SOCILOGICAL RESEARCH INTO RELIGION IN LUSAKA

Preliminary field report, 31st March 1972

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Introduction.

Since 1st March 1972, we (myself and my research assistant Mr. P.A. Mutezi) 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 stimulate 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 some general outline for a more preliminary report that will more explicitly be based on empirical data. To some extent I shall not go into a review of relevant literature; for the sake 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 the Kivulam 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...
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 to closely with this previous survey and failed to appreciate the
distinctions between Mibolo’s main objectives and our own; but in general
Mr. Woodfall 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 research into an agreeable occasion.

Despite, Lusaka covers a very vast area, where streetnames and houses
are seldom used, where telephones 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 disgusting to the informant, and
discouraging 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 derive 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, attitude 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: treaties, 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). Dr. R. King was granted access to recent religious material on Matera township and surroundings, whereas Miss H. T. Hansen gave invaluable information on Matera township, where she had conducted a survey on married women (see also 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 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 legitimise my participation.

As expected, the conference was a marvellous opportunity for participant observation, and in addition provided many useful contacts.

A visit to Mibele 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 organisations 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 organisations, 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 effects 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 realised.
Within the limits of time and money set by the research grant, if our field 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 our research assistants.

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 referable 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 insipient 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 Mutindere township in Lusaka East. This place has various other advantages; some descriptive material about it is already available (two papers by Miss Rosenda); 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 Mutindere, 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 Mutindere, we are now in the process of acquainting ourselves with the township and building up contacts, both in and outside the religious agencies.

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 contributions. 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 behavior and motives 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 (1-6):

1. **Denomination.** 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 structures; positive creeds; 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 denomination vis-à-vis another association is unsatisfactorily clear - as it may in the case of a new one), 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 "brining people to the religious Truth" and preparing them for eternal life in the Lord's Presence). Most goals however are not specifically 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 behavior and ideas of members; to carefully select, and effectively socialize (in special training institutions), those members who will occupy positions of formal 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 "identifying management" (of the association, not of its members). This complex aims for primary goals 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 "identifying 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 merely 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 dichotomist to recognize and do make 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 kinship; the association 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, and 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 dominant, 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 urban behavior.

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 association 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 offices, the catharsis produced by the interpersonal expression of grief, despair, hope (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 elections and a point-system, hierarchical control, etc.) and informal (cross-sections of the formal structure as 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 some small number of well-studied associations, it must be worth-while to screen the formal and informal organization against the respective goals (and functions) of the association. Certain (not all)
pects 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) have now mainly significance as labels. The connection, however, between goals and organization is by no means unequivocal: the organizational requirements for, e.g., identity management may very well depend on 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 members, respectively as office-bearers, 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, bonuses) but include an analysis of the dynamics and respect and leadership in concrete situations (worship, committee meetings). Funding or rewards, again, largely depend on the association’s relations, if any, with a missionary body.

Missions 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 (“rationalization”, coup, “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 religious associations adopt in the move towards rationalization of personal, localizing the authority structure (many religious associations in Zambia have used their regional headquarters in Rhodesia or SouthAfrica), mobilizing local funds? Apart from this, a 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 Lusak urban alone. According to their distinctive 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 growing relations, apart from providing in creating 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 at play in the processes of fission that are so characteristic of religious associations in Zambia (as elsewhere). For a more detailed case study of the England-based Apostolic Faith Church (region headquarters in Mulungu, 860 members in Zambia) seems fruitful, as its office-bearers turned out to be especially prone to fission and new churches established some of the new churches 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 Zambia shall have to find an answer to is why, within a few years, there is such a marked shift towards cooperation between the increasing number of churches. The process must be understood as resulting from various concomitant forces: the economic ideology, national and international political situation, funding problems (overseas contributions; the increasing expenditure on buildings; mass communication equipment), the anxiety for an ideological form of organizational religion in urban areas.


For many distinctive symbols of religious associations it will be difficult, if not altogether impossible to explain the fact that they were selected rather than other symbols. These symbols serve as more labels to distinguish the religious associations one from another: baptism by total immersion, shaming 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 inadequacy 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 (language patterns) and the association 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 analysis can only be selective: 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 structuring 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 affect the total life of the members. Some associations do not claim any authority, except over the performance of their 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 rooted 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 urban 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 imps or Watchtower, it is painfully manifest in nearly all our interviews with religious leaders, as well as in spontaneous statements (sermons,(masses, etc.), 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. How are the traditional strategies of sermons, pastoral work and education supplemented with the organization of sophisticated conferences, full participation in mass communications, representation in local government, etc. Modern religious organizations such as Multimedia and Mosaic Ecumenical Foundation can be seen in this light.

Conclusion.
The last month will be used to identify and outline 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 Matereere, where our main objectives are:

1. to get a detailed picture of the internal organization and mutual external relations between local branches of religious associations,
2. to study the process of establishment and early growth of local branches of religious associations,
3. to study religious associations against the background of the overall social and political structure of a Zambian urban area,
4. to 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 ill strated 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.