

# Messianic Movements\*

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## I

SINCE the middle of the last century a large number of indigenous religious movements have been reported from all over the non-Western world. Though there are marked differences between all of them, related to the particular cultural, socio-economic, historical and religious situation, a great many of these movements show striking similarities, in content and in form. And these likenesses are the more remarkable since they often occur in spite of the (great) differences in the cultural, historical and religious milieu.

A vast and ever increasing bibliography exists on these indigenous religious movements,<sup>1</sup> which, depending upon their

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<sup>1</sup> Among the most important general works are: V. Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed, A Study of Modern Messianic Cults*, (New York, 1965); R. Linton, "Nativistic Movements" *American Anthropologist* XLV, No. 1); S. Thrupp (ed), *Millennial Dreams in Action*. (The Hague, 1962); W. D. Wallis, *Messiahs - Their Role in Civilization* (Washington, 1963); A. F. C. Wallace: "Revitalization Movements" *American Anthropologist* LVIII No. 2); G. Guariglia, "Prophetismus und Heils - erwartungsbe-  
wegungen als Völkerkundliches and religions - geschichtliches Problem" (Vienna, 1959); W. E. Mühlmann, "Chiliasmus und Nativismus" (Berlin, 1961).

most outstanding characteristic and the viewpoint of the author, have been named: *Nativistic-movements* (Linton), *Revitalization-movements* (Wallace), *Contra-acculturative movements* (Herskovitz), *Liberation movements* (Lanternari), *Embryonic nationalistic movements* (Guiart, Lawrence), etc. They have further been described in ethonological and historical-religious literature as *Cargo-cults*, *Prophetic movements*, *Millennarian or Chiliastic movements*, *Salvation movements*, *Religious revivalism*. etc.

Throughout this study the term *Messianic movements* will be used. The term "Messianic", though often loaded as a Judaeo-Christian term, should be understood, however, both in its *religious* and *secular* meaning, and either centering in a *person*, in a whole nation, or in an *idea*.

## II

In general these movements share the following characteristics:

a. They emerge from a *crisis-situation*, in particular the crisis brought about by the contract between a dynamic, wealthy civilization and a more or less static, technically and economically undeveloped population, the "colonial situation" (Balandier). Aspects of this acculturation crisis are: the breakdown of traditional so-

ciety with its loss of (traditional) certainties; deprivation, both cultural and economic; "oppression" of the indigenous population by powerful foreigners; the "cultural lag" as a lag between the "expected" and the "not-yet fulfilled."

These religious movements have therefore often been described as reactions of people affected by this culture clash: "The religions of the Oppressed" (Lanternari); "Short-circuit reactions," manifestations of a "failing acculturation" (Van-Baal); "Protest Movements" (Pereira de Queiroz), etc. And indeed, a significant function of these movements is to offer those who feel discontented and oppressed, freedom and salvation; freedom from subjection to foreign powers as well as freedom from subjection to the "Establishment" (Government; Church) which fails to do justice to all. Salvation not only from the present state of evil, such as social injustice, poverty, and insecurity, but also from sin, sickness and death.

b. These movements commonly center around a *charismatic leader*, *i. e.*, a person, usually with a strong personality, who claims to possess special spiritual powers (he has visions, revelations), magical or technical qualities (he has the gift of healing; he knows how to influence and manipulate "established powers"; he is an inventor, etc.), and shamanistic tendencies.

Sometimes, this charismatic leader is considered to be the liberator-redeemer himself, the messiah who will lead his followers into a "land-without-evil," or who will restore social justice and put an end to oppression, either foreign or indigenous, and who will then usher in the "Golden Age."

Very often, however, the charismatic leader is a prophetic warner, or the fore-

runner to prepare the people for the coming of the "Messiah."

In quite a number of instances those men and women who claimed that they were called by a supernatural power to proclaim the powerful message of liberation became "deified" after their death, and are expected to return (re-incarnated) as the messiah.

c. Among the leaders and the followers, frequently *ecstatic tendencies* can be observed. These range from cultic dances (the "ghost-dance" movement is even named after these ecstatic dances) to shaking (*cf.* "the Shakers") and a state of "madness" (*cf.* the Vailala-madness"). In their state of ecstasy, people claim that they hear "voices" or the rattling of the anchor chain of the ship which they expect. They say that to observe normally imperceptible realities, such as angels, returning ancestors, spiritual beings with whom they can "shake hands", etc., spirit-possession and trance often accompany these manifestations. People also claim to be exalted above certain physical laws of nature and normal human limitations, making them immune to pain, death or invulnerable to the bullets of the police (Epikilipikili sect, Lapiang Malaya).

d. The messianic movements center around an *apocalyptic idea*; *i. e.*, they rouse the hope that within the near future the present evil state of affairs, by some miraculous event, will suddenly be changed. The established powers (of evil) will be destroyed (defeated); the "Masters" will become slaves, the foreigners will be chased out of the country and the dead will return. Then a new government will be established, headed by the "Messiah," who will rule in righteousness. All poverty will end; there will be abundance for all, with the people possessing their own land and homes. All tears will

be wiped off, and sickness and death will be no more.

Commonly, all this will be brought about by cataclysmic events in the natural world, which are looked upon as the sure signs of the nearness of the coming of the "Messiah" and the New Age: floods, famines, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc.

In Melanesia, also in Polynesia, and the Philippines for instance, the "Messiah" and the dead are expected to return by a big ship, carrying a large cargo which will be distributed among all the followers of the prophet.

People differ in their ideas as to how this renewal of the present state of affairs may be achieved. In some movements, this Golden Age is a glorified past, and people are longing and working for the regeneration of their old beloved and idealized culture. All that is new is rejected. The term "nativistic" is very appropriate here, or viewed from the angle of acculturation, one may speak here of *contra-acculturative* movements (ghost-dance, Milne-Bay movement a. o.). In other movements, such as in most of the Melanesian cargo cults, it is the old that is rejected, both in its material form as well as in its ideological contents. Ancient temples and sacred objects are destroyed, people start imitating the practices of Europeans, often without understanding their purpose or meaning. New methods of agriculture are adopted, schoolhouses are built, and often mass conversions to Christianity are reported.

A third but much less common idea is that the Golden Age will be something radically new and until now unheard of. The old and the new ways are both rejected in anticipation of something which "the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard."

Most common among all the messianic movements, however, is that in the soon expected messianic "kingdom" the good ideas of the old and indigenous culture (emphatically mentioned) will be harmoniously blended with the which is good in the new. Wallace speaks in this connection about "importation movements", Marian W. Smith<sup>2</sup> about *vitalistic movements*, while Voget<sup>3</sup> has suggested the term "*accommodation movement*".

e. Most of these movements are *strongly nationalistic*, and directed against the "Established Powers." When such powers are foreigners, the movements have a strong anti-foreigner character. Where these "established powers" are identified as a Religious Power or a Church, the movements became *anti-established church* (the well-known *separatist* churches), *anti-Mission* (both foreign and Church together), and also anti-Witchcraft and anti-Sorcery, as in West-Africa.

f. The majority of these Modern Messianic movements show a strong *syncretism*, i.e., the beliefs of the old order are blended with the beliefs adopted from Christianity, often in distorted form, or from Buddhism and Islam.

### III

It should be noted that these six key-characteristics of the Messianic movements in general are not always simultaneously found in each particular cult. Usually, only a few of them are outstanding, while others are only latently present, and one or two may be missing altogether. Moreover, many of these movements shows changes in form and nature

<sup>2</sup> Marian W. Smith, "Towards A Classification of Cult Movements", Mar. 2, 1959, pp. 8-12.

<sup>3</sup> Fred W. Voget, "The American Indian in Transition, Reformation and Accommodation", American Anthropologist Vol. 58, 1956, pp. 249-263.

over time, so that some characteristics paramount in the beginning of the movement may gradually disappear, whereas others are added or are becoming more prominent. They have been movements which began as a Millennialist nativistic cult and which developed into a nationalistic-political importation movement. And the opposite has happened also.

All this makes the classification of these movements into certain "types" even more difficult than the great diversity of the movements alone.

The "types", whichever scheme or typology is adopted,<sup>4</sup> are not limited to one particular culture area either. They all have a very wide geographic and historical expansion and they do occur in any cultural, socio-economic or religious situation.

Among the most important examples of these indigenous messianic movements are:

a. In *North America*: the *dream-dance*, *prophet-dance* and *ghost-dance* movements, the latter with its famous outbreaks in 1870 and 1890 which left few Indian tribes unaffected. The main theme in the visions of such prophets as Wovoka was the near coming of the "Culture hero" the imminent end of the world and the return of the dead; the "whites" and their culture would either be expelled from the Indian territory or destroyed. Guariglia has listed some 60 of such nativistic movements between 1870 and 1890 only. They all share the key-characteristics of the acculturation-crisis, the prophetic leaders, a strong ecstasy, the eschatological idea of the coming Messiah, the cataclysmic end of the world, the return

of the dead, and, the anti-foreigner attitude. When the ghost-dance movement was shattered by the, sometimes bloody, victory of the whites, the Peyote-cult appeared. Rebellion and fighting changed into introspection and meditation; salvation is now primarily, but not exclusively, looked upon as a spiritual achievement, rather than one of material goods and land. The literature on this consists of the following: J. Mooney, *The Ghost-dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* 14th Annual Report Bureau of Ethnology 1896; H. G. Barnett, *Indian Shakers: A Messianic Cult of the NW Pacific* (Carbondale, 1957); J. L. Slotkin, *The Peyote Religion* (Glencoe, 1956); L. Spier, *The Prophet Dance of the Northwest and its Derivatives*, (Menasha, 1935); C. Dubois, *The 1870 Ghost Dance*: Anthrop. Records, Vol. 3:1; University of Calif. press, 1939

b. In *Oceania* the *cargo cults* have attracted most attention. These movements grew out of the apocalyptic idea of a ship loaded with "kago," the pidgin-English word for (European) wealth, and bringing the long expected "Messiah" with all the ancestors. And still, hardly a month passes without somewhere in this vast area another prophet arising, foretelling the end of the world, the coming of the Messiah and the return of the dead. Some of these movements are rather peaceful, bringing about social and economic reform; others develop into fierce anti-white, anti-missionary rebellions. Whole villages and areas become affected; all work ceases; the pigs are killed, the houses are burned and the old sacred objects are destroyed to accelerate the coming of the Messiah and the "Golden Age". Many of the cults have adopted "Christian ideas", but other movements have also been reported from areas

<sup>4</sup> Good examples of such a typology are found in the studies of A. F. C. Wallace, R. Linton, G. Guariglia, A. J. F. Köbben, M. W. Smith.

which were wholly unaffected by Christian Mission or Western civilization. Literature: J. Guiart, *Culture Contact and the John Frum movement on Tanna*, SWJA, 1956; P. Lawrence, "Road Belong Cargo"; 1965; I. Leeson: "Bibliography of Cargo Cults and other Nativistic Movements in the South Pacific"; South Pacific Commission Paper, 1952; G. Oosterwal, "A Cargo cult in the Mamberano area" *Ethnology*, 1963; P. Worsley, "The Trumpet Shall Sound", 1957.

c. In *Africa*, the two most outstanding features of the hundreds of messianic movements are their *anti-foreigner* or *anti-established power attitude* and their *syncretism*. The movements greatly stimulated political independence and brought into existence some 3000 separatist African churches; "Ethiopian" or "Zionistic".

The socio-economic background of many of these prophetic movements is well expressed in the words of a Zulu leader, "At first we had the land and you had the Bible. Now we have the Bible and you have the land". In many areas, in particular in West-Africa, the movements turned also fiercely against "Black Magic", witchcraft, and sorcery. Literature: E. Anderson, "Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo, Uppsala, 1958; G. Balandier, "Sociologie actuelle d'Afrique Noire", Paris, 1955; G. Parrinder: "Religion in an African City," 1953; K. Schlosser: "Propheten in Africa," Braunschweig, 1949; B. Sundkler: "Bantu Prophets in South Africa," London, 1948.

d. From *Latin America* have been reported some of the oldest messianic movements in indigenous societies, such as the Land-Without-Evil movements of the Tupac-Guarani Indians. In later years, the aspect of "protest" is very significant in many of the Latin-American messianic

movements whose prophets foretold *liberation* (from the whites), *freedom* (from poverty and injustice) and the coming of the "Holy City" (on earth). Syncretism is a key aspect of all these movements. Here, like in Melanesia, there is hardly a month passing without seeing the rise of new prophetic movements among the peasants as well as in the cities.

The sudden boom of Adventist, Pentecostal and Spiritist churches in Latin America seems closely related to this indigenous spiritual climate of messianic expectations.

In the Caribbean (Jamaica, Haiti) where there is a large Negro population of African descent, the messianic cults also include a revival of traditional African beliefs and practices, and a longing for a return to Africa (Ethiopianism). Literature: R. Bastide, "Les Religions Africaines au Bresil"; A. Métraux: "La Religion des Tupinamba"; Paris, 1928. C. Nimuendaju, *Leyenda de la creacion y juicio final del mundo como fundamento de la religion de los Apapokura-Guarani* Sao Paulo, 1944; E. Schaden, *Ensaio etno-sociologico a mitologia heroica de algumas tribos indigenas do Brasil*, Sao Paulo, 1946; G. E. Simpson, "Jamaican Revivalist Cults", 1956; R. Ribeiro, "Brazilian Messianic Movements" 1967.

In *Asia* the messianic movements show as great a variety as the geography, cultures and religions of this vast continent. The movements occur from Turkey to Japan and from Siberia and Tibet to Indonesia. Except for Japan, Indonesia and Vietnam, however, good analytical studies on the messianic movements are rare.

In general, the Asian messianic movements show a strong nativism: the new "golden age" is patterned after the old

cultural past, with their ancient gods and rulers as the liberators and redeemers. But first this world has to be destroyed by a great fire, by earthquakes or by a terrific war. The foreigners (whites) will be chased away, the dead will come back, and the messiah will set up a government of righteousness and justice.

The influence of these apocalyptic ideas on the present struggle in Southeast Asia (Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia) is tremendous. Literature: E. Abegg, *Der Messiasglauben in Indien Und Iran*; Berlin, 1928; B. B. Fall "The Political-religious Sects of Vietnam" *Pacific affairs*, 1955, pp. 235-253; J. Van der Kroef, *Messianic Movements in Celebes, Sumatra and Borneo* in S. Thrupp (ed): *Millennial Dreams in Action*, pp. 80-121. H. van Straelen, *The Religion of the Divine Wisdom*, Kyoto, 1957; Nguyen Tran Huan, *Histoire d'une secte religieuse au Vietnam: le Caodaisme*; 1958

In the Philippines, the messianic cults show all the key-characteristics of the movements in general, and of those in Asia in particular. This makes the Philippines a very fruitful field of research on the messianic movements.

These movements have been reported as early as the 1840's when Apollinario de la Cruz wanted to set up his "Kingdom of the Tagalogs." Later movements under the Spanish regime shared the characteristic of a socio-religious protest, culminating in the wars of independence and the founding of a separatist Catholic Church (Aglipayan movement). The social protest continued under the American Regime (Colorum movements) and may be called a characteristic also of many of the present-day movements (Lapiang Malaya).

Movements centering around the apocalyptic idea of the soon coming end of the world and the return of the messiah are found both among the Christian and the non-Christian population of the Philippines (Tungud and Langkay movements in Mindanao, the Sampilada among the Bontoc; the Rizalista movements in the lowlands).

The Tungud movement is of a ghost-dance type, with the prophet returning from the dead and preaching the imminent destruction of the world. From Southern Luzon and the Visayas, Cargo-cult type movements have been reported, while the Sampilada-religion is a representative of a reform and accommodation movement. Well-known are the Rizalistas, expecting the soon return of Jose Rizal, "son of God and son of Mary". The trance-cults are represented in such movements as the *pasagahay*-movement in Roxas City.

All these movements are strongly *syncretistic*, a blending of ancient or new folk beliefs and Roman Catholicism. The majority of these movements and their charismatic leaders are peaceful, emphasizing the brotherhood of man, such as the *Kapatiran ng mga maka-Apo*, the improvement of society and the preparation for the coming of the messiah.

Besides the aspect of importation and syncretism, the Philippine messianic movements are further characterized by a strong *nationalism* and *separatism* from established churches. What Parrinder once has called the "Africanization" of religion has a counterpart also in the "Philippinization of Christianity". Of the some 370 churches and movements officially registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission, about 70% is more or less indigenous. That the crisis-situa-

tion is not limited to the actual "colonial situation" becomes clear from the fact that out of these 370 churches some 210 began after the Philippines gained its independence. Literature: M. A. Foronda, *Cults Honoring Rizal*, 1961; P. Covar, *The Wawat ng Lahi*, (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of the Philippines, 1962); F. Eggan and A. Pacyaya, *The Sapilada Religion*, SWJA, 1962; G. Oosterwal, *Religious-nationalistic movements in the Philippines* (Dutch), 1967; D. Sturtevant: "La Guardia de Honor," *Asian Studies*, 1966; D. Elwood, *Churches and Sects in the Philippines*, 1968

#### IV

##### *Synthesis*

In the discussion on the messianic movements two issues have come to the fore, namely, their evaluation, and the explanation of their origin. The problem is that the social scientist is seeking answers to questions here which go beyond the limit of his science. For, however regrettable to admit, there are no objective criteria by which we can evaluate a movement positively or negatively. What Nida negatively sees as the "grim evidence of a dying culture-the last agonies of a disintegrating society,"<sup>5</sup> is looked upon positively by Voget<sup>6</sup> as reformative and accommodative. What Williams describes negatively as "the destruction of native ceremonies" which he greatly regrets, has been described by others as "liberation from fear and social tyranny".

a. *Evaluation.* The anti-foreigner and anti-Establishment character of so many of these movements has commonly led to

their suppression and extremely negative evaluation. The prophets were jailed; the movements were forbidden. The anti-Church and anti-(foreign) Mission attitude, often resulting in the expropriation of Mission properties, large-scale apostasy from the established Church and resurgence of neo-paganism, made these movements also condemned in the eyes of the church and the missions. And then, what can we think of the holocausts they aroused, the mass hysteria, the destruction of food and properties, the introduction of "negative" moral practices and the attitude of non-cooperation? Or, like in the nativistic cults, the orientation towards a past which is long gone by and the frustrations which are the result when the expected messiah and the "new rule" tarry to come? What about the energy lost in the movements, and the waste of money and time?

There seem to be reasons enough to take a negative attitude. Yet, this is only one side of the coin. Government and Missions (Churches) may well ask why the leaders of these messianic movements have taken this anti-Establishment attitude. And this is more so since a large number of the prophets and leaders have been trained to become teachers, evangelists or leaders in the various churches. The often repeated remarks that these prophets "wanted to become bishops", "had affairs with women", "did not get the recognition they wanted", etc. are true only to a certain, and rather limited, extent.

Though many of the messianic movements have a negative result on the Established order, their positive functions should not be underestimated:

1. Wallace has drawn our attention to their positive effort of *revitalization*. Peo-

<sup>5</sup> E. A. Nida, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions* (Harper, 1954), p. 177.

<sup>6</sup> Voget, *op. cit.*

ple are no longer indifferent towards the evil state of affairs around them. They show concern, they like to do something about it. Or, as Wallace puts it, the movements are a "deliberate, organized, conscious effort to construct a more satisfying culture."<sup>7</sup> From a rational standpoint the solutions may seem absurd and "idiotic," to use Williams' term but they are attempts to *create* something new when the old is destroyed, to *reform* when time and circumstances so demand, and to *accommodate* when cultures meet. There are many pure examples of such movements, like the Wege-Bage in W. New Guinea, or the Sopilada in the Philippines. But, most movements and separatist churches have this aspect of reform and accommodation more or less.

2. The *reforms* these movements generated for a smaller group have often led to greater social and political reforms for the country as a whole. The independence-movements in Asia and Africa are one aspect, the progressive socio-economic reforms in those same countries are another. They often became the forerunners of socio-economic reform, not only through a "negative" protest against the failure of Governments, but also through their positive action and example.

3. These large-scale socio-political reforms were only possible after much of the narrow tribalism and geo-cultural particularism of many new countries was broken. And this is what these movements helped to accomplish: a new group emerged which united members of various kinship units, tribes, villages or regions.

4. The organization into new groups is a real contribution, preparing its members

for the new, technological order, in which there is no more place for the traditional organization in kin group or village communities.

And to those people living in the emerging metropolitan areas of the Third World, these new movements have the function of giving people a new in-group with which they can identify themselves, giving them new certainties and securities, psychologically, but often also financially (members of the group find employment, get financial assistance, etc.).

5. Often a "new morality", a new ethos, and a new way of life are the result of membership in these movements. Many of these cults require the members to give up drinking alcoholic beverages (Kimbaguism; North American Indians, a.o.), insist on strict, often very strict, rules of conduct: no lying, no stealing, no gambling, etc.

Old feuds were buried, and a "new brotherhood" emerged, such as in North America, New Guinea, and also in the Philippines and Africa.

6. The "observed consequence" (Meriton) of adaptation, adjustment, and integration becomes also evident from the process of democratization these movements promoted. This is even the case where these movements themselves at times displayed a rather monocratic and autocratic form of organization. For in the two-class structured society (the haves and the have-nots, the rulers and those who feel suppressed, the elite, old or new, based on nobility, money or land and the common people), the leaders of these movements, with their following, form a third force, not based on ancient nobility, money or land.

<sup>7</sup> A. F. C. Wallace: *Revitalization Movements*, American Anthropologist LVIII, No. 2.



7. The French sociologist, Balandier, has called attention to another important positive function of the movements, which he refers to as the "psychological liberation". This consists of belief in the soon change, and the action it arouses, and work as a force to liberate the "oppressed" from fear, anxiety, and insecurity. This also refers to the contents of the beliefs. Absurd and irrational as they seem to be, they give the believers hope and certainty, a reason of life (*raison d'être*), a power to endure. For no matter how wealthy and efficient our technological civilization may be, it seems extremely poor in spiritual content. Thousands of people have found in these "movements of hope" a new power to live by which they did not find in the (Western) materialistic civilization or in the established Churches.<sup>8</sup>

These positive elements in the messianic movements characterize them not just as protest-movements, but rather as movements on Reform and Accommodation. Their protest against the Established order, Government or Church, calls attention to the "Unfinished Revolution", the existence of poverty, injustice and exploitation which still need reform, and to the positive way—in spite of their many negative aspects—in which these movements help to accomplish it.

b. *Explanation.* In general, four factors are held accountable to explain the origin and rise of these movements. 1) deprivation 2) distress and anxiety 3) The powerful aesthetic attraction of the millennial thought, and 4) the urban situation with its high degree of specialization.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See G. Oosterwal, "Cargo-cults As a Missionary Challenge" *International Review Missions*, Oct. 1967, pp. 469-477.

<sup>9</sup> See S. Thrupp, *Millennial Dreams in Action* (Mouton, The Hague, 1962).

Though in historical-religious circles a strong resistance exists against reductionism *i.e.*, against the explanation of religion out of socio-economic or psychological factors, literature abounds with such statements as "These movements are the result of frustration", or "They arose out of the colonial situation." Thus also Lanternari in his excellent study on "The Religious of the Oppressed" says: "The birth of these movements can only be understood in the light of historical conditions relating to the colonial experiences and to the striving of subject peoples to become emancipated".<sup>10</sup>

These explanations have been suggested in all anthropological literature: The ghost-dance as a result of the white man taking away the Indian's land, of the buffalo becoming extinct, etc; the cargo cult as the result of foreign oppression and the culture lag, etc. But, a few questions ought to be raised in this connection. Why is it that people react to oppression, injustice and social poverty by developing such peculiar beliefs such as the soon coming of the messiah and the rising of the dead? Why don't they react in revolt and social uprisings? Why don't they join the Huks or proclaim another Communist manifesto to unite in revolution?

It is not without interest to note that the time in which the Millerites and Irvingians proclaimed the end of the world and the coming of the Messiah in North America and Europe, the 1840's, was also the time of Marx, Lasalle and the Communist Manifesto. And, similarly, in many areas of the world do the messianic movements coincide with revolution and (communist) uprisings, as in the Philippines.

<sup>10</sup> V. Lanternari, *op. cit.*, p. VI.

Messianic movements are a universal phenomenon. If we rule out diffusion as the only explanation - on which most anthropologists agree - then what are the common factors responsible for all of them? And in this connection it should be stressed that these messianic movements are not limited at all to former colonial areas. They have been reported from the United States of America and England, from Spain to Holland and from Germany to Russia. It is a known fact also that messianic movements occur (and have occurred) in areas which have never had any contact with another (superior) culture. The "Land-Without-Evil" movements in South America are a case in point, and so are also those cargo cults in areas in New Guinea which have never had any contact with western civilization or any contact with Christian Mission. The latter is noteworthy, because in quite a number of studies on cargo cults Christian missionaries have been accused of evoking them. But, since such movements do occur in the non-Christianized areas, one should not take the explanation that they all are the result of Christian Mission, too seriously.

Moreover, why is it that messianic cults occur in one colonial area, whereas they have not been reported in others where the same situation prevailed? For instance, why were there no messianic cults among the Australian Aborigenes, or no cargo-cults in New Caledonia, areas which are both ripe for a cargo-situation?

May be one should take the standpoint of those anthropologist who maintain that the comparison is not possible, and that we are led back to the particular and the essentially unpredictable.<sup>11</sup>

As we already stressed, the answer to the problem of the origin of the messianic movement may not be found in the social sciences. And in attempting to find that answer I realize therefore that I am going beyond the boundaries set by the social sciences.

In some recent explanations of the Melanesian cargo cults, great emphasis has been laid on the fact that those messianic beliefs have been a part of genuine native mythology. The culture clash worked as a catalyst. It helped to provoke the movements, but the beliefs in the coming messiah and the return of the dead are of genuine native origin. This fact has also been reported from many other culture areas. Among the North American Indians the (soon) return of the Culture Hero and the "resurrection" of the dead is a frequently recurring theme. Spier therefore agreed that these messianic movements are based on a genuine native belief. A similar idea comes from Anderson in his study on the messianic movements in the Congo, and from Lomax<sup>12</sup> on the movement in Northern Thailand: They are rooted in native beliefs. Moreover, such a message is also ringing in Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam alike. If culture clash and oppression were the factors generating these particular eschatological beliefs of the messianic movements, then indeed is Judaism the result of Egyptian (Babylonian) oppression, and Christianity the result of the clash with the Romans at the beginning of the Christian era. But, I am taking the standpoint here of Bleeker, and others, that religion is *sui-generis*, i.e., that it cannot be reduced to socio-economic, political or psychological factors only.

<sup>11</sup> J. Inglis, "Cargo Cults - The Problem of Explanation" *Oceania*, XXVII, 4.

<sup>12</sup> L. Lomax, *Thailand* (in particular the chapter on "Waiting for the Messiah"), 1967.

The prophet is a case in point. No doubt, prophetism is a phenomenon of a crisis situation. The major prophets of Israel make this very clear also. This crisis need not be a colonial crisis, however, but a political, an economic or a technological. Yet explaining Moses, Siddharta Gautama, Jeremiah, Jesus, Mohammad, St. Catharina of Sienna, Brigitta of Sweden, Ellen White or prophets of the twentieth century, as the result of the colonial situation, of oppression, or of frustration means bypassing the very essence of religion. It is extremely important that we do not confuse the deter-

mining causes with factors favoring the rise of these movements. Culture clash, discontent, injustice, deprivation, and many other socio-economic and political and psychological factors may work as catalysts; they give the movements a certain direction, or even change its original outlook. Yet, as an explanation of the origin of the messianic beliefs, they seem to be insufficient.<sup>13</sup> These seem to originate in a Reality which is not open to our rational-critical research.

<sup>13</sup> See also M. J. Pereira de Queiroz, "L'influence du milieu social interne sur les mouvements messianiques bresiliens", *Archives de Sociologie des Religions*, 5, 1958.