M. F. C. Bourdillon

GLEANING: SHONA SELECTIONS FROM BIBLICAL MYTH

The most obvious types of response to Christianity are acceptance or rejection. In the latter case, anthropological studies are likely to ignore Christianity, or quickly dismiss it as irrelevant to the study in hand.

With respect to the former alternative, studies of conversion look at different ways in which Christianity may be accepted, involving different degrees of modification of traditional belief systems. Godfrey Lienhardt points out that among the Dinka,[1] conversion to Christianity is often simply part of a larger package: Christianity goes with education, new forms of income and a new way of life that could generally be summed up as 'progress'. In this context conversion involves a re-orientation and re-interpretation both of traditional ideas and of concepts introduced by Christian missionaries.

A third possibility, which has received little attention in the literature but which Lienhardt refers to in passing,[2] is that the introduction of Christianity into a society simply adds a new range of ideas into the cultural pool, from which individuals choose to meet their particular cognitive needs. In this case conversion is not an important issue: members of the community may be indifferent as to who formally joins a church and why. Indeed, people's definitions of what constitutes church membership may vary widely. Nevertheless, some of the ideas introduced by Christianity may be widely influential in the society, irrespective of formal conversion to Christianity. To expand a piece of Gospel imagery, apart from the wheat to be harvested and the darnel

1. R. G. Lienhardt, 'The Dinka and Catholicism', in J. Davis (ed.), *Religious Organization and Religious Experience*, London and New York: Academic Press 1982 (ASA Monographs, no. 21).

2. Ibid., p. 95, n. 9.

to be burnt, there are bits and pieces left lying around, which can be picked up by anyone passing by. People glean from the beliefs of Christians those ideas which correspond to their experiences or suit their particular purposes.

A clear example of this kind of influence among the Shona of Zimbabwe is provided by Marshall Murphree's study of the vaBudya in the north-east of Zimbabwe (or Rhodesia as it then was). His survey shows 28 per cent of non-Christians attributing drought to the High God rather than the traditional chiefly spirits; over half responding that the spirit of a good man will go to heaven; 47 per cent saying that God speaks to his people through the Bible; and 67 per cent saying that polygamy is wrong.[3] In all these cases, the response of non-Christians differed in aggregate from those of Christians, but it is clear that some non-Christians have understood and accepted some of the ideas introduced by Christianity. Murphree describes the different religious bodies as providing different services to the community, members of whom may easily move their allegiance from one body to another according to their needs of the moment. The mission churches provided, materially and symbolically, the possibility of breaking out of an enclosed, kinship-based community into the wider world of the nation; and not all the facilities they provide are conditional upon church membership.[4]

In 1970 I was doing extended fieldwork in the hot, dry, low country of the north-east corner of Zimbabwe (my fieldwork was not very different in time and place from Marshall Murphree's study). Marymount Mission had been founded in the area in 1950 by the Jesuits. Its principal work had been education, with a boarding-school at the mission and seven small outschools it supervised. The few students who went on to complete their secondary education mostly did so at another Jesuit mission station, about a hundred miles away in another corner of the district. In 1970, these catered for a total of 1210 children, of whom only 95 were recognized by the missionaries as Roman Catholics. If converts to the tenets of Roman Catholic belief were few, a large number of children, and to a lesser extent their parents, had some contact with the missionaries through education.

The mission also ran a hospital with thirty-five beds, although at the time of my fieldwork there was no resident doctor there. Nevertheless, the treatment given by a competent nurse and visiting doctors was much appreciated. The wards were usually full, often with some patients having to sleep on the floor. About forty miles along the road, there was a hospital with a resident doctor run by the Evangelical Alliance Mission, which also ran a domestic training-school. Relations between the two missions were at best reserved. The people in the area dominated by Marymount Mission had little to say in favour of the Evangelical Alliance Mission.

At the time of my fieldwork, I thought that Christianity had had very little

3. M. W. Murphree, *Christianity and the Shona*, London: Athlone Press 1969, pp. 179–83.

4. Ibid., ch. 8; see also M. W. Murphree, 'Religious Interdependence among the Budjga Vapostori', in D. B. Barrett (ed.), *African Initiatives in Religion*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press 1971.

influence in the area. It is true that in my survey of the community in which I was living, a number of household heads (12 per cent of those present and formally interviewed) declared that they were Roman Catholic. But in the majority of cases, this simply referred to association with the outschool run by the Marymount Mission, situated seventeen miles away. Baptized members of the church were few and were not necessarily the ones who attended the Sunday services. People who held to a system of beliefs which the missionaries might have recognized as Catholic were fewer still, the head teacher being the only certain example—and he was not a local man. Nevertheless, the monthly Sunday services conducted by a priest from the mission and the weekly services conducted by the teacher were reasonably well attended, much as any ritual conducted in the community was well attended. Schoolchildren went along, largely on the encouragement of the teacher. Men and women attended perhaps in the hope of alleviation from some personal trouble, perhaps in appreciation of help received in the past from the mission, especially treatment in the mission hospital. People might well attend out of a sense of loyalty to the school, or for want of anything else to do that day. This is not to deny that people believed that there was a spiritual power behind the Church; it is simply pointing out that services were casual and relaxed affairs, with people attending for a variety of reasons.

People did believe in the spiritual power of the Church. I have heard old men formally belonging to no church assert that a drought would end if people got together to pray to Jesus. Prophets of the local independent church community were consulted by all as diviners. People were appreciative of the help given to the sick and the poor, and indeed the community as a whole, by the missionaries.

From 1974, the area was involved in the war which led to the independence of Zimbabwe. For the people it was a bitter time, with tactics of terror used by both sides. A German priest stayed on at the mission until a colleague was murdered at the next station (about fifty miles away). Although the first guerrillas in the area were friendly towards the missionaries, guerrillas generally were closely allied to traditional spirit mediums,[5] and some were clearly hostile towards Christianity. The people appreciated the courageous help given to any who needed it by the priest, who remained at Marymount through most of the war and appeared to fear neither government forces nor guerrillas. Indeed, in one remote area a small core of 'Roman Catholics', led by an aged polygamist, kept the 'church' services going through the war after it became impossible for missionaries to visit the area.

The point is that the work and teaching of Christian missionaries was making an impression on the community, irrespective of any formal conversions to their church. Their general influence is illustrated by the story of a local myth-maker which I recorded before the war.

5. See M. F. C. Bourdillon, 'Religious Symbols and Political Change', *Zambezia*, Vol. XII, no. 5 (1984), pp. 39–54.

History According to Timothy

This account of the traditional history of the people, given to me by an aged and crippled *n'anga* (diviner-healer), I dismissed at the time as being his own fabrication, but I regard it as interesting precisely because of the fabrication it reveals.

The old man was known to missionaries and people alike as Timothy. His homestead was remote from other homesteads in the area, on the bank of a small river, and he habitually wore a blue loincloth together with a tattered shirt. The blue loincloth was the characteristic dress of 'lion' spirit mediums (*mhondoro*) in the area,[6] and certain of the more important *mhondoro* lived similarly in relative isolation on a river bank. But Timothy was not possessed by one of the 'lion' spirits of the chiefdom, which would have given him a certain political status in the community: he claimed to have been taught his art by his ancestors in dreams and to have been helped by a *shave* (a wandering spirit or stranger). He was a *n'anga* rather than *mhondoro*, concerned with private and professional help for personal problems rather than with the affairs of the community as a whole,[7] and his status depended on his reputation for divining and healing.

Timothy lived within a couple of miles of Marymount Mission, on the eastern border of the chiefdom of Diwa, under Chief Makuni. His wife regularly attended the church on Sundays, and he occasionally did so, hobbling along on his twisted ankles with the help of walking-sticks. Neither were formally members of the Roman Catholic Church, but both enjoyed cordial relations with the priests of the mission. Timothy claimed that he sent those patients he could not heal to the mission hospital for treatment, though I failed to find independent evidence of this. Certainly the mission medical staff had no thought of sending any patients to Timothy: their cordiality was not based on respect for a fellow-practitioner.

What little I was told about Timothy's personal history was largely contradictory, so we remain in ignorance on that score. He was as ready to fabricate a personal history as he was the histories of the people among whom he lived. His clan name was Shava (Eland) Mukonde, a different branch of the clan from any of the chiefs in the area who were Eland (including Makuni, under whose jurisdiction Timothy lived). What follows is Timothy's account, freely translated, of the history of the people among whom he lived, interspersed with my comments and explanations. The point is to show that Timothy was constantly picking up information from those about him and adapting it to his own needs. The first section shows a sketchy knowledge of local history, which Timothy incorporated into a wider scheme:

> The people here came from Chishawasha. They were running away from war and they took this country. Some of our people remained at Chishawasha and their clan name is also Eland. The people were running away from the Zezuru of

6. See M. F. C. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1983 (2nd edn.), ch. 10.

7. Ibid., pp. 232–7, 246–7.

Chinamora (whose clan name is *Soko*—Monkey). They decided that there were too many people at Chishawasha, so they decided to leave and come down here.

Timothy then gave an extended account of the history of Chishawasha which I do not repeat here. Chishawasha is the country, now densely populated, on the plateau just north of Harare and under Chief Chinamora, from where the neighbouring people of Chief Rusambo, whose clan name is Monkey, originated.[8] But Timothy was purporting to tell the history of the chiefdom in which he resided. Chief Makuni was Eland, but, as we shall see, his people have a different history, relating them to the Korekore (the northern Shona group) and the ancient state of the Mutapas.

The people arrived here. There were certain people living in that mountain [Rukore, to the east]. These people left and went away when they saw the people coming. Some people went to Mukosa and found there a person called Nyandoro, and they chased him and he went away. Some people went down to the Ruya River [to the west and north]. They came from the same people. They arrived here from Guruuswa, which is the same as Chishawasha.

This is a very abbreviated history of the local peoples. The peoples of Diwa and Chiruja (a chiefdom to the east, often referred to as Mukosa) have related traditions of driving out earlier inhabitants of the area. In particular, the Chiruja people tell of driving out Nyandoro, which is the clan name of the people now living just to the south, across the Mazoe River. Timothy had some detailed knowledge of the spirits of Diwa and Chiruja, which are involved in the central traditions of these peoples; but his brevity as regards their histories (relative to his lengthy discussion of Rusambo's people) suggests that Timothy was a relative outsider to the community in which he practised, and had gleaned only bits of their traditional histories.

Guruuswa (literally, 'long grass') is the name of the place of origin of all the Korekore. Beach suggests it simply refers to the high veld where the long grass grows,[9] and interprets the myth of the Korekore coming from Guruuswa as reflecting a series of migrations northwards to the Zambezi Valley.[10] Timothy's association of Guruuswa with Chishawasha supports this suggestion. But what matters here is that Timothy has picked up the name used in local traditions as the place of origin, together with the name of Mutota, the legendary or mythical figure who led the people from Guruuswa. The next section diverges from Korekore legends and gives weight to an autochthonous cult which came into conflict with white administrators:

Makuni's people came from the same place as Mutota. When they came with Mutota, they arrived at Choma, where there was a great person called

8. For a survey of the chiefdoms of the area, see M.F.C. Bourdillon, 'Peoples of the Darwin', *NADA* n.s., Vol. X, no. 2 (1970), pp. 103–14.

9. D. N. Beach, *The Shona and the Zimbabwe, 900–1850*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1980, pp. 62–3.

10. David Lan questions any historical reality to the myth and relates the name symbolically to fertility, and also to the high land where the rain and the rivers come from: it is the land of the ancestors rather than the land of men. See his *Guns and Rain*, London: James Currey 1985, pp. 102–5.

Dzivaguru: he was possessed by the spirit of Dzivaguru. Dzivaguru was the one who begot Mutota. Mutota distributed the country, appointing chiefs. But Dzivaguru was the great one. When he was staying at Choma he was clothed with skin and said, 'You see, my children, now you see me here. I am not going to marry a wife.' He stayed for many years; then he realized that the time had passed. He went into a baobab tree and died there. His large harvesting basket was filled with strings and hashish and a flint gun—if you strike the stone it discharges. He was always with these things. When people saw these things where he had left them, they looked for him but could not find him. They asked themselves, 'Where is the chief?' Some young people went hunting and found him at the baobab tree.

Most of the Korekore peoples, including the people of Diwa, speak of having come from Guruuswa with Mutota. Although certain Tavara claim that their great spirits fathered the founders of the Korekore peoples,[11] in traditional Korekore legends Mutota has no father, and it was he who disappeared into a baobab tree when he found he had already arrived at his destination without adequately preparing himself. The historical basis for the figure of Mutota is questionable: Lan fits the name into a symbolic system concerning rain, fertility and origins.[12] Timothy substitutes for Mutota the name Dzivaguru, who is certainly associated with origins and rain and whose cult has a very long history. Elsewhere in Shona country, Dzivaguru (literally, 'great pool') is one of the names for the High God.[13] In the north-east of Shona country, Dzivaguru was a spirit of the autochthonous Tavara people of the Zambezi Valley, who remained a famous rain spirit after the Korekore invasion. The cult of Dzivaguru was centred on the Tavara chiefdom of Choma and associated with the cult of Karuva, which I discuss below. It is not clear to what extent the details of the myths were selected by Timothy for their symbolic coherence in his conceptual scheme, or whether they were accidentally present in the stories he found useful. When he makes the Tavara spirit senior to the leader of the Korekore, it is not clear that he is deliberately attacking Korekore political supremacy or the status of the Korekore as owners of the land and providers of rain.[14] It appears rather that he is using the Korekore myth to emphasize the power of the most famous rain spirit, irrespective of local political issues.

Some of what Timothy said next makes more sense when one knows that among the Shona, the medium of an important spirit is commonly known by the name of the spirit. Here he uses rare and ancient traditions to emphasize the power of spirits:

11. See M. F. C. Bourdillon, 'The Manipulation of Myth in a Tavara Chiefdom', *Africa*, Vol. XLII (1972), pp. 112–21, at pp. 115–16.

12. See Lan, *Guns and Rain*, pp. 102–6; also idem, 'Making History: Spirit Mediums and the Guerrilla War in the Dande Area of Zimbabwe', University of London: Ph.D. Thesis 1983, pp. 134–5.

13. See W. J. van de Merwe, 'The Shona Idea of God', *NADA*, Vol. XXXIV (1957), p. 44.

14. See Bourdillon, 'The Manipulation of Myth'.

> After his death, another man came who said he was Dzivaguru. When he arrived, he got married. We know Dzivaguru does not marry. The people asked him, 'Sir, why have you married? You are not Dzivaguru: Dzivaguru does not marry.' He said, 'I am Dzivaguru', and the people said, 'No.' Then they decided to kill him, and when they came to his field Dzivaguru said to his wife, 'You see these people coming. They are coming to stab me.' His wife said, 'They are not going to kill you.' He said, 'They will kill me. You shall see.' When they arrived, they clapped their hands [the standard form of respectful greeting]. He asked why they had come and they answered, 'We want you, sir. Who do you really say you are?' He said, 'I am really Dzivaguru. But do not kill me here; I want you to kill me at my house.' They went to his house and took the gun. He was sitting at the entrance. He said, 'Now kill me.' They tried to fire the gun, but it did not explode. Then his wife said, 'Now you see. Don't think that this person sitting there is still alive: he has died already.' They asked, 'Have you seen a dead person sitting?' He said, 'You have killed me, but I will go and tell my children and my children will conquer all this country.' They said, 'You have lied.'
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> Truly, when they killed him, he left and went to another country. The chief of this place is the younger brother. He arrived there and said, 'I have been defeated. I have been killed, people saying that I was not Dzivaguru. They are very excessive and very greedy.' That is why the whites came to the country of Salisbury: they were sent by him. The people said that the whites had come and they tried to fight against them. But they did not defeat the whites, their crime being that they had killed Dzivaguru.

This was the only occasion on which I heard any version of the story in the field; but the native commissioner had come across it in 1910, when he commented that the previous medium had been killed because he had married and that the current medium referred to the whites as his 'uncles'.[15] The question of marriage is difficult. There are common taboos against spirits coming in contact with blood, especially menstrual blood, or with lactating women. Lan[16] tries to connect these prohibitions with the idea that spirits are outside the world of life and death: he argues that mediums avoid contact with persons and things associated with both birth and death. Reality is less tidy. One sometimes finds a woman designated as the wife of the spirit who bears children, officially for the spirit, by the spirit's medium. Normally mediums marry; although a medium must get the permission of his spirit to marry, this is invariably given, and apart from this occasion I never came across a suggestion of a celibate male medium. The last generally accepted medium of Dzivaguru, Kamoti, who had a widespread reputation as a powerful rain-maker and who was the current medium in 1910, had two wives. Perhaps ancient traditions of Dzivaguru were different: female virginity was required in the associated cult of Karuva. Or perhaps Lan is correct in suggesting that celibacy fits more easily into the symbolic system of spirits and their mediums. In any case, Timothy's account justified the marriage of the medium.

Most of the Korekore stories about Dzivaguru concern his fabulous powers

15. National Archives, file 8/91/10.

16. Lan, *Guns and Rain*, pp. 94–5.

of producing rain. This was the only occasion on which I have come across a story of Dzivaguru controlling his own death, but the account is reminiscent of legends about the death of a medium of Chaminuka, the greatest spirit of central Shona country, at the hands of the raiding Ndebele.[17] Again Timothy appears to have mixed elements from different legends.

This interview with Timothy took place in April 1970, not long before the war for the independence of Zimbabwe broke out in earnest. The power of the whites is based on a crime against the traditional spirits. Later, during the war, traditional spirits were prominent in the guerrilla campaign to overthrow the whites.

The next passage shows Timothy using recent history, careless of some details and modifying others to emphasize spiritual powers. It concerns the cult of Kuruva, also centred at Choma, and a rite which was stopped by the government when they found it was still taking place in 1923.[18] The drought of the previous year and the threatened drought of 1922–3 were believed to have been caused by someone seducing the Nechiswa, a virgin dedicated to the spirit Karuva. People told me that anyone who gave her tobacco was liable to come under suspicion, but on this occasion the victim had in the previous year asked her for beer. He was, according to custom, ritually burnt to death (and the rite was followed by thirty-nine days of continuous rain.)[19] There are minor errors in Timothy's account: the Nechiswa came from a Tavara chiefdom just to the north of Choma, and not from Karanga country hundreds of miles to the south; and she was not in fact locked in a hut with no entrance. The case was reported to the administration by the brother of the victim. The detentions and initial hearings of the case took place in Mount Darwin.

> At the village, there was a Karanga girl who was not to be married. Now she was a wife of Karuva. They used to say she was the wife of Karuva, but Karuva could not be seen. She would be locked in a hut which had no entrance. They would say that she would not be given tobacco by anybody. When she asked for tobacco, the person who gave it to her would be said to have committed adultery with her, and the rain would never fall. When the people found there was no rain, they would ask who had given her tobacco. When she told them, the person would be bound in cloth and put on a pile of wood and set on fire. Then the rain falls. This is what used to happen. Now in a certain year when the whites were in this country, the people thought to do what they used to do before. The child of the person who had been bound in cloth reported that his father was about to be burnt. The whites asked who was responsible, and he blamed the Nechiswa. He asked her, 'Why do you want to burn my father?' She replied, 'I am not burning your father.' They were all arrested, including the chief, and taken to Shamva [a

17. See M. Gelfand, *Shona Ritual, With Special Reference to the Chaminuka Cult*, Cape Town: Juta 1959, p. 32.

18. See M. F. C. Bourdillon, 'The Cults of Dzivaguru and Karuva among the North-eastern Shona Peoples', in J. M. Schoffeleers (ed.), *Guardians of the Land*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1978, pp. 244–8.

19. See A. W. Fraser, 'The Rain Goddess Case at Mount Darwin', *The Outpost* [Journal of the British South African Police], Vol. I (1923), pp. 4–7.

> mining and farming centre between Harare and Choma]. She was asked there, 'Why are you causing people to be burnt?' She said that it was true.
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> They asked, 'If you want rain to fall, will it fall?' She said it will. It rained, then the girl died of grief. When she died, her stomach swelled and they heard a clanging inside. They asked, 'Why has the stomach become so big?' Then they opened it up and found books and pots and other things. This is how the story ended.

There is no record of the Nechiswa dying in captivity; she was not even convicted, although she and her mother were among the eighty-two originally brought from Choma and detained and questioned in Mount Darwin. Six people, including the local chief, were tried by the High Court and sentenced to death; the death sentences were subsequently commuted to various terms of imprisonment. The aged chief was released on grounds of ill health after serving about a year of his sentence. Even the administrators noted that three days after the clemency was granted, a freak thunderstorm swept up the Zambezi Valley in the middle of the dry season and that the release of the chief was followed by the wettest rainy season on record. Timothy's account ignores these facts and instead contains a further attempt to link the ancient cults to the current dominant culture.

As we approach the end of Timothy's account, we come to my justification for including it in this collection. Timothy also picked up stories he heard at the mission and wove them into his account of his people.

> Dzivaguru had no children, but Mutota was his first born. If I tell you the whole story, you would think that I am lying.

He was right. I did think he was lying; but I am not sure now. He put together some stories from a variety of traditional sources and was now adding gleanings from a new source, the teachings of the Christian missionaries. Perhaps we could say this was legitimate poetic licence.

> The whole world was destroyed, but there were people who were not killed, and these were Noah and his two children. There were himself, his two children and three boys. The eldest of these was Dzivaguru; next came Karuva; and the last born was Abraham. That is how Abraham stayed. Dzivaguru killed Karuva because he had to plough while Karuva herded. Then Karuva said, 'You are not my brother who killed me.' All your children will be black all over. At that time there were no black people. That is how we black people came into existence. Then he begot Mutota, and Mutota is the one who begot us. Abraham ran away, and found God waiting for him, and was given a country. He stayed there with his wife, but she did not give birth to any child. Then an angel told him that he would beget a child, a son, and he said, 'How can we have a child when my wife is very old?' The son was called Ghana. When the child was grown a little, God came to Abraham and told him that he should take his son to be sacrificed at the top of the mountain.

There follows an accurate and detailed account of the biblical story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac (though still called Ghana), and the eventual substitution of a sheep. In Timothy's account, the country that led the nationalistic movement in sub-Saharan Africa is associated with the child that is begotten late, about to be sacrificed but redeemed by a messenger from God. Timothy concluded:

> The son is now called Isaac and his brother is Jacob. Jacob's children were the founders of all the white people.

In presenting and discussing Timothy's account, I have given considerable attention to the various traditional sources he used in order to show that his use of biblical sources (which I expect to be more familiar to readers and thus not to require so much discussion) is no different.

The Great Pool

Timothy was something of an eccentric, but perhaps not more so than thinkers in any society. More orthodox traditional histories also involve an element of gleaning from different sources to produce a politically convenient story. The writings of professional historians in Zimbabwe provide a variety of histories involving different mixes of a variety of sources. It is not clear now which version will ultimately be accepted. All history is gleaning. But Timothy's version is less constricted than most by binding tradition.

His social activity was hindered by his twisted ankles, which no doubt left him with more than a usual amount of time to sit with his own thoughts. His calling as a *n'anga* further encouraged him to dwell in the realm of ideas and to play with symbols. He collected ideas, irrespective of their sources, and wove them together to form some kind of coherent scheme which would make sense of the political and social world in which he lived. Mission teaching was simply one of the available sources of ideas, and it enabled him to incorporate into his scheme a wider world than that which is accounted for in the purer traditions of the people.

One finds other examples of this kind of activity. Michael Gelfand has described a *n'anga* who was also a member of the Pentecostal Church and who specialized in healing madness. In his seances, he used a combination of symbols derived from traditional spirit mediums and from his Church, in which he fully believed.[20] Angela Cheater met a young man considered by his Christian family to be mentally deranged and under the influence of a traditional avenging spirit. He was under the influence of an ageing *n'anga* and wore a black shirt and fur hat (which would associate him with traditional mediums and healers). He spoke of the Father, Christ and Chaminuka and said he had been sent by the Father 'to work in Africa for new light...to cast out evils...everywhere all over this kingdom...to create a new kingdom in Jesus'. He commented that the country was troubled by evil spirits.[21] The

20. M. Gelfand, 'A Nganga who has Adopted Two Faiths', *NADA* n.s., Vol. X, no. 3 (1971), pp. 73–6.

21. A. P. Cheater, personal communication.

combination of ideas put together by this young man was considered bizarre by his family. His acceptance as a *n'anga* rather than his rejection as a madman would depend on whether he was able to put together a mixture of ideas which not only had a degree of coherence in his own view, but which also enabled others in the community to make sense of things which troubled them.

For most people in a community, ideas may not seem important until they are troubled. Then any ideas or explanations which seem to meet the situation will do: few people concern themselves with the overall coherence of how they react to different situations.[22] A *n'anga*, however, specializes in the realm of ideas and the manipulation of symbols, and must be ready to provide a means of coping. A *n'anga* specializes in personal problems, especially ones which have no obvious customary solution, such as those that might arise through immersion in a national economy or through a major war. Influential ideas, particularly those propounded by educated Christian teachers, cannot be ignored. So we find people like Timothy listening to sermons in church and looking for ways to incorporate what he hears into the symbols which are so important to his healing practice.

Fabian has argued against the usefulness of 'pluralism' as a concept.[23] Part of his argument arises from a story told by a Jamaa store clerk which can be interpreted to mean that life, and religion in particular, is ultimately one: the truth must ultimately be allowed to emerge. Fabian argues that people do not accept the relativistic view of religion that the concept of pluralism applies. One could argue that Timothy's attempt to bring together beliefs from Tavara, Korekore and Judaeo-Christian traditions supports such a view.

Nevertheless, there is a great pool of ideas from which individuals may glean whatever suits their particular circumstances. The range of these ideas may not be as evident to people within the community as they are to an outsider who is not committed to any of them. Individuals may differentially select and adapt the ideas that are circulating in their community to suit their particular circumstances. Each may regard other adaptations as being essentially mistaken, thus denying the legitimacy of religious pluralism. In practice, however, there are often different systems operating within a single community, and it may be difficult or impossible to place a relative value on these systems. Timothy's attempt to draw together the different systems of ideas did not effectively unite different groups within the plural society in which he lived; but they did help individuals cope with problems that the plural society presented.

22. I have argued this with respect to systems of healing in Nigeria in M. F. C. Bourdillon, 'Pluralism and the Problems of Belief', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, Vol. LIV, no. 1 (1982), pp. 21–42.

23. J. Fabian, 'Religious Pluralism: An Ethnographic Approach', in W. van Binsbergen and M. Schoffeleers (eds.), *Theoretical Explorations in African Religion*, London and Boston: KPI 1985.

WENDY JAMES

UDUK FAITH IN A FIVE-NOTE SCALE: MISSION MUSIC AND THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL

CONVERSATIONS with the old lady Umpa remain a vivid memory from my first weeks of fieldwork among the Uduk in the 1960s.[1] She decided to keep a kindly eye on me from the start, helped me to housekeep, introduced me to others and explained as well as she could what was going on. I found her company reassuring, though she was sometimes a little over-zealous in her defence of my privacy against visitors from neighbouring hamlets. Loyal and enthusiastic in defending the 'traditional' culture of the Uduk villages, Umpa nevertheless treated me to occasional speeches on the Day of Judgement. Opening her arms wide over the imagined crowd of chosen ones, she would sweep them up as if to Heaven, peering down over her shoulder at those abandoned to the fires below. She loved the drama of the scene, and her anxiety about it was real. But she was in no sense a Christian. The gusto of the portrayal belied a sober caution about the claims of the local evangelical mission and stubborn doubt about its motives. She refused to become a 'person of Jesus' and had only rarely been to the sermons preached at Chali church. But like many others in the outlying villages, she had picked up some elements of Christian dogma from the hymns which had been spread, almost as popular folk-songs, by the younger people who came and went freely between the mission and the countryside. Familiar as so many villagers were with these new tunes, but without the background to make morally intelligible the stark

1. From December 1965, fieldwork, supported by the University of Khartoum, was carried out in various periods until June 1969. A subsequent brief visit was made in 1983. A general account of the Uduk may be found in my book, *'Kwanim Pa: The Making of the Uduk People. An Ethnographic Study of Survival in the Sudan–Ethiopian Borderlands*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1979.