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SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH INTO RELIGION IN LUSAKA

Preliminary field report, 31st March 1972

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Introduction.

~~March~~
February

Since 1st ~~March~~ 1972, we (myself and my research assistant Mr. P.A. Mutesi) have been carrying out sociological research into religion in Lusaka. The research has been made possible by a generous grant of the University of Zambia Research and Higher Degrees Committee. As there is not yet an established tradition of urban religious research in Zambia (I mean cumulative research - of course there have been some publications in this field), our research was meant to be highly exploratory; our aim was to end up with a qualitative understanding of some of the major descriptive and theoretical issues, rather than with detailed quantitative material based on sophisticated survey techniques. We have now reached a stage in our research where it is possible (and necessary!) to formulate some of these major issues, to indicate where more detailed information is needed, and to stipulate the way in which to proceed, both during this last month of full-time research, and in a part-time follow-up project during the next academic year. The primary aim of this paper is to pull a number of ideas together, and to present them for private discussion. As such the paper suggests somehow a rough outline for a less preliminary report that will more explicitly be based on empirical data. To save time I shall not go into a review of relevant literature; for the same reason, and to save my precious relation with my informants, I shall not enter into a detailed discussion of the empirical material collected so far.

Data collection and research strategy.

Our main concern during the past two months has been a survey of religious organizations in the Lusaka urban area.

For the religious organizations of christian inspiration (whatever be their degree of christian orthodoxy) we benefitted greatly from the work of Mr. C. Woodhall, of Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation (Kitwe), who, in the first half of 1971, conducted a survey into the involvement of Zambian churches in development activities (training centres, hospitals, agricultural projects etc.). Besides publishing a useful comprehensive directory of the religious associations in Zambia, Mr. Woodhall established excellent relations especially with the independent churches, which rarely

associated with the nation-wide religious umbrella-organizations (like the Christian Council of Zambia) and whose leaders are often difficult to trace. Sometimes, we ran into difficulties because people associated us too closely with this previous survey and failed to appreciate the distinctions between Mindolo's ~~own~~ objectives and our own; but in general Mr. Woodhall cleared the way for us and greatly reduced our problems in explaining our informants why religious matters should be subject to systematic enquiry.

From nearly every religious organization contacted so far we met an unexpectedly high degree of cooperation and trust. This, together with the relaxed and wholesome general atmosphere of Zambian urban religious life, makes this pre-research into an agreeable occupation.

Evenso, Lusaka covers a very vast area, where streetnames and ~~houses~~ housenumbers are seldom used, where telephone communications are deficient, where geographical mobility, growth of residential areas, and urban impersonality present serious information problems, so that most people can only be traced through collective post boxes. We spend very much of our time in contacting representatives of various religious organizations.

Nearly every day we had one or more interviews with religious leaders or other strategic informants. Of course, in this exploratory stage we had to refrain from highly structured interviews, questionnaires etc. The main structuring factors in the interviews were a few themes (as either explicitly outlined in our research plan or gradually emerging in the course of the investigation) according to which we would gently steer the conversation - however, always prepared to change a subject when it appeared to be confusing, boring or disquieting to the informant, and encouraging the informant to dwell upon such topics as obviously appealed to him. Although the dangers of this "anthropological" interview technique are clear (it is likely to leave gaps in the information, so that the data collected with various informants and about various associations are difficult to compare), these deficiencies can probably be overcome in a later stage of investigation. Moreover, the technique is, more than any more formalized one, suited to elicit topics and bits of information that, so far, escaped the researcher's attention; it is more in line with the personal reverence religious leaders expect from who approaches them; and finally it is the technique in which I am most experienced and which I trust most.

After the initial few weeks, in which we explored the range of variation of the religious associations, I was able to devise a comprehensive 18-page general questionnaire (appendix), in which all seemingly relevant items could be entered in a systematic way - so that for each case gaps in our knowledge would stand out, and the cases can easily be compared one to another. This questionnaire proved to be mainly useful for subsequent storage, by the researcher himself, of information acquired in one of more informal talks with the religious leaders concerned.

Our attendance of church services helped to establish new contacts,

and moreover had great heuristic value in itself, as it provided a wealth of observational material on such topics as: size of the local branch, languages used, nature of leadership and member participation, the position of women, the general socio-economic background of the members, attitudes towards healing, and the various general goals and functions the religious association appears to have.

In addition, much printed material about religious organizations was collected: tracts, periodicals, press-cuttings, pamphlets. Access to the files of the Lusaka City Council was refused by the Town Clerk. On the other hand, we received much cooperation from the Ministry of Home Affairs (Registrar of Societies - formal permission to consult the files was finally acquired, but not yet used), the Chief Education Officer for the Lusaka area (whom I persuaded to conduct an official survey of the use of school buildings by religious organizations), the Ministry of Education Headquarters (who will give detailed information on the involvement of religious organizations in education). ~~By~~ ^{By} Dr. F. King I was granted access to recent religious material on Matero township and surroundings, whereas Miss K. T. Hansen gave invaluable information on Mutendere township, where she had conducted a survey on married women (second half 1971).

Presently many religious associations show a revived interest in secular development projects. Mr. Woodhall's work, of course, concentrated on this, but did not intend to raise the sociologically relevant aspects. Yet, activities in this field provide a test-case for the study of relations between religious associations mutually and between religious and political structures. Therefore, I welcomed the opportunity of attending a four-day conference on "The role of churches in national development" (Lusaka 20-23 March 1972); I even went through the pains of preparing a paper for this conference, to legitimize my participation. As expected, the conference was a marvellous opportunity for participant observation, and in addition provided many useful contacts.

A visit to Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation enabled me to take a first look at the files and convinced me that another, longer visit would be extremely useful. This visit will take place in the last week of April.

Unfortunately, non-Christian religious organizations were not yet covered in this stage of the research; however, some useful contacts were made here and will certainly be followed up in a later stage.

Although many of our interviews with religious leaders scattered all over Lusaka contain interesting details on the actual functioning of the organizations, I decided to select a limited part of the Lusaka urban area in order to acquire, in the course of time (not necessarily within the three months specified in the research grant), intimate knowledge of the religious situation in this area. (The alternative is to concentrate not on a geographical unit but on one or a few strategically chosen religious associations. I did not reject this alternative altogether, but reserved it for a follow-up project, for the following reasons: the optimal choices can only be made after a thorough analysis of the material collected so far; as many religious associations have national or even world-wide distribution, this alternative could hardly be realized

within the limits of time and money set ~~by~~ the research grant; if our ~~limit~~ ^{unit} of analysis is a religious organization, instead of a geographical area, our material might be biased by not taking into account the large category of people not affiliated to any religious organization, nor - even in the case of members, - those aspects of social life that are not directly religious; by concentrating on a geographical unit we might better utilize the linguistic skill of the research-assistant.)

In the selection of a geographical unit a number of considerations are important. It should be a clearly defined and rather stable political unit, so that the research will not be crushed by political struggles; it should not be a typical squatter compound (today's fashion), nor a typical low-density area (with its practical problems of great distances, great spatial mobility of the well-to-do part of the population - car ownership - , relative inaccessibility of the other - servant - part of the population, emphasis on indoor-life, preponderance of expatriates); it should not be Matero as this has already been studied too intensively; it should be close enough to the University and to my own house to make possible daily research and a follow-up project; it should be old enough to have a more than incipient system of social relationships and associational life; though, it should be new enough to allow the detailed study of the establishment of local branches of associations already existent elsewhere; it should be large enough to develop a certain internal segmentation, but small enough to cover on foot.

All these considerations point into the direction of Mutendere township in Lusaka East. This place has various other advantages: some descriptive material about it is already available (two papers by Miss Hansen); it shows a wide range of socio-economic status; because of previous research the population is not entirely unprepared, but on the other hand the previous researchers finished their work in Mutendere, did not study the community as a structure of interactions but rather as a cluster of relatively isolated interviewees, and did not concentrate on religion.

Having thus decided on Mutendere, we are now in the process of acquainting ourselves with the township and building up contacts, both in and outside the religious sphere.

Some central topics and preliminary findings.

Without questioning the validity of other approaches, in this research project religion will be studied from the viewpoint of religious organizations, as a particular form of voluntary, formal associations. I feel that it is in this field that the sociologist can make the most valuable contribution. The social-psychological dimensions of religiosity will, at this stage, not be studied in themselves, but rather as distinctive aspects of various religious groupings. Admittedly, this position limits our scope (to such an extent, perhaps, as to make our study meaningless for the very people whose religious behaviour and notions it explores); but at the same time it suggests a number of relevant topics for analysis.

As units in the general social organization of society, religious associations can be studied from the following points of view (1 - 8):

1. Demarcation. The association has a name and other "symbols" (material objects like buildings, books, garments and other paraphernalia; rituals; particular criteria and procedures for the admission of new members; particular organizational structure; positive creed; prohibitions) by which the association distinguishes itself among other such associations. Often, this identity is formally expressed by registration with the Registrar of Societies. In some cases (particularly if the demarcation vis-à-vis another association is insufficiently clear - as happens in the case of fission), this registration is refused. Although perhaps not very exciting in itself, our first task is to inventory these characteristic symbols for each religious association. This process is in full operation for a considerable number of associations.

2. Goals. The association has a number of goals. Some of these goals may be explicitly formulated (such as "bringing people to the religious Truth and preparing them for eternal life in the Lord's Presence"). Most goals however are not immediately clear and can only be discovered from the study of actual interaction (including statements as elicited in an interview situation).

Virtually every religious association aims at the preservation of its own existence (the main exception being missionary bodies, which, however, in itself are only instrumental to wider associations which they represent, and which engender new, local religious associations). Religious associations tend to develop institutions to ensure the effective preservation of their distinctive symbols: institutions to control the behaviour and ideas of members; to carefully select, and effectively socialize (in special training institutions), those members who will occupy positions of normal leadership; to expose and expel those who do not conform with the distinctive symbols, and (failing this) to alter the selection of distinctive symbols. The entire complex could be, tentatively, referred to as "identity management" (of the association, not of its members). This complex forms a primary goal of most associations, and the rationale of many institutions and organizational devices in the religious associations under study. Moreover, many religious associations make numerical increase of membership, and financial growth, into goals - and develop institutions accordingly. Either as instruments to achieve the goals of "identity management", expansion and "salvation", or as a goal in itself, many religious associations adopt the institution of assistance to members, and non-members, in times of crisis (poverty, illness, bereavement). Women's and youth clubs belong to the same sphere.

3. Functions. Using the term in a rather narrow sense (more or less equivalent with Merton's "latent functions") I refer here to those wider effects of religious associations that could hardly be called goals (as selected, explicitly or implicitly, by members of the association, and as can be shown to be pursued by their actions)

but which nonetheless constitute important aspects of the social impact of these associations. One does not need to be a diehard functionalist to recognize and appreciate these wider effects. Functions that emerge from the material collected so far include:

a. Socialization of the members into complex urban society. This process has a number of aspects. The association provides a focus for identification in the ~~urban~~ town; it provides individual social contacts which eventually can (and sometimes do) play a role as fictive kinsmen; the association ~~is~~ presents and explains the wider society from the pulpit and through the regular announcements of the local secretary; it trains a limited number of people in executive committees (church committees etc) where they interact with agents of the outside world; it offers an alternative normative system which is explicit, clear, more or less applicable to the urban situation, and in some respects even appropriate to the urban situation (e.g. the widespread emphasis on individual salvation, monogamy and prohibition of divorce stimulates the nuclear family to emerge as ^{the} basic, rather stable and enduring unit of individual social mobility and social-psychological gratification). However, much more research is required before we can assess the relevance of these and other religious norms for actual ~~imm~~ behaviour.

b. Aesthetic expression. For many members of religious associations, collective worship provides the main or exclusive occasion for singing, dancing and eloquence. Under the same heading the important recreational function of the religious associations can be included (emphasized by the widespread prohibitions on drinking, and by the attention given to women's and youth clubs).

c. Psychological functions: the psychological rewards from subjective righteousness, from religious office; the catharsis produced by the interactional expression of grief, despair, hope ^{or relief} (particularly important where prayer-healing is practiced), etc.

4. Internal organization. In order to achieve their goals, religious associations develop an internal organization, both formal (as outlined in a formal constitution, and effectuated by election and appointments, hierarchical control etc.) and informal (cross-cuts of the formal structure arising from the dynamics of primary interaction: personality, wealth, skill, implicit values about leadership and respect in face-to-face situations). Of course, the formal organization is much more easily studied than the informal one; the latter requires an intimate acquaintance with a particular religious association over an extended period of time - such as can only be realized for a few associations. It appears that from the empirical data a typology of the degree of formalization can be developed - this, in turn, can then be related to such variables as geographical distribution, membership figures, period over which the association has existed.

For ~~the~~ a small number of well-studied associations, it must be worthwhile to screen the formal and informal organization against the respective goals (and functions) of the association. Certain (not all)

For some aspects, however, a rational explanation is ~~not~~ ^{not} possible.

Aspects of organization will then appear to be not rationally and necessarily connected to these goals: these aspects then constitute certain distinctive symbols which (whatever were their function when first introduced) by now have mainly significance as labels. The connection, however, between goals and organization is by no means univocal: the organizational requirements for, e.g., identity management may vary according to the intrinsic complexity of the distinctive symbols selected by the association, the geographical distribution and number of members, the type of funding, the amount of valuable property of the association, etc.

5. Recruitment of members and office-bearers. The association may set formal rules of eligibility as member/ respectively as office-bearer, but it normally does not strictly define the social field of potential members, nor the ways to mobilize these potential members. A detailed study of recruitment in a selected number of associations may reveal the individual perceptions and motivations that make certain people join certain religious associations, respectively aspire to leadership in these associations.

Important is here which rewards the office-bearer derives from his position. Religious associations show a wide range in these rewards. In order to assess them we should not merely look at material aspects (income, housing, allowances) but include an analysis of the dynamics and respect and leadership in concrete situations (worship, committee meetings). Funding and rewards, ^{may} largely depend on the association's relations, if any, ~~with~~ with a missionary body.

Missionaries come from abroad, tend to be white, rather highly educated, and control access to both spiritual authority and material resources for the local office-bearers and ordinary members. The present situation of the missionary is uneasy, due to the national and international political climate ("zambianization", coups, "the threat of communism"), changing notions about white leadership, the dwindling funds from overseas religious associations, etc. It is here that the dynamics of "identity management" can be closely studied: what strategies do ~~the~~ religious associations adopt in the move towards zambianization of personnel, localizing of the authority structure (many religious associations in Zambia ~~are~~ used to have their regional headquarters in Rhodesia or South-Africa), mobilizing local funds? Apart from this, closer study of the position of foreign missionaries is a useful (though sometimes shocking) addition to our understanding of race-relations in post-independence Zambia.

6. Relations between religious associations. As is to be expected in an urban, rapidly changing society we recorded an enormous number of religious associations (over 50 operating in Lusaka urban alone). According to their distinctive ~~own~~ symbols, goals, functions, internal organization and recruitment of members and office-bearers, these associations will have particular perceptions of one another and particular types of interaction (including various expressions of conflict). Certain religious associations have developed out of one another. The study of these ~~given~~ relations, apart from providing interesting material in itself, can help to elucidate

the characteristics of each association separately. Thus a detailed comparative analysis of "identity management" will reveal much of the dynamics behind the processes of fission that are so characteristic of religious associations in Zambia (as elsewhere). Here a ~~more~~ detailed case study of the England-based Apostolic Faith Church (regional headquarters in Bulawayo, 800 members in Zambia) seems fruitful, as its officebearers turned out to be especially prone to fission and established some of the most successful independent churches in Zambia. However, processes of fission, and fusion, are not only at work in the distinct churches, but also on the level of national umbrella-organizations. One of the questions that a sociology of religion in modern Zambia shall have to find an answer to is why, within a few years, there is such a marked tendency towards cooperation between an increasing number of churches. The process must be understood as resulting from various concomitant forces: the ecumenical ideology, national and international political situation, funding problems (overseas contributions; the increasing expenditure on buildings, mass communications equipment), the ~~rising~~ fear of the (alleged) decline of organized religion in urban areas.

7. Religious associations and non-religious aspects of society.

For many distinctive symbols of religious associations it will be difficult, ~~and~~ or altogether impossible, to explain the fact that ~~these~~ were selected rather than other symbols. Often the symbols serve as mere labels to distinguish the religious associations ~~one~~ from another: baptism by total immersion, shunning of pork, the choice of a particular name, etc. We touch here upon a number of well-known though hardly solved problems of sociological theory: the relation between social structure and culture, the inadequacies of functionalist explanation, and Durkheim's notion of non-intrinsic sacredness.

However, many features of any religious association call for a further explanation in terms of the wider social structure. For instance, the prevalence of a particular language in worship and communication within one association ~~formation~~; patterns of recruitment of members and office-bearers. Thus the study of religious associations may shed new light on major cleavages in the wider society (in terms of region, nationality, race, socio-economic status, education, etc.). Here the treatment ~~must~~ can only be eclectic: a comprehensive sociology of Zambian society is yet to be written, and this gigantic task could hardly be the by-product of an analysis of religious associations! Therefore only some salient features of the wider society can be explored as to their relevance in the religious sphere.

8. Religious associations, authority and power. Religious associations (in their office-bearers) must be endowed, by their members, with a certain measure of power and authority. If this were not the case, the association would be utterly impotent in pursuing its goals. This is especially clear with regard to what I call the "identity management" complex: the analysis of this complex reveals

the internal structure of power and authority within the association.

Religious associations vary very much both in the pattern of distribution of authority over members (including office-bearers) and in the extent to which this authority is supposed to make an impact on the total life of the members. Some associations do not claim any authority, except over the performance of the actual ~~main~~ ritual. Other associations claim, or even exercise, effective control over such institutions as food habits, sex, marriage, education, burial. Some claim to be the ultimate and exclusive locus of authority over everything concerning their members. This variety has to be investigated, related to other characteristics of the association, and (if possible) explained.

Here, as in other points in our analysis, it is important to note that the religious associations under study are part of a diversified, loosely integrated, rapidly changing urbanizing society, where there is great variety of religion (expressed in a large number of religious associations) and where, in the overall social structure, religion is by no means the only source of norms, values, legitimacy, and the distribution of power, goods and services. Thus, a religious association is likely to be in latent conflict not only with other such associations, but also with major non-religious bureaucratic organizations, and with systems of norms and values that have originated outside this association (either rooting in "traditional" society or newly emerging in urban mass society).

Here we touch upon the most fascinating problem of the sociology of religion in modern Zambian society.

The tension between religious association and the state is one aspect of it - and although this tension does not always take the overt, extreme forms as in the case of Lumpa or Watchtower, it is ~~im~~ painfully manifest in nearly all our interviews with religious leaders, as well as in spontaneous statements (sermons, mass-media etc.). As said earlier, the recently revived attention for secular development work is a suitable test case to study this problem.

Another aspect of it is; the role of religious organizations in the emergence of systems of social control in new urban settlements. What is the practical significance of the norms and means of conflict regulation offered by religious associations? In how far is there competition with non-religious institutions: party, police, local courts, kinship.

And finally there is the broad field of general values and norms (position of women, marriage, concepts of health, illness and healing, patterns of authority, recreation, etc.) over which religious organizations try to gain, or to restore, authority. Here the traditional strategies of sermon, pastoral work and education are supplemented with the organization of sophisticated conferences, full participation in mass communications, representation in local government, etc. Modern ~~mass media~~ organizations such as Multimedia and Mindolo Ecumenical Foundations can be seen in this light.

Conclusion.

The next month will be used to identify and substantiate the theoretical foundation sketched in the previous section. It is unlikely that one month will be enough. Besides continuing the survey activities, at a slower pace than before, we shall concentrate on work in Mutendere, where our main objectives are:

- a. to get a detailed picture of the internal organization and mutual external relations between local branches of religious associations.
- b. to study the process of establishment and early growth of local branches of religious associations.
- c. to study religious associations against the background of the overall social and political structure of a Zambian urban area.
- d. ~~more~~ specifically, to study the role of religious associations as instruments of social control.

The collection of data is the basis of all sociological analysis. The reader be assured that the tentative statements in the previous section can already, at most points, ~~be~~ be illustrated by data collected so far. The collection of data will continue. However, the central problem of social research remains the construction of a solid framework of ideas; it is here that the reader is kindly asked to participate.