Organization and Religious Experience. Ed. J. Davis. London: Academic Press, 1982. 169-79.

King, Christine. "The Case of the Third Reich." In New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society. Ed. Eileen

- Barker. New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1982.
125-39.
- King, Noel Q. Christian and Muslim in Africa. New York: Harper & Row, 1971
- Kluckhohn, Clyde. "Values and Value-orientations." In Toward a General Theory of Action. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951.
- Knudten, Richard D. Ed. The Sociology of Religion: An Anthology. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967.
- Kobben, A.J.F. "Prophetic Movements as an Expression of Social Protest." International Archives of Ethnography, XLIX (1960), 117-64.
- Kraemer, Hendrik. The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World. London: Edinburg House, 1938.
- La Barre, Weston, et al. "Movements religieux nés de l'acculturation." Dans Histoire des religions III. Encyclopédie de la pléiade. Dir. Henri-Charles Puech. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1976. 985-1276.
- Lanternari, Vittorio. "Nativistic and Socio-religious Movements: A Reconsideration." Comparative Studies in Society and History, 16, No. 4 (1974), 483-503.
- Lenski, Gerhard. The Religious Factor: A Sociological Study of Religion's Impact on Politics, Economics, and Family Life. 1961. Rev. ed. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1963.
- Lerrigo, P.H. "The Prophet Movement in the Congo." International Review of Mission, 11 (1922), 270-77.
- Les quatre fleuves, Cahiers de recherche et de réflexion religieuses.
10. Un Christianisme africain. Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1979.
- Lienhardt, G. Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.
- Lincoln, C. Eric. The Black Experience in Religion. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday/Anchor, 1974.
- Linton, Ralph. "Nativistic Movements." American Anthropologist, 45, No. 2 (1943), 230-40.
- Lipp, Wolfgang. "Charisma--Social Deviation, Leadership and Cultural Change: A Sociology of Deviance Approach." The Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion, 1 (1977), 59-77.
- Long, Theodore E. and Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Sects, Cults and Religious Movements." Sociological Analysis, 40, No. 4 (1979), 280-82.

MacGaffey, Wyatt. Modern Kongo Prophets: Religion in a Plural Society.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983.

Manyoni, Joseph R. 'Anthropology and the Study of Schism in Africa: A
Re-examination of Some Anthropological Theories.' Cahiers
d'Etudes Africaines, 17, No. 4 (1977), 599-631.

Martin, D.A. 'The Denomination.' British Journal of Sociology, 13,
No. 1 (1962), 1-14.

Mayer, Jean-François. Sectes Nouvelles: Un Regard Neuf.
Latour-Maubourg, Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1975.

McClelland, David C. Power: The Inner Experience. New York: Irvington
Press, 1975.

McComas, Henry C. The Psychology of Religious Sects: A Comparison of
Types. 1912. New York: AMS Press, 1973.

McGuire, Meredith C. 'Testimony as a Commitment Mechanism in Catholic
Pentecostal Prayer Groups.' Journal for the Scientific Study of
Religion, 16, No. 2 (1977), 165-68.

Mbiti, John S. African Religions and Philosophy. New York: Frederick
A. Praeger, 1969.

Mbon, Friday M. 'African Traditional Community in Transition.'
Bulletin of the International Committee on Urgent Anthropological
and Ethnological Research, No. 23 (1981), 41-67.

----- 'Deliverance in the Complaint Psalms: Religious Claim or
Religious Experience?' Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious
Studies, 14, No. 2 (1982), 120-31.

----- 'Response to Christianity in Pre-colonial and Colonial
Africa: Some Ulterior Motives.' (Forthcoming in Zeitschrift fur
Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft).

Meek, C.K. 'The Religions of Nigeria.' Africa, 14, No. 3 (1943),
106-117.

Messenger, John Jr. 'Religious Acculturation among the Anang Ibibio.'
In Continuity and Change in African Cultures. Eds. William R.
Bascom and Melville Herskovits. 1959. Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 1968. 279-99.

----- 'Reinterpretation of Christian and Indigenous Belief in a
Nigerian Nativist Church.' American Anthropologist, 62 (1960),
268-78.

Millett, David. 'A Typology of Religious Organizations Suggested by
the Canadian Census.' Sociological Analysis, 30, No. 2 (1969),
108-19.

Mitchell, Robert Cameron. "Religious Change and Modernization: the Aladura Churches among the Yoruba in Southeastern Nigeria." Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, Illinois, 1970.

----- "Religious Protest and Social Change: the Origins of the Aladura Movement in Western Nigeria." In Protest and Power in Black Africa. Eds. R.I. Rotberg and A.A. Mazrui. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970. 458-96.

----- "Witchcraft, Sin, Divine Power and Healing: the Aladura Churches and the Attainment of Life's Destiny among the Yoruba." In Traditional Background to Medical Practice. Paper read at a conference at the University of Ibadan in 1966 and later published under this title in the University of Ibadan Occasional Paper series, No. 25, 1971.

Moberg, David O. "Virtues for the Sociology of Religion." Sociological Analysis, 39, No. 1 (1978), 1-18.

Mol, Hans. Ed. Identity and Religion: International, Cross-cultural Approaches. London: Sage Publications, 1978.

----- Identity and the Sacred: A Sketch for a New Social-scientific Theory of Religion. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976.

----- Meaning and Place: An Introduction to the Social Scientific Study of Religion. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983.

Morgan, John H. Ed. Understanding Religion and Culture: Anthropological and Theological Perspectives. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979.

Mosatche, Harriet S. Searching: Practices and Beliefs of the Religious Cults and Human Potential Groups. New York: Stravon Educational Press, 1983.

Murvar, Vatro. "Toward a Sociological Theory of Religious Movements." Journal for the Scientific Study of Religions, 14, No. 3 (1975), 229-56.

Nabofa, M.Y. "The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star in Great Britain." Religion Today: A Journal of Contemporary Religions, 2, No. 3 (1985), 8-11.

Nadel, S.F. Nupe Religion: Traditional Beliefs and the Influence of Islam in a West African Chiefdom. 1954. New York: Schocken Books, 1970.

Ndiokwere, Nathaniel I. Prophecy and Revolution: The Role of Prophets in the Independent African Churches and in Biblical Tradition. London: SPCK, 1981.

Newman, William M. Ed. The Social Meanings of Religion: An Integrated Anthology. Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Co., 1974.

Nichol, Francis D. The Midnight Cry. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1944.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. The Social Sources of Denominationalism. 1929. New York: Meridian Books, 1957.

Nkereuwem, Umo Efiang. "'African Christianity: A Case Study of the History of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star.'" B.A. Research Project, University of Calabar, 1983. (Author is an active member of the BCS.)

Nottingham, Elizabeth K. Religion and Society. New York: Random House, 1954.

Nsagak, I.U. et al. "'The Abak Story.'" An unpublished mimeograph on New Religious Movements in the Abak Division of the Cross River State of Nigeria. 1967. 44pp.

Nwanunobi, Cyril O. "'Sects as an Urban Phenomenon in Contemporary Eastern Nigeria.'" Anthropos, 75 (1980), 117-28.

----- "'The Significance of Separatist Movements (Indigenous Sects) in Contemporary Eastern Nigeria.'" Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1976

Nwosu, V. Ed. Prayer Houses and Faith Healing. Onitsha, Nigeria: Tabansi Press, 1971.

O'Dea, Thomas F. Sociology of Religion. Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966.

Offiong, Daniel A. "'The 1978-79 Akpan Ekwong Anti-Witchcraft Crusade in Nigeria.'" Anthropologica, n.s. 24, No. 1 (1982), 27-42.

----- "'Social Relations and Witch Beliefs among the Ibibio.'" Africa, 53, No. 3 (1983), 73-87.

Offiong, Essien Akabom. "'Schism and Religious Independency in Nigeria: A Case Study of Calabar.'" B.A. Research Project, University of Calabar, 1983. (Author is a former member of the BCS.)

Ogedegbe, Peter Irabor. "'Origin and Causes of Independent Churches, with Special Reference to Edo.'" B.A. (Hons.) Extended Essay, University of Ibadan, 1969.

Okeke, George E. "'The Challenge of the Rising Christian Groups and Churches in Nigeria.'" Communio Viatorum, 22 (1979), 165-71.

Omoyajowo, Joseph Akin. "'An African Expression of Christianity.'" In Essays on Black Theology. Ed. M. Motlali. Braamfontein, Transvaal: University Christian Movement, 1972. 60-70. Reprinted in Black Theology: the South African Voice. Ed. B. Moore. London: C. Hurst, 1973. 81-92.

- . "The Aladura Churches in Nigeria since Independence." In Christianity in Independent Africa. Ed. Edward Fashole-Luke et al. London: Rex Collings; Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1978. 96-110.
- . Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church. New York: NOK Publishers International, 1982.
- . The Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Relation to Church, Society and State: A Jubilee Publication 1925-1975. Ibadan: Claverianum Press, 1975.
- . "The Cherubim and Seraphim Movement: A Study in Interaction." Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies, 4, No. 2 (1970), 124-39.
- . Diversity in Unity: The Development and Expansion of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Nigeria. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984.
- Onyewuenyi, Innocent C. "A Philosophical Reappraisal of African Belief in Reincarnation." Présence Africaine, No. 123 (1982), 63-78.
- Onyioha, K.O.K. African Godianism: A Revolutionary Religion for Mankind Through Direct Communication with God. New York: Conch Magazine Ltd., 1980.
- Oothuizen, Gerhardus C. Afro-Christian Religions. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979.
- . "The Church among African Forces." Practical Anthropology, 11, No. 4 (1964), 161-79.
- O'Toole, Roger. Religion: Classic Sociological Approaches. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1984.
- Parrat, J.K. "Religious Change in Yoruba Society: A Test Case." Journal of Religion in Africa, 11, No. 2 (1969), 113-28.
- . "Syncretism in Yorubaland." Practical Anthropology, 16 (1969), 109-13.
- and A.R.I. Doi. "Some Further Aspects of Yoruba Syncretism." Practical Anthropology, 16, No. 6 (1969), 252-56.
- Parrinder, Geoffrey E. "Traditional Religions and Modern Culture (Africa)." In Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, vol. 1: The Impact of Modern Culture on Traditional Religions. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968. 99-112.
- . West African Psychology: A Comparative Study of Psychological and Religious Thought. London: Lutterworth Press, 1976.

----- . Witchcraft: European and African. London: Faber and Faber, 1963.

Parsons, Talcott. Action Theory and the Human Condition. New York: The Free Press, 1978.

----- . Essays in Sociological Theory. Rev. ed. New York: The Free Press, 1964.

Peel, J.D.Y. "Religious Change in Yorubaland." Africa, 37 (1967), 292-306.

----- . "Syncretism and Religious Change." Comparative Studies in Society and History, 10, No. 2 (1968), 121-41.

----- . Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Pickering, W.S.F. Durkheim's Sociology of Religion. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.

Pike, E.R. Jehovah's Witnesses. New York: Philosophical Library, 1954.

Pope, Liston. Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia. With an Introduction by Richard A. Peterson and N.J. Demerath. 1942. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1965.

Ranger, T.O. and I.N. Kimambo. Eds. The Historical Study of African Religion: With Special Reference to East and Central Africa. London: Heinemann, 1972.

Ray, Benjamin C. African Religions: Symbols, Ritual, and Community. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976.

Roberts, Keith A. Religion in Sociological Perspective. Homewood, Ill.: The Dorsey Press, 1984.

Robertson, Roland. "Religious Movements and Modern Societies: Toward a Progressive Problemshift." Sociological Analysis, 40, No. 4 (1979), 297-314.

----- . The Sociological Interpretation of Religion. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970.

Robbins, Thomas and Dick Anthony. Eds. In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1981.

----- and Dick Anthony. "New Religious Movements and the Social System: Integration, Disintegration or Transformation." The Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion, 2 (1978), 1-27.

-----, Dick Anthony and James Richardson. "Theory and Research on

- Today's 'New Religions'.' ' Sociological Analysis, 39, No. 2 (1978), 95-122.
- Rokeach, Milton. Beliefs, Attitudes, and Values. San Francisco: Jossey-Base, 1968.
- Runcian, W.G. 'The Sociological Explanation of Religious Beliefs.' Archives Européennes de Sociologie, 10, No. 2 (1969), 149-91.
- Salamone, Frank A. 'Competitive Conversion and Its Implications for Modernization (Nigeria).' Anthropos, 75 (1980), 383-403.
- Sanford, John A. Evil: The Shadow of Reality. New York: Crossroad, 1982.
- Sanneh, Lamin. West African Christianity: The Religious Impact. London: C. Hurst & Co., 1983.
- Scharf, Betty R. The Sociological Study of Religion. 1970. New York: Harper & Pow, 1971.
- Schneider, Harold K. The African: An Ethnological Account. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981. (Especially chapter 8: 'Religion and Philosophy: Binary Classification and Ritual.')
- Schneider, Louis. Sociological Approach to Religion. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1970.
- Seneviratne, H.L. 'A Critique of Religion and Power in the Social Sciences.' Social Compass, 32, No. 1 (1985), 31-44.
- Shank, D.A. 'The Prophet of Modern Times: The Thought of William Waddy Harris.' 2 vols: (415pp. and 373pp.) Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1984.
- Sharpe, Eric J. Understanding Religion. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983.
- Shenk, Wilbert R. 'Mission Agency and African Independent Churches.' International Review of Mission, 63 (1973), 475-91.
- Shepperson, G. 'Ethiopianism and African Nationalism.' Phylon, 14 (1952), 9-18.
- 'The Politics of African Separatist Movements in British Central Africa, 1892-1916.' Africa, 24 (1954), 233-46.
- Shorter, Aylward. African Culture and the Christian Church: An Introduction to Social and Pastoral Anthropology. London and Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973.
- Prayer in the Religious Traditions of Africa. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1975.

- Shupe, Anson D. Six Perspectives on New Religions: A Case Study Approach. New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981.
- Smart, Ninian. The Religious Experience of Mankind. 1969. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976.
- Stark, Rodney and William Sims Bainbridge. "'Of Churches, Sects and Cults: Preliminary Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements.'" Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 18, No. 2 (1979), 117-33.
- Stark, Werner. "'Max Weber's Sociology of Religious Belief.'" Social Analysis, 25, No. 1 (1964), 41-49.
- Stone, Donald. "'On Knowing How We Know About the New Religions.'" In Understanding the New Religions. Eds. Jacob Needleman and George Baker. New York: Seabury Press, 1978. 141-52.
- "'New Religious Consciousness and Personal Religious Experience.'" Sociological Analysis, 39, No. 2 (1978), 123-34.
- Streng, Frederick J. Understanding Religious Life. 1969. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1976.
- Sundkler, Bengt M. Bantu Prophets in South Africa. 1948. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- Sylla, Laciné. "'Succession of the Charismatic Leader: The Gordian Knot of African Politics.'" Daedalus, 3, No. 2 (1982), 11-28.
- Tasie, G.O.M. "'Africans and the Religious Dimension: An Appraisal.'" Africana Marburgensia, 9, No. 1 (1976), 34-70.
- Taylor, W.H. "'Missionary Education in Africa Reconsidered: The Presbyterian Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria 1846-1974.'" African Affairs, 83, No. 331 (1984), 189-205.
- Theobald, Robin. "'The Role of Charisma in the Development of Social Movements.'" Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions, 49, No. 1 (1980), 83-100.
- Tillich, Paul. Systematic Theology, vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951.
- Towler, Robert. Homo Religiosus: Sociological Problems in the Study of Religion. London: Constable & Co., 1974.
- Tripathi, R.K. Problems of Philosophy and Religion. Varanasi, India: Banaras Hindu University, 1971.
- Troeltsch, Ernst. The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches. 2 vols. Harper Torchbooks ed. Trans. Olive Wyon with an Introduction by H. Richard Niebuhr. 1931. New York: Harper and Brother, 1960.

Tucker, Robert C. "The Theory of Charismatic Leadership." Daedalus, 97 (1968), 731-56.

Turner, Bryan. "Sociological Founders and Precursors: Theories of Religion of Emile Durkheim, Fustel de Coulanges and Ibn Khaldūn." Religion: A Journal of Religion and Religions, 1 (1971), 32-48.

Turner, Harold W. African Independent Church, 2 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

----- "The Hidden Power of the Whites: The Secret Religion Withheld from the Primal Peoples." Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions, 46, No. 1 (1978), 41-55.

----- "The Relationship Between Development and New Religious Movements in the Tribal Societies of the Third World." In God and Global Justice: Religion and Poverty in an Unequal World. Eds. Frederick Ferré and Rita H. Mataragnon. New York: Paragon House, 1985. 84-110.

----- Religious Innovation in Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979.

----- "Tribal Religious Movements." In Encyclopedia Britannica 1974 ed.), Macropaedia, 18: 697-705.

van Binsbergen, W.M.J. and R. Buijtenhuijs. "Religious Innovation in African Society: Introduction." African Perspectives, No. 2 (1976), 7-11.

Wach, Joachim. Sociology of Religion. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Walker, Sheila Suzanne. "Christianity African Style: The Harrist Church of the Ivory Coast." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1976.

----- The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and the Harrist Church. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, 1983.

Wallace, A.F.C. "Revitalization Movements." American Anthropologist, 58 (1956), 264-81.

Wallis, Roy. "The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life." The Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion, 3 (1979), 191-211.

----- "Charisma, Commitment and Control in a New Religious Movement." In Millennialism and Charisma. Ed. Roy Wallis. Belfast: The Queen's University Press, 1982. 73-140.

----- "The Social Construction of Charisma." Social Compass, 29, No. 1 (1982), 25-39.

- The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976.
- "'Yesterday's Children: Cultural and Structural Change in a New Religious Movement.'" In The Social Impact of New Religious Movements. Ed. Bryan Wilson. New York: The Rose of Sharon Press, 1981. 97-133.
- Walls, Andrew F. "'Religion and the Press in 'The Enclave' in the Nigerian Civil War.'" In Christianity in Independent Africa. Ed. Edward Fashole-Luke et. al. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; London: Rex Collings, 1978. 207-15.
- Weaver, Edwin and Iren Weaver. The Uyo Story. Elkhart, Indiana: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1970.
- Meeting Indigenous Churches in West Africa. Elkhart, Indiana: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1974.
- Weber, Max. From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology. Trans. and ed. by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.
- Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building. Ed. with Introduction by S.N. Eisenstadt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Trans. Talcott Parsons. London: Allen & Unwin, 1930.
- Sociology of Religion. 1922. Trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, with Introduction by Talcott Parsons. New York: Beacon Press, 1969.
- The Theory of Social and Economic Organization. Trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. 1947. New York: The Free Press, 1964.
- Webster, James Bertin. The African Churches Among the Yoruba 1888 - 1922. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- "'Independent Christian Churches in Africa.'" Tarikh, 3, No. 1 (1969), 56-81.
- Welton, M.R. "'Holy Aruosa: Religious Conservation in a Changing Society.'" Practical Anthropology, 16 (1969), 18-27.
- Westley, Frances. The Complex Forms of the Religious Life: A Durkheimian View of New Religious Movements. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983.
- "'The Cult of Man': Durkheim's Predictions and New Religious Movements.'" Sociological Analysis, 39, No. 2 (1978), 135-45.
- White, Ellen G. Early Writings. 1882. 4th ed. Washington, D.C.:

- Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945.
- Wilber, Ken. The Sociable God: A Brief Introduction to a Transcendental Sociology. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983.
- Wilson, Bryan R. "An Analysis of Sect Development." American Sociological Review, 24, No. 1 (1959), 3-15.
- "Apparition et Persistance des Sectes dans un Milieu Social en évolution." Sociologie des Religions, 5 (1958), 140-50.
- Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements Among Tribal and Third-world Peoples. London: Heinemann, 1973.
- "The New Religions: Preliminary Considerations." In New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society. Ed. Eileen Barker. New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1982. 16-31.
- Religion in Sociological Perspective. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Sects and Society. London: Heinemann, 1961.
- Ed. The Social Impact of New Religious Movements. New York: The Rose of Sharon Press, 1981.
- "A Typology of Sects." In Sociology of Religion: Selected Readings. Ed. Roland Robertson. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969. 361-83.
- Wiseberg, L.S. "Christian Churches and the Nigerian Civil War." Journal of African Studies, 2, No. 3 (1975), 297-331.
- Wolff, Kurt H. The Sociology of Georg Simmel. New York: The Free Press, 1950.
- Worsley, Peter. The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of "Cargo" Cults in Melanesia. 2nd ed. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
- Yinger, J. Milton. Religion, Society and the Individual. New York: Macmillan, 1957.
- The Scientific Study of Religion. London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970.
- "The Sociology of Religion of Ernst Troeltsch." In An Introduction to the History of Sociology. 1948. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965. 309-15.
- Zahan, Dominique. Religion, Spirituality and Thought of Traditional Africa. 1970. Trans. Kate E. Martin and Lawrence M. Martin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Zuesse, Evan M. "On the Nature of the Demonic: African Witchery." Numen, 18, fasc. 3 (1971), 210-39.

----- Ritual Cosmos: The Sanctification of Life in African Religions. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979.

Zygmunt, Joseph F. "Prophetic Failure and Chiliastic Identity: The Case of Jehovah's Witnesses." American Journal of Sociology, 75, No. 6, (1970), 926-48.

APPENDIX A

ABSTRACT

OF

BROTHERHOOD OF THE CROSS AND STAR: A SOCIOLOGICAL CASE STUDY OF
NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

by

Friday Michael Mbon

Supervisor: Dr. Roger Lapointe

ABSTRACT

One of the ways in which contemporary African Christians have expressed their dissatisfaction with missionary, Western-type Christianity has been their experimentation with new religious forms and initiatives. A major consequence of this experimentation has been the pullulation of new Christian religious movements throughout contemporary Africa, especially the sub-Saharan part of the continent. In West Africa, Nigeria proves to be the largest stage for this new religious drama and experimentation. This study is about one Nigerian new religious movement that is actively engaged in this fervid religious furor and fermentation. Known as the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star (BCS), this particular movement was founded in the late 1950s by the Nigerian charismatic by the name of Olumba Olumba Obu (1918 -). The movement emerged spontaneously around Obu's charismatic personality, beginning as it did as a prayer-cum-Bible-Study group/healing home with only a handful of women and children in search of physical healing through spiritual means. But today it has grown into an international body with thousands of adherents from all walks of life all over Black Africa, the United States, Great Britain, Australia, West Germany, Japan, India, and the West Indies.

Our specific objectives in carrying out the study include: to discover the factors leading to the emergence of the BCS; to find out why the movement continues to attract and retain teeming numbers of devotees from all social strata both at home and abroad; and, since it claims to be a Christian movement through and through, to determine the

degree of its Christianness as judged from a study of its beliefs and practices. It was also our aim to indicate how much of the movement's teachings and practices resemble those of other religious traditions. At the back of our mind, too, was the question as to whether deprivation or poverty led some or most people to join the movement.

The study begins with an Introduction in which our research objectives, scope, focus, and methodology are explained and specified. We also pay attention in this section to general methodological issues involved in researching a religious faith. Also, it is indicated here that our particular approach in the study is sociological.

In chapter one, we introduce Obu to the reader by briefly narrating his biography, including his family and socio-religious backgrounds and the beginnings of the nascent movement. We move from here to chapter two where we examine the movement's structure and organization, the twin axis on which it moves and has its being, punctuating that chapter with a brief theoretical analysis of the sociological implications of the movement's role structure.

The organizational structure of the BCS could not stand firmly without some solid ideological foundation. Undergirding that foundation is the movement's system of beliefs, doctrines, practices and institutions. We undertake a detailed examination of that institutional and doctrino-belief system in chapters three and four, in order to advance our knowledge of the basis of the movement's worldviews (Weltanschauungen) and actions.

Religion may respond to its cultural environment either positively, negatively or indifferently. Chapter five of this work is devoted to a discussion of how Brotherhoodism responds to African traditional

culture, showing how Obu stands à cheval on both African religio-cultural belief system and Christianity, straddling apparent acceptance and obvious rejection of elements of both traditions.

Chapter six deals with more secular aspects of the BCS. Here we examine the movement's impact on Nigeria's politics, economy and social life in general. Strictly for purposes of comparison and in order to accentuate our appreciation for BCS' contributions, we have often referred in this chapter to what other Nigerian new religious movements are doing in these areas of the country's social life. Following this chapter, we discuss, in chapter seven, the movements' religious impact on Nigerian society and how that society responds to it.

In chapter eight, our ultimate chapter, we have attempted some theoretical analysis of a selected number of issues that have emerged from the study. For instance, we have dealt here with concerns such as the causal factors for the emergence of African new religious movements, the question of typology of these movements in general and of the BCS in particular, the issue of succession in the BCS, and the nature of Brotherhood syncretism.

We conclude the study by attempting to answer the questions raised above, suggesting that the main reason why people flock into the BCS is to seek personal protection from certain life situations, especially protection against witchcraft, sickness, evil forces (both human and spiritual), and death. Since the goal of protection is accented much more than any other in the the BCS in particular and in other Nigerian new religious movements in general, we have suggested that the term protectionist (without its economic connotations) is the most empirically appropriate type label or classificatory "type-term" for

Nigerian (African) new religious movements. That term, we have argued, immediately indicates and best describes the movements' goals, aspirations, and cosmological-cum-cultural underpinnings.

APPENDIX B

THE MANY NAMES OF OLUMBA OLUMBA OBU

Below are some of the divine names or onomastic designations, found passim in Brotherhood literature, which members of the movement give their Leader. It is to be noted that these names emerged gradually, assuming more divine dimensions as the members' religious experience with Obu grew deeper and deeper. Starting from referring to and addressing him simply as "Brother Obu," then as "Leader" and eventually as "Papa" or "Father" (the qualifying "Holy" came a little later), Obu's followers have now come to address or refer to him by such divine-coated names as:

The Saviour, Jesus Christ back on earth, The Physician, Christ in disguise, "I am that I am," Great Deity, God in human Mask or God in Human Form, Sole Spiritual Head of the Universe, The Universal Judge, The Light of the World, The Alpha and Omega, God all in all, The Supreme Being of the Universe, The Changeless Promised Morning Star, The Oversoul, The Overself, The Unknown God, The Lord of Light, The Ruler of all planes, World Teacher, The Supernatural Teacher, The Mediator between Godhead and erring humanity, The Creator of heaven and earth, The Life-giving Spirit, The Great Ruler, The Inner Light, The Supreme Identity, The One and Universal Spirit, The Long-expected Comforter, The Great Light, The Great Being, The Super Spiritual Being, The Desire of Ages, The Super King, The Holy Spirit Personified, The Omnipresent Holy Spirit, The Great Descendant of David, The Lion of Judah, The Root of

Jesse, The Controller of the Universe, The Holy Light, The New Testament Teacher, The Ultimate Reality, The Great Prophet of our Day, The Greatest Doctor, the Sole Scientific, Medical and Diabolical Wisdom, He Who is Greater than the world, Impregnable Rock, The Solid Rock, God Incarnate, The Love incarnate, Love in Expression, the Master of the Universe, The Universal Mind, The Everlasting Father, The Spirit of Truth Made Manifest that man may understand what Truth is, The Supreme Spirit made manifest, Another of the Comforters, The Master/pure Spirit, The Christ, The Lord of the New Age, A Potential World Saviour, Our Lord and Master, The Almighty God, The Holy Father, King of kings and Lord of lords, A Glowing Spiritual Mass, A King who will rule over other things, The Word of God, A Cosmic, Super Spiritual Being with absolute Self-mastery, The Greatest Cosmic Teacher, Super Diplomat, The Source of all Dynamic Energy and Wisdom, The Only One in heaven and earth Who has the Legal Right to open the Scroll, The First Fruit to God and the Lamb, The Universal Sovereignty, The Head of all spirits, The Omnipresent, the Omniscient, and the Omnipotent, The King of Righteousness, The King of Infinity, The King of Glory, The Immortal, The Citadel of Spiritual Wisdom, The Storehouse of Human knowledge, The Mystery Man of Biakpan, The Prince of Peace, The Lamb of God, The Voice of Nations, The King of Truth (03), Ete Nnvin (our Father), The Creator of all native and English doctors, The Rock of Salvation, Giver of life and rest in heaven and earth, Spiritual Rock, The Super-genius, The True God and Father of all creation, Creator and Ruler of the whole creation, etc.

APPENDIX C

SOME BROTHERHOOD FELLOWSHIPS

1. The Spirited Children Fellowship
2. The Representatives' Fellowship
3. Deaconesses' Fellowship
4. Women Fellowship
5. Men Fellowship
6. General Fellowship
7. Choristers' Fellowship
8. Education, Labour and Welfare Board Fellowship
9. Youth Fellowship
10. Children Fellowship
11. Workers' Fellowship
12. Ordained Sisters' Fellowship
13. Visioners' and Dreamers' Fellowship
14. Teachers' Fellowship
15. Mercy Fellowship
16. Pastors' Fellowship
17. Elders' Fellowship
18. Prophets, Prophetesses, Elders, Workers, Students, Preachers, and Christ's Servants Fellowship
19. Crusaders' Fellowship
20. Health Workers' Fellowship
21. All Forces Fellowship
22. All Blessed Brothers' and Sisters' Fellowship

23. Preachers' Fellowship
24. All Ordained Fellowship
25. New World Fellowship
26. Spiritual Council of Churches
27. Holy Spirit Church
28. Students' Fellowship
29. Christ's Students' Fellowship
30. Enlarged Practical Students Fellowship

APPENDIX D

WHAT BROTHERHOODS CONSIDER TO BE SINS¹

"Any person who does not refrain from all the sins enumerated below cannot be a good Christian. These sins are:

Fornication, adultery, stealing, lying, deceipt, envying, cunning, anger, quarrelling, fighting, gossipping, idolatry, witchcraft, taking of drinks, smoking, snuffing, heresy, lasciviousness, sedition, unrighteousness, mischief, jealousy, cowardice, vindictiveness, pomposity, division, laziness, covetousness, argument, flippancy, pride, fraud, aggravation, whispering, cursing, herbalism, traditional plays, worldly dance, worldly scence (sic), swearing by blood, oath, inordinate lust and evil concupiscence, both native and English (Western) treatments, occult science, burning of incense, ogboni society, playing of band or drums (i.e. musical instruments in worship), weeping, frowning of face, sighing, bribery or being bribed, selfishness, flogging of children, wife, servant; disobedience and lamenting, wearing of gold, pearl, earrings, necklace, finger ring, boring of ear etc. offering people drinks, keeping mourning house, secret society such as Roscirusian, Lodge, Abu, Ekpe, Ekpo, and others, court action, backbiting, sacrifice, (being) present in worldly society, soothsayer or

¹From BCS' The First Step to God (1967?), pp. 2-3; emphasis added.

worldly gathering, eating meat of strangled beasts or meat of animals which die of themselves, and such-like ungodly manners."

APPENDIX E

YEARLY STATISTICS OF OBU'S VISITORS 1978-1984

(Figures as provided by the movement's Registration Office.)

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Registered Visitors</u>
1978	27, 304
1979	17, 976
1980	26, 254
1981	30, 360
1982	43, 860
1983	35, 875
1984	42, 049

Note: These figures represent numbers of registered visitors only. A great many people who visit Obu "nicodemusly" prefer anonymity and confidentiality and, consequently, do not register with the Registration Office. However, these figures are an indication of Obu's popularity among many, the general negative attitude toward his movement notwithstanding.