

'THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH':
SOME ASPECTS OF EVANGELISATION
AMONG THE TRIO INDIANS¹

In this paper I examine certain changes that have resulted from missionary activity among the Trio Indians of Surinam. The focus is on the evangelical influence of the missionaries, and ignores the numerous secular effects that they have had. These latter topics form the subject of other papers, which, together with the present one, are intended to go into a book which will document social change among the Trio over the last two decades.

I shall start by giving a brief introduction to the Trio and a sketch of the development of missionary activity among them. In the second part I will give an account of traditional Trio beliefs with special reference to those concerning the causes of sickness and death, and also describe the nature of the Christian teaching to which they have been exposed. In the third part I consider how the Indians have understood the biblical message and reinterpreted it in the light of their own ideas. In the final section a few comments are made about the success and failure of missionary work in other parts of the world and some possible reasons are advanced.

¹ This article represents a modified version of a paper given to Oxford University Anthropological Society and to the Department of Social Anthropology, The Queen's University, Belfast. The main change that has been made results from the requirements of a written rather than spoken presentation, but I have also incorporated some suggestions that arose during discussion. I am grateful to all those who commented.

I

The Trio Indians² are a group of Carib-speakers who live in the tropical forest on either side of the Surinam-Brazilian border. Even today this is a remote region, difficult of access except by air, and still separated from the encroaching boundaries of national development by great distances. The Trio's traditional settlement pattern consisted of small villages, averaging about 30 inhabitants, with about a day's walk between them. There was no overarching tribal organization. Villages were autonomous but relatively impermanent, with a lifespan of about six years. The population was highly mobile, and there was a continuous movement of people between villages. The subsistence economy is based on slash-and burn-cultivation with bitter cassava as the staple crop. Protein is mainly obtained through hunting and fishing, and gathering provides substantial amounts of food at certain times of the year. Virtually all raw materials are available from the environment, and the exceptions to this are metal goods and other manufactured items which were obtained through trade with the Bush Negroes of Surinam, in small quantities at least as early as the first half of the last century. The main division of labour is along sexual lines, and an adult man and woman form a self-sufficient combination in terms of production and reproduction. Shamanism provided the only clear-cut specialism, while village leaders were little more than heads of extended families.

The switching in the last paragraph between past and present tense is intentional and is designed to indicate certain features which no longer exist. In particular this applies to the traditional settlement pattern, and its disappearance is the most obvious effect of the missionary activity. Until 1960, the Trio had had relatively little contact with the outside world, and

² My fieldwork among the Trio in 1963-4 was funded by the Research Institute for the study of Man, New York, and that in 1978 by the S.S.R.C.

For further information on the Trio with special reference to the changes which have occurred in the past two decades, the reader can be referred to: R. Cortez, *O 'Diaconato' Indígena: articulação étnica no Recôncavo Tumucumaque Brasileiro*, Unpublished Thesis, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro 1977; P. Frikel, *Dez anos aculturação Tiriyô, 1960-70*, Belem: Museu Goeldi; and the following works by P.G. Rivière: 'A Policy for the Trio Indians', *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, Vol. XLV (1966), pp. 95-120; *Marriage among the Trio*, Oxford: Clarendon 1969; 'A Report on the Trio Indians', *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, Vol. LV (1981).

certainly no permanent association. The most regular interaction with the outside world was with the Bush Negroes who visited the Trio for trading purposes. From the mid-19th century onwards various scientific expeditions, boundary commissions, and survey teams visited the region for brief periods. Then in 1959, a Franciscan missionary, Protasio Frikel, who had made frequent trips to the Trio during the previous ten years, founded a permanent mission station on the Brazilian side of the frontier. Although I will refer to this mission on future occasions, it is not the main concern of this paper. The focus is on the Baptist mission that was founded in Surinam in 1960.

This Baptist mission started life as the Door-to-Life Gospel Mission, but its activities were soon taken over by the West Indies Mission. Two mission stations were founded, and a policy of persuading the Indians to abandon their own villages and to settle round these stations was actively pursued. The missionaries were extremely successful in this (for reasons that cannot be examined here), and they attracted not only all the Surinam Trio but many of those living in Brazil as well. The Roman Catholic missionary who until then had been happy to visit the Indians in their own villages retaliated by implementing a similar policy. By the late 1960s all the Trio and members of some small neighbouring groups were living around one of the three mission stations, leaving the rest of a vast area deserted.

The policies of the two missionary organizations have differed on many points. The Roman Catholic mission has concentrated more on secular aspects, and has brought about some quite fundamental changes in socio-economic organization. They have paid less attention to the spiritual work, and the religious teaching that has been undertaken has been done mainly in Portuguese, a language in which a proportion of the population is now relatively fluent. Little or no attempt has been made to eradicate many traditional practices, such as smoking, dancing, and drinking. It is not clear whether shamanism is still practised.

On the other hand the Baptist missionaries have not gone out of their way to change the socio-economic organization, although some changes have inevitably occurred. Instead they have focused their efforts on religious conversion. This has involved the elimination of smoking, drinking, dancing, and shamanism, all practices associated with the Trio's traditional beliefs. The Baptists have done all their teaching in Trio, have translated the whole of the New Testament and suitable parts of the Old Testament into Trio, and have taught the Indians to read and write in their own language. With very few exceptions the Surinam Trio have remained monolingual.

There is no love lost between the two missionary organizations, and they are critical of each other's activities. Some of the Baptist missionaries regard Roman Catholicism as a deviation from true Christianity and do not accept their converts as Christians. This attitude has rubbed off on some of the more ardent Baptist converts, while Brazilian Trio have accused

the Baptist missionaries of practising ethnocide.³

II

To appreciate the changes that have been brought about by missionary teaching, it is first necessary to look at traditional Trio beliefs and then the particular form of Christian message to which the Indians have been exposed.

Traditional Trio beliefs are unsystematised and *ad hoc*, a fact which is in keeping with the nature of their social organization. It is out of the question to examine Trio beliefs in general, and I will concentrate on their notions of causation, with particular reference to sickness and death.

There are various components which may be identified here. First, and perhaps most important, is the influence of the individual human being. His or her behaviour can affect directly the well-being of others. This may be intentional or unintentional, and broadly speaking the more closely related two people are the less intentionality is required for one to influence the welfare of the other. It is not possible unintentionally to cause the sickness or death of a stranger, but it is of a close kinsman. Examples of this include the restrictions on diet that members of a nuclear family follow when one of their number is ill, and the acceptance that an individual's misdeeds may be responsible for the sickness of a kinsman. The mechanism at work here is not easy to follow, but basically the individual is seen as being intimately involved in a network of relations which form a part of his individuality. Harmony within this network is vital for a person's physical and spiritual well-being, and vice-versa. Influence within such a nexus is direct and calls for no other agency; the mechanism results from the sharing of a common relatedness. I must confess that I remain uncertain about the exact way in which the Trio conceive of this relatedness but it seems to be less a shared substance such as blood (as has been reported from elsewhere in Amazonia) and more a metaphysical entity such as soul-matter.

When intentionality is involved, the influence may be exerted either directly or indirectly. In the case of direct influence, the individual goes through some procedures, said or done, which act on the intended victim directly. The indirect method involves the recruitment of an agent, a spirit, which

³ See the report on the Second Assembly of Indigenous Chiefs held in Brazil in May 1975.

is sent to attack the victim. Laymen only have limited contact with and control over spirits, and as far as possible they try to avoid them. It is the shaman who has most dealings with the spirit world, and who is best able to employ its services for good or evil. The shaman has his own spirit helpers, and his relationship with them is not unlike that described above for close kin. It is essential for the shaman's safety that he keeps on good terms with his spirit helpers, and many of the restrictions he has to observe before contacting the spirit world are to ensure harmony in these relationships. Because of their greater powers shamans can kill over longer distances and in larger numbers than can laymen.

Spirits are also said to act on their own volition, but they are not thought of as unambiguously bad or dangerous. The main trouble with spirits is their unpredictability. They are potentially anywhere and everywhere, and anything may have its invisible, spiritual counterpart, although certain things are more often and closely associated with spirits than others. The presence of a spirit can only be determined after the event, so that it is always wise to take precautions. The ambiguity is most clearly recognised in the fact that the same spirit can kill or cure.

Thus an individual's sickness or death may be explained in a number of ways, but more often than not it is assumed that human malevolence has something to do with it. Most people die of sorcery, and sorcery symbolises the catastrophic breakdown in human relations. The opposite condition to this is the state of *sasame*. This word can be translated as happy, but interestingly enough you cannot be *sasame*, or happy, alone. *Sasame* is something that has to be shared with others, and is a quality of a relationship. Its implication, however, is more far-reaching than this since it refers not simply to a state of harmony with one's fellow men but with the natural and supernatural worlds as well. When I first glossed the word, I wrote 'In its simplest connotation this word means 'happy', but its deeper meaning implies a sense of contentment and the feeling of belonging not only to society but to the whole of nature and the universe.'⁴ The most general and public demonstration of this condition was displayed in dance festivals.

For the present purposes that brief sketch of Trio ideas about the causation of sickness and death will suffice. We can now turn to what the Baptist missionaries believe and teach. The first and crucial point is that they are fundamentalists, and as such they recognise the Scriptures as a literal and historical document. Furthermore the Scriptures are inerrant and infallible. In practice, this fundamentalist commitment to the scriptural texts means that life is a constant battle against the forces of evil and the temptations that Satan places in the way. The only way in which victory can be attained and individual sal-

⁴ *Marriage among the Trio*, p. 256

vation assured is through God and the acceptance of His word by which one's actions must be continually guided. Failure to believe and obey will result in damnation and burning in the eternal fires. The God of the fundamentalists appears much more as an avenging father than a forgiving one, and to turn away from His true path is to bring His wrath upon one. How has this message been conveyed to the Trio?

Much of the biblical message is totally meaningless to the Trio. This is barely surprising given that parts present insurmountable difficulties to those brought up within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Evans-Pritchard drew attention to some of these difficulties in his introduction to *Theories of Primitive Religion* and asks 'how do you render into an Amerindian language "In the beginning was the word"?'⁵ The answer for one Amerindian language is 'Ma, ipit̃toponp̃mao Omi teese'. The missionaries have made a literal translation of the biblical text. Ma is a standard opening for any sentence, and could be roughly rendered as "well". Ipit̃toponp̃mao is derived from the stem of the verb 'to begin' (ipit̃) which is nominalised by -to. The suffix -ponp̃ means 'former', and -mao provides the temporal sense. Thus the word literally means 'beginning former when'. Omi is the word for 'speech' or 'talk' (although it is rarely used without a possessive pronoun), and teese is the stative form of the verb 'to be'. Thus while it is possible to find words in the Trio language with which to translate such a sentence, the problem of how to convey the meaning is left untouched. This difficulty is not only present with reference to metaphysical passages but is equally problematic in the translation of the socio-cultural background. How to get across the pastoral idiom that is so central to biblical imagery to a people who not only lack a pastoral tradition but might even be described as anti-pastoralist in their outlook?

On the other hand there are various biblical stories and notions that the Trio have no difficulty in appreciating; the Garden of Eden and Noah are examples of these. However, it is not the Trio's reaction to such passages that is as interesting as their adoption and adaptation of more essential ideas. This is best illustrated by returning to the subject of the causation of sickness and death, and to the title of this paper.

⁵ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1965, p. 14.

III

The Trio for 'the wages of sin is death' is *iripi irepeme nai wawein*. This, in turn, can be rendered back literally as 'sin payment is death', and although the Trio understand it as that, it is worth pointing out some interesting points about this sentence. Leaving *iripi* aside for the moment, *irepeme* although now fully incorporated into the Trio language is a loan-word, its origin being almost certainly French, Spanish or Portuguese (the Trio [r] sound is close to [d] and [l]; and [p] is close to [b]). It seems probably that the word was introduced by the Bush Negro traders. Trading between the Trio and Bush Negroes involved an almost contractual relationship between permanent partners, and was based on considerable trust since debts were left outstanding for long periods, as they are among the Trio today. Thus, while *irepeme* does mean something being owed, there is no sense of immediacy attached to the word. It might be said that the old comment that the wages of sin is death but not immediate death is built into the Trio version.

The problem about *wawein* is that as well as death it refers to a state of unconsciousness, as, for example, when someone is in a coma. This, in other contexts, has implications for the understanding of certain miracles.

The most difficult word is *iripi*, sin. Unfortunately I have no information about the traditional meaning of the term although it seems improbable that it meant sin. Possibly cognate with it is the word *wirip*, which is the Trio for spirit, although the missionaries invariably translate it as evil spirit or devil. For example, in the story of the Gadarene swine, Jesus sent the *wirip* into the pigs. There is the word *wiripme* which literally means '*wirip* being'. The missionaries have taken this term to mean 'bad', but this translation can be accepted only if spirits were regarded as unequivocally evil, which the Trio did not. As has been mentioned, spirits are unpredictable and unreliable. This ambiguous position is perhaps further evinced by another word, *wiripetao*. This term refers to the area between the village clearing proper and the forest proper. This is a strip of tree-roots, uncleared fallen trees, weeds and low secondary growth, and is the place where the village rubbish is dumped. It is neither village nor forest, which are the two essential socio-spatial categories in Trio thought, but something in-between.

While it is questionable whether *wiripme* meant 'bad' in the past it certainly does today as a result of missionary teaching. Nor did the missionaries fail to note and exploit the closeness of the terms for spirit and bad. Likewise, whatever *iripi* meant in the past, today it means sin. The sins against which the missionaries preached are those listed in numerous

passages in the New Testament, and include such things as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, strife, sedition, idolatry, witchcraft, sorcery, hatred, anger, murder, drunkenness, revelling, orgies, and so on. All of these are features of Trio life, and even if they did not regard them as sins they did recognise most of them as potential sources of disharmony. Most of these sins can be translated into Trio without too much distortion, and in some cases there is an abundance of suitable terms for the purpose. For example, the Trio language is well endowed with terms to describe different degrees of anger. However, some bias can be seen in the missionaries' choice of words. Witchcraft is translated as 'practising shamanism', idolatry by the belief in the shaman's spirit helpers which are represented in his rattle by tiny pebbles, revelling and orgies as 'dancing', and sedition by the verb 'to leave a village'. Given the policy of retaining the Indians close to the mission stations, this last example is of particular significance considering the high rate of traditional mobility.

Having identified the Trio's sins, translated them into Trio (at least to their own satisfaction), the missionaries still had to persuade the Indians that they were sins and should give them up. They did this by telling the Trio about a new spirit of whom they had never heard. This new spirit is called God (*Kan* in Trio). *Kan* is all powerful, and unequivocally good and protective on condition that one places unwavering faith in him and those allied to him. Those who are not with him are against him. The spirits with which the Trio had been dealing in the past had deceived them for they were the allies and representatives of *Kan*'s direst enemy, Satan. *Kan*, however, is more powerful than Satan, and if you believe in him, pray to him, and follow his word He will protect you from the spirits and malevolent men and give you everlasting life.

It is important to realise that the missionaries never denied the existence of the Trio spirit world. Indeed all the evidence indicates that the missionaries believe as firmly as the Trio in the existence of spirits, although they call them devils or Satan. The Trio still accept the presence of spiritis. Former shamans do not deny their past communication with the spirit world and their relationship with spirit helpers. No-one has suggested that they should, and they are frightened to perform traditional shamanistic practices because this will put them back in contact with that world. They admit that in the past they were ignorant of what they were doing, and because of this their forefathers have gone to burn in the eternal fires. Today they have heard of *Kan*, are His children, are good, are better off, and do not die.

This last claim is crucial to our understanding of the process of conversion. The speed at which the Trio gave up so many of their traditional ritual practices is startling, and in another paper I have tried to explore some of the reasons for this. There is no room here to go into this subject in detail, but there is one vitally important aspect to which attention must be

drawn. When the missionaries started work in the area, the Trio were demographically in a parlous state. Medical care provided by the missionaries has completely altered this situation. The infant mortality rate has dropped right off, and life expectancy has risen abruptly. The number of people of 50 years and over has quadrupled in a generation, and four-generation families are common. The overall mortality rate has been unnaturally low in the last decade, and in a certain sense people have stopped dying, at least at the usual rate.

The Trio are well aware that medicine is mainly responsible for this change. However, medicine did not come to them in an ideologically uncontaminated form. The missionaries taught that the power of medicine to cure is directly dependent upon the will of Kan, who may give or withhold this power in any particular case. Medicine is by no means the only thing whose efficacy the missionaries have attributed to Kan, but it is the most obvious and the one which has had the greatest implications for the Trio. The point should be made, however, that I do not think that the missionaries can be accused of making opportunist and deceitful use of the powers of Western medicine in order to advance their evangelical message among those who know no better. They are, I feel certain, acting sincerely, and preaching what they themselves believe. Kan, for the Trio, has become accordingly both the necessary and the sufficient cause in the explanation of a whole series of phenomena, and above all in that relating to sickness and death. Because these events continue to occur - people fall ill and die, that is - the causal explanation has to include the reason why in any particular case, and even in that of the most dedicated Christian, Kan has failed to save the patient and withheld from the medicine its power to heal.

The answer to this is contained within the evangelical slogan 'the wages of sin is death'. Kan will punish the sinner by withholding the power of the medicine, and allow him to die. The Trio have elaborated this simple message in order to make it fit better with their traditional ideas. Today the Trio recognise that sickness and death result from Kan in revenge for sinning, but not necessarily that of the victim. Revenge may be visited on an individual as a result of his own wickedness, but it may equally be the effect of some other, closely related person's lapse. In other words, the social network component of the traditional causal notion remains, and an individual's behaviour can influence the well-being of others as well as his own. Blame is still attached to individuals, and as in the past it is apportioned after the event. The Trio have high, but rather unspecific standards of Christian behaviour, and they tend to be judged in the light of what has happened. Thus the behaviour of a person who falls ill and dies is scrutinised for lapses which will explain the event. Likewise the behaviour of others, especially closely related people, is examined. Relevant to this is the fact that the question 'are you *sasame?*', which means approximately 'are you happy in your relation with others?', has also come to mean 'are you a Christian?'. Christianity involves being in a state of harmony with your fellow men and

with God. Disharmony in social and spiritual relationships is still understood to be an aspect of the aetiology of sickness and death. Blame for a particular occurrence will be laid on a defaulter in exactly the same way as accusations of sorcery were made in the past. Also, as in the past, explanations are *post facto*.

A change that has come about is the disappearance of the intentional aspect referred to earlier when discussing traditional ideas. The Trio no longer fear the sorcerer against whom Kan and prayer protect them. Rather it is the punitive action of Kan that is responsible for sickness and death, and even the intentional sinner only does unintentional harm since no-one knows when and on whom Kan will wreak his vengeance.

There is a final aspect to all this that is worth a brief mention. The importance of the shaman's harmony with the spirit world, and in particular his spirit helpers, before conducting a seance has been mentioned. This idea has been transferred to the medical personnel who care for the Trio. These are mainly Dutch nurses, and they have been the focus of numerous accusations when patients have failed to respond to treatment. The nurses are charged with not being Christians, or not being *sasame*, and because of this Kan has withheld the curative power of the medicine. An interesting case involved an Indian girl who was being trained as a medical assistant. She had been forced to marry a man whom she did not want to marry, and was conducting a rather open affair with the man whom she wished to marry. She was heavily sanctioned for her adulterous behaviour, and it was proposed by the village leaders that she be suspended from her medical duties. This might appear to have been a punishment, but an informant took the view that since she was sinning there was little point in her administering medicine because its potency would be lost or reduced. She was giving medicine in vain (*nepin&yanre*), the informant explained.

To summarise the nature of Trio Christianity, we may say that they believe in an all-powerful spirit, Kan, and they accept that there are certain forms of behaviour of which He does not approve and if they indulge in them He will punish them. On the other hand, if they heed His word and follow His commandments, they will be rewarded with everlasting life. The nature of traditional beliefs has not provided an obstacle to the assimilation of parts of the Christian message. Given the open-ended nature of the Trio pantheon, the existence of a spirit of whom they had not previously been aware called for no radical reappraisal. It is true that the qualities of this new spirit have resulted in the world being more sharply divided between good and bad than it was in the past, but since there was always an aura of uncertainty about the traditional spirits, Kan's guaranteed goodness, concrete evidence of which was readily observable in the demographic circumstances, seems to have offered an alternative that was attractive to the Trio. The values of harmony and brotherhood as present in Christian teaching are not out of keeping with the notion of *sasame*. Nor are the sins

listed in the New Testament unknown to the Trio as forms of asocial behaviour, and furthermore the Trio belief that the behaviour of one person can affect the welfare of another has its parallel in Christianity: 'For I the Lord God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation'.

IV

The Trio succumbed relatively quickly and easily to the evangelical message, and there are a number of reasons and circumstances that can be held to account for this. This is the topic of another paper, and here I wish to draw attention to only one aspect, the degree to which the ideas on both sides were compatible. I would argue that the discrepancy between certain fundamental Christian beliefs and Trio beliefs is not all that great, and further that the rather unsystematised nature of the latter allowed for the absorption of the former, or at least parts of them. If this is correct, then another form of Christianity would not prove so acceptable or the Trio would latch on to different aspects of it. Some information on this will be forthcoming when Father Francisco Cerqueira of the Institute completes his work among the Trio in the Brazilian side of the frontier. For the moment we will have to do with two rather more wide-ranging comparative examples.

The first of these is another South American case, the Toba of Argentina, and the source is Miller.⁶ The Toba have been exposed to four centuries of Catholic missionization, the first mission having been founded in 1585. During this long period, the evangelical work has been carried on with varying degrees of vigour, but, Miller claims, apart from the use of the term Dios there is very little among present-day Toba which can be contributed to Catholic teaching. Two Protestant missions, one Church of England and the other Mennonite, operated with considerable intensity during short periods of this century, but they proved no more successful in converting the Toba than the Roman Catholics. The reason Miller gives for the failure of all these missions is similar. In all cases, the main power figures, God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary, are too remote to fit with Toba notions of what a relationship with such supernatural entities should be. The failure of these organizations is to be contrasted with the immediate and lasting success of a Pentecostal mission. A key

⁶ E.S. Miller, 'Shamans, Power Symbols, and Change in Argentine Toba Culture', *American Ethnologist*, Vol II (1975), pp. 477-496.

aspect of Pentecostal beliefs and experience is the direct communication with the divine, or supernatural. Miller explores some of the points at which Pentecostal beliefs have brought about changes in traditional Toba ideas and practices, in particular the fact that there is now universal communication with the supernatural while in the past this was confined to shamans. However, it is not this point which is interesting for the present subject, but rather the fact that the Toba, having rejected three forms of Christianity as inappropriate, accepted a fourth because it fitted with their indigenous notions.

For a second case, we may turn to the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea, and the source here is Schieffelin.⁷ The mission is the Asia Pacific Christian Mission, a fundamentalist Protestant organization, but much of the evangelical work among the Kaluli was performed by Papuan pastors who gave the scriptural message a distinctly Papuan flavour. The speed at which conversion took place was startling, according to Schieffelin, and he explores various reasons why this was so. He concentrates on one particular aspect which is associated with the Kaluli's notions of reciprocity, and centres round the notion of *wel*. *wel* is the exact return for something given or received. Thus it is a pig returned for a pig given, but it is also revenge for death by witchcraft. It is a matter of evening up the score, and these are the terms in which the Kauli have interpreted Judgement Day; God's *wel* in return for Jesus' death upon the Cross. The Kaluli found themselves in the uncomfortable position of being in the middle of an uncompleted transaction with God. Each individual, they were taught, is responsible for Christ's murder, and revenge could be expected unless one gave one's soul to Christ in compensation. The Christian message could be made to fit neatly with traditional ideas. The similarities of the Kaluli case with that of the Trio is striking, and perhaps nowhere more than when Schieffelin writes: 'With Judgement Day, one's conduct towards others is no longer a matter between person and person, but between each individual and God. That is, what one does towards another is directly a matter of one's relation to God'.

The Three examples of conversion discussed in this paper have much in common, but can they in turn be related to wider generalizations on the topic? Perhaps the most general claim about conversion is that of Horton⁸ who argues that in Africa the success of Muslim and Christian ideas reflect their coincidental appearance with a cosmological horizon that was expanding

⁷ E.L. Schieffelin, 'Evangelical Rhetoric and the Transformation of Traditional Culture in Papua New Guinea', Paper presented at the American Anthropological Association Meeting, Cincinnati 1979.

⁸ R. Horton, 'African Conversion', *Africa*, Vol. XLI (1971), pp. 85-108; and, by the same author, 'On the Rationality of Conversion', *Africa*, Vol. XLV (1975), pp. 219-235 & 373-399.

for other reasons, and the two-tiered structure of existing African belief systems. The lower of these tiers consisted of local deities who became increasingly less relevant to everyday affairs as horizons widened, and there were no traditional means for dealing with the otiose deities of the upper tier. This want was filled by the world religions. How far Horton is correct with reference to Africa I do not know, but his tendency to treat Christianity as a uniform set of ideas, or rather his failure to discriminate between different forms of Christian teaching, may be unfortunate if the suggestion made in this paper is more widely true. That is that the particular form of Christianity is a crucial variable in the conversion process. However, this does not mean that there must be a direct fit between the symbols of the two belief systems. Rather, as Miller has argued, the relationship between the systems must contain a degree of ambiguity so that there is room for reinterpretation. This has clearly happened among the Kaluli, Toba, and Trio among whom an appropriate Christianity has blended with traditional ideas to form a new syncretic belief system.

Finally, reference must be made to one further problem. Given the large variety of forms in which Christianity can be retailed, it might be thought that an appropriate form exists for every society. This may be so but since all societies have not been exposed to every form, we do not know. However, this seems unlikely and it is more likely that there are numerous cases where there is no meeting-ground between the symbolic systems. On the other hand there may be more to it than this, and the example I have in mind are the Waiyana, the eastern neighbours of the Trio, who have mainly rejected the same missionary organization to whom the Trio succumbed so readily. There are historical factors which have to be taken into account in explaining these different reactions, but the key variable seems to have been the degree to which religious notions, myth and ritual, are embedded in the social structure. This is something that requires more thorough examination in the future.

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