

RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND:

Spiritual Technology in Modern Nigeria

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Information is abundant on the arrival of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, as well as on the later influx of Christian denominations (mainly from the United States). Far less is known about a third wave of religious imports, which we shall refer to as the "spiritual sciences", whose main focus is on the development of spiritual power and knowledge and whose origins are as diverse as India, Indonesia, Korea, Britain and California. Forerunners of this very varied collection of movements have been present in Nigeria since the 1930s, although the majority have arrived since the end of the Civil War in 1970.

Our main interest in this paper is not just in specific institutional forms, but also in the wider and more diffuse religious phenomenon which we are describing as "spiritual technology". This refers to those beliefs, practices and attitudes which seek to manipulate the divine or the spiritual and achieve specific, this-worldly ends. Magic is not considered to be an appropriate term to refer to this widespread phenomenon; certainly some degree of magic is involved, if we take this to mean the manipulation of impersonal forces using prescribed ritual techniques (usually administered by an intermediary specialist) to attain desired results. But the concept of spiritual technology is broader than this: it permeates the beliefs and practices of individuals and religious institutions; it is manifested through prayers, rituals, religious literature and sacred objects.¹

This religious instrumentalism and concern for techniques and results derives from both indigenous and exogenous sources. We may identify the this-worldly pragmatism of the traditional world-view as well as the esoteric and mystical claims of Western and Eastern metaphysical and occult groups offering direct access to the sacred and knowledge of the infinite. It is an attitude which pervades both institutional and organized forms of religion as well as the more popular and informal types of religious expression. There is an attendant emphasis on the cognitive and experiential dimensions as opposed to the ethical, the mythical and the social.

Our awareness of the growing importance of spiritual technology emerged from eight years of field work on all aspects of religious life and activity in Nigeria. It was highlighted during a recent survey of religious institutions in the town of Calabar, south-eastern Nigeria (1983) when an unexpected number of spiritual science movements were identified (14 or approximately 12% of all distinct religious bodies in the town).² This paper therefore stems from a desire to single out the phenomenon for further investigation.

The first part of the paper will focus on particular movements, while the second and third parts will be concerned with those indigenous religious institutions which have incorporated spiritual science teachings, either totally or partially into their belief

systems. We shall then examine the various aspects of spiritual technology which are available to the consumer, before discussing, in conclusion, the implications of these new forms of spirituality for religious behaviour and identity in Nigeria as a whole.

I SPIRITUAL SCIENCE MOVEMENTS

There is no easy definition of a spiritual science movement since this is an extremely heterogeneous category with virtually no doctrinal, historical or cultural unity. These movements nonetheless share certain definable characteristics, namely, a quest for higher states of consciousness, increased spiritual power and knowledge and a direct religious (sometimes ecstatic) experience, as well as the use of procedures, techniques and practices which draw on hidden or concealed forces in order to manipulate the empirical course of existence. In a Western context movements of this nature would be referred to as "cults". For obvious reasons, this would be confusing in the African context. The term "spiritual science movement" is preferred since the search for spiritual knowledge and power through the use of scientific, or at least pseudo-scientific means, characterizes most of these groups.³ It is also a term used by Nigerians themselves.

These movements are highly eclectic, drawing on a variety of sources: metaphysical, spiritualist, psychic, occult and mystical. There are important differences between the above: for instance, the metaphysician believes that he/she can have knowledge of the world and the cosmos through human reason (though not as a result of logical knowledge). The mystic, on the other hand, believes that direct knowledge of God, of spiritual truth, or of ultimate reality, is attainable through immediate intuition, insight or illumination, in other words in a way which differs from ordinary sense perception and which is not dependent on the medium of human reason. The psychic is considered to be subject to non-physical forces, while the occultist is concerned to discover the concealed, the unknown, the esoteric, that which lies beyond the realm of human understanding, but which is not necessarily supernatural — astrology or parapsychology for example.

We have not used the above terms as classificatory labels because of the loose organizational structures and tendency to eclecticism of many of the groups in Nigeria today. The data is therefore divided up in terms of origins, i.e. whether a movement is Western- or Eastern-related, since this is to some extent indicative of particular orientations.

Given the relative lack of information on the spiritual sciences on a national scale, we have centred our discussion on the town of Calabar in south-eastern Nigeria, where data was collected regarding the origins and development of movements operative in that region. Wherever possible, reference will be made to the activities of these movements in Nigeria as a whole. Calabar, however, serves as a good illustration, having benefited from the expansion of Lagos-based groups as well as being the headquarters for at least three movements. Some details of the world-views and cosmologies of the movements have been included, particularly of the lesser known groups, since this may help us to understand their potential appeal in the Nigerian context.

The Rosicrucians (AMORC) are today the most well known spiritual science movement in Calabar, even in Nigeria, largely owing to their extensive publicity campaign and the fact they have been active in the country since 1925. An impressive, Egyptian-style temple, which is the administrative headquarters for the whole of Nigeria, stands in the centre of Calabar and Rosicrucian literature, such as the "Mystic Life

of Jesus”, is readily available in the town’s bookstores. The appeal of AMORC lies not just in its historical continuity with an ancient Egyptian occult order (several Nigerian historians trace their ancestral roots to Egypt), but also that it claims not to be a religion but a “mythical philosophy” and a “worldwide cultural fraternity” which can help people discover their secret powers of inner vision and cosmic consciousness and attain greater personal success.⁴

One of the reasons that could be adduced for the success of the AMORC in Calabar and in Nigeria as a whole, is its similarity to the Masonic model. While operating as a secret society, with initiation into different grades and esoteric knowledge, AMORC as an organization is not restricted to particular ethnic groups, as in the case of traditional secret societies. The AMORC world-view has international, even cosmic dimensions, and a content which is seen as “scientific” and “modern”. (It claims not to be a religion.) This has obvious attractions for migrant professional men who have become disillusioned with conventional church worship and yet still want to be part of a support network, which may equally satisfy their religious needs. By the same token, it is the secret society image which has engendered hostility towards the AMORC. The esoteric rites are popularly linked with “magic” and “witchcraft”, particularly those that surround the burial of their members.

The Aetherius Society was publicized, on the occasion of its introduction to Calabar in 1982, as an “international spiritual brotherhood”. It is perhaps more accurately described as a “flying saucer” cult with an explicitly religious structure which incorporates the teachings of occultism and yoga.¹ Founded by a British medium in 1955, the society claims to be able to communicate with extra-terrestrial beings for advanced spiritual and material powers through spiritual discipline and “scientific prayer”. Groups have reportedly been established in Calabar and Port Harcourt to date.

Swedenborgian literature has been circulating in Nigeria for over fifty years, and branches of the **Church of the New Jerusalem**, founded on the teachings of the Swedish mystic, Emmanuel Swedenborg (1668-1772), have existed for almost as long in the eastern and western regions. A group of refugees initiated a small group in the Calabar area during the Civil War (1967-70). Works by Swedenborg where he describes the supernatural spheres and their activities, such as “Heaven and Hell”, “The Last Judgement”, as well as doctrinal studies such as “The True Christian Religion” are the most popular, as from his concrete visions he sought to give answers to the sort of questions ordinary Christians would ask, such as, What is heaven like? What really goes on in hell? How do spirits live?²⁵ His work was, however, tinged with spiritualism and Kabbalism.⁶ In later years he claimed that he had received revelations directly from God about the hidden spiritual meanings in the Bible.⁷

The Institute of Religious Science, which has a very small following in Calabar, stands in the New Thought tradition.⁸ Its metaphysical teachings on healing, as purveyed through the publication *The Science of Mind*, are the most popular in the Nigerian context. There are currently seven branches or study groups throughout the country.

The Superet Light Mission is primarily concerned with psychic phenomena; it was founded in Los Angeles by Dr Josephine Trust (Mother Trust), an aura scientist who claimed to have the mission of bringing into the world Jesus’ light teaching. Superet literature found its way to eastern Nigeria in the 1950s, but has only generated two or three groups; the members are barely educated, but claim to be attracted by this “scientific religion”.

The Eastern-related groups are a far more recent phenomenon. **Eckankar** or the Secret Science of Soul Travel, based on the teachings of the ECK master, Paul Twitchell, teaches the direct path to God or the path of total awareness.⁹ An extensive

campaign launched the movement in earnest in the early 1980s and there are now 64 branches throughout Nigeria. Eckankar makes frequent use of the broadcasting media to communicate its teachings and the Area Mahdi, Benjamin Anyaeji, is a popular speaker with accounts of his reincarnations, his "higher" powers and ability to stop rain. **Hare Krishna** devotees (of the **International Society for Krishna Consciousness**) have been visiting major Nigerian cities since the 1970s, distributing literature from the "Hare Krishna Bookmobiles". Nigerians are initially drawn to the movement because of the feasts and the festivals, as well as the emphasis on devotionalism, but few become committed devotees because of the monastic rules of conduct, notably regarding marital relationships and offspring. The appeal of the highly structured family life of the Krishnaite group can only be to those individuals who are alienated from the mainstream of African life.

The Unification Church has been operating in Nigeria since the 1970s but has not been as successful as in Zaire for example. They managed to take over two small independent churches in eastern Nigeria to effect government registration and they have a small staff of foreign missionaries at the headquarters in Lagos. But as in the case of the former movement, Nigerians are averse to the kind of total commitment required to be a member of the Unified Family and, in addition, are unused to Japanese missionaries (which was one of the reasons that the Calabar branch was closed in 1981). The church has been able to exert some influence in the academic world through the participation of African scholars in its global congresses, and has recently been involved in negotiations with a spiritual church in Calabar over a joint fishing project.

The Subud Brotherhood is a movement with Indonesian origins which is seeking to gain a foothold on Nigerian soil. The founder, Bapak, taught that through a series of spiritual exercises, known as "latihan", one can gain access to God's power by complete surrender of the self and the senses. People of all faiths are invited to participate in the direct religious experience of Subud. The National Spiritual Centre is based in Calabar but claims only a few regular members and occasional enquirers. **The Grail Movement** has been active on university campuses since the 1970s in Nigeria; people are invited to public lectures on spiritual knowledge and "any issue concerning human existence in Creation". The teachings of the founder, Abd-ru-shin, are found in his major work: *In the Light of Truth*.¹⁰

We have included the worldwide religion of Iranian origin — **Baha'ism** — even though its emphasis is on social, ethical and practical realities, rather than on mystical questions. The movement entered Nigeria from the Cameroons in 1956 via a Ugandan missionary and has since spread to both rural and urban areas of Nigeria.¹¹ Membership is limited to those with sufficient education to appreciate the egalitarian and global ideals of the organization.

Japanese new religions are not excluded from the spectrum of movements that may be found today in Nigeria. **Tensho-Kotai-Jingu-Kyo** toured Nigeria in 1979 advertizing itself as "the universal spiritual religion for World Peace and Redemption of evil spirits". It is not known whether this movement with its Buddhist/Shinto elements was able to gain a following. **Soka Gakkai** has branches in Lagos and Zaria.

II INDIGENOUS SPIRITUAL SCIENCE MOVEMENTS

The indigenous spiritual science movement is still a relatively rare breed, but is likely to grow in time as more people seek to indigenize and institutionalize the spiritual science teachings and ideas of overseas groups.

The Spiritual Fellowship (SF), founded by Mr A. Peter Akpan in 1980, emerged as a response to the book he wrote in 1977 entitled: *The Path of Holiness*. The main theme of the book is "spiritual development", which the author understands as a graduated path of knowledge by which the student attains higher levels of consciousness and spirituality: "Spiritual development leads to higher knowledge and, in all realms, knowledge is power."¹² The author's teachings regarding the acquisition of spiritual power stem from a variety of religious, mystical and occult sources.¹³

At their weekly meetings on a Sunday evening, Mr Akpan delivers a lecture on a theme such as reincarnation, love, service, money, the human mind or the reappearance of Christ. There are no prayers or hymns; Mr Akpan considers "churchly religion" to be inferior to the more mystical and metaphysical variety. And yet his renunciation of "esoteric individualism" and call for service as the fruit of study and meditation, reflect his Methodist upbringing as well as his African sense of community. He carefully vets incoming participants and demands a high level of literacy (in English), which has tended to restrict membership, particularly in terms of women. The group currently meets in a private house (although they have recently acquired a plot of land) and includes people from a variety of religious backgrounds: Muslim, Presbyterian, Apostolic Church and Brotherhood members.

The Esom Fraternity Company (Nigeria) is another example of an indigenous spiritual science movement, which is based on the mainland part of the Cross River State; it is known in Calabar because of its relationship with the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, the largest independent or spiritual church in the region. The director, Professor Assassu Inyang-Ibom F.E.O., L.E.C., B.Sc., claims to have been converted to the Brotherhood after having encountered Obu on his astral travels and through mystical and occult research.¹⁴

Despite Professor Inyang-Ibom's declaration that he is the "Harbinger of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star", he seems to maintain a certain degree of autonomy. In 1980 he announced that he was in the process of establishing an inter-denominational institution in Ukanafun Local Government Area, for the training of "priests" and "nuns" in the "healing arts and sciences".¹⁵ Plans have also been released for the building of a "cosmic hospital" at Ibiak-Keffe in Oruk local government area. The project is a joint venture of the Society of Metaphysicians in Britain, the Grace Bible Church of Florida and the Esom Order. Drugs and personnel are to be supplied by Indian associates. The cosmic hospital will treat sicknesses which "defy medical cures" by means of "mystical impulses".

Strictly speaking **TUB or The Universal Body** exists more as a blueprint than in reality, but it is a good example of a nascent spiritual science movement. The founder, Cyril Owan, who comes from Ikom in the north of the Cross River States, owns and runs a bar and restaurant in Calabar. In his late thirties or early forties, he is of a very easy disposition and receives a steady stream of visitors who come to him for friendly and spiritual advice, particularly seeking his "mystical predictions". He was born and bred a Catholic, but left the church seven years ago because he considered it to be a "selfish church which hides secrets", likening it to a "mystical organisation" since salvation is only available, in his opinion, to the reverent fathers and sisters.¹⁶

Then followed a period of searching: he experimented with a local spiritual church but felt that his spiritual intellect was insufficiently stimulated and moved on. He discovered the "Psychology School of Thought" in 1977 and started to receive their letters and metaphysical tests, mainly concerning predictions. He attended a four-month course conducted by a European in Lagos.

For many years, Cyril Owan had kept up his membership of AMORC, following their training programmes and advancing to the rank of "Frater" in the Rosicrucian

hierarchy. In the last few years he has become dissatisfied with their “slow, solid training” and has decided that he does not want their type of knowledge, that is, how to attain the link between human knowledge and the Universal Mind and how to tap the source of life. He nonetheless retains some Rosicrucian paraphernalia — an altar, candelabra, incense, bust of Nefertiti, etc., and has their “Supply Bureau” catalogue at hand should further ordering be required.

Now he feels the need to be more spiritually independent, although he admitted to having planned his own religious organization since 1974. He intends to call it THE UNIVERSAL BODY or “TUB” for short and construct a building on a small plot of land that he acquired in 1981. He has no helpers as yet but plans to isolate himself for three months in spiritual preparation for the “explosion” of his “church”. He wants it to be a place where people from all social levels can “come and reason” and “know what they are worshipping”.

The above comments relate to the importance that he attaches to knowledge, particularly of an esoteric kind. At times he calls this knowledge “Christ-consciousness”, a state of being “Christlike” and having greater illumination and hence greater impregnability to dangers and evil forces. He also has a predilection for symbolism, having designed and made his own altar banner, with elaborate symbols reflecting the spiritual life and protection (weapons) that TUB will offer its members. Much of this symbolism is based on biblical sources, but it is in the area of his mystical predictions and calculations that the influence of his associations with spiritual science movements is more apparent.

There also appears to be a growing trend amongst traditional healers and “native doctors” to supplement their knowledge of herbalism and divination with spiritual science teachings, astrology, astral projection, tarot card readings etc.¹⁷

III INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRITUAL SCIENCES ON OTHER RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

In this section we examine the ways in which some religious institutions have incorporated and adapted spiritual science teachings into their own beliefs and practises.

The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, which has established itself as one of the largest spiritual or independent churches in eastern Nigeria, is drawing increasingly on the support of occultists and metaphysicians. This is done primarily to enhance the image and status of the Sole Spiritual Head and founder, Leader Olumba Olumba Obu. For instance the front page of one of the Brotherhood newspapers — the Herald of the New Kingdom (May 18-24, 1984) — reveals how three of the “world’s great occultists” have acknowledged Obu to be the source of Ultimate Power. Professor Assassu Inyang-Ibom describes how he travelled to various planes and into the astral world to test the power of Obu — “Every result was that the leader of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star was a Super-Human Being”. Dr J.S. Bazie (alias Dr Aggarwal), an occult and mystical specialist based in Delhi, wrote in 1972 (in reference to Obu) to say: “I am convinced that God has his representative here on earth who comes into the world as God in disguise”. Dr Bazie’s letter, as well as a later declaration that he had been visited by Obu in spirit in India, have been much publicised by the Brotherhood as testimonies to the power of their leader. Dr Bazie and a small entourage from India visited Calabar in the late 1970s.

The Brotherhood also publishes numerous testimonies by its members (both in Nigeria and overseas) regarding their visions and auditions of Obu and their miraculous cures performed by him. He is generally believed to be omnipresent and

omniscient. Obu claims that the power of Brotherhood is above that of any church or secret society or cult. Nonetheless, a Brotherhood delegation visited the Rosicrucian (AMORC) headquarters to San Jose, California in 1981 and there have been negotiations with the Unification Church concerning a joint fishing industry on the Cross River.

The Crystal Cathedral Church began in 1964 as a small healing home in Lagos. The founder, Leader Brother A.E. Inyang, who is from Oku-Iboku in the Cross River State, is a fairly well educated man, with a Presbyterian background. He has read a number of spiritual science works and this is partly reflected in some of his teachings on spiritual power and communication which are set down in a booklet on the history of the church. For instance there is reference to the leader's "premier psychic initiation" in a dream and to the later development of his "clairvoyance, clairaudience and strong inspiration of the body".¹⁸ Inyang is described as a "great mystic"; in a Revival address he stated the following: "I invoke the Light of the Ancient Power to encircle you all and may the vibration of the creation demonstrate its power today."¹⁹

There are examples of other independent church leaders being influenced in similar ways by their readings of occult and mystical texts. Bishop Dr V.A. Oluwo, the founder of the **Cross of Christ World Ministry** in Ibadan, confesses to being an avid reader of comparative religious texts, as well as theosophical, magical and mystical materials. While he sees this in terms of his own personal edification and not as a determinant of church ideology and activities, it nonetheless influences his teachings on spiritual power and discipline. **The Cherubim and Seraphim Church** (an Aladura or spiritual church) regularly places the following advertisement regarding its London branch in the news magazine, **West Africa**:

PRAYER AND SCIENCE
Prayer books, candle burning Psalms,
and Seraphic Sciences.
For your difficulties, knowledge, success
and easy life Contact:
Mother Prophetess Janet Awojobi

CHERUBIM AND SERAPHIM
7 Ranelagh Road, Tottenham

The introduction of the concept of "science" has occurred over the last few years.

We may also include here the influence of the spiritual sciences on the media. For example, a popular evening television programme in Calabar is "Contemplation", billed as "our spiritual and metaphysical programme for mature minds". It features local leaders or representatives of spiritual science movements or any prominent "thinker" who is able to express himself on "philosophical" (i.e. non-church) issues. The local Sunday newspaper in Calabar, the *Sunday Chronicle*, carries a lively column entitled the "Philosophy of Life". The writer, Mr B.I. Otu-Udofa, a lecturer in General Studies at the University of Calabar, is described by his readers as a "Christian mystic". He admits to having had early training in lodges and philosophical schools before recognizing the "power of Jesus". In his articles he addresses himself to moral and religious issues of the day, with a language heavily infused with concepts such as "karma", "power" and "reincarnation". The beginning of each calendar year is also an important time for Nigeria's parapsychologists whose front-page predictions proclaim Nigeria's fate for the coming twelve months. The increasing influence of

these metaphysicians and parapsychologists is the object of a satirical play — "Requiem for a Futurologist" — by the Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka.²⁰

IV THE INDIVIDUAL AND SPIRITUAL TECHNOLOGY

Two concepts which are particularly appropriate for understanding the mass of beliefs and practices which characterize the religion of the individual in Nigeria today are power and protection. The two go hand in hand; the acquisition of spiritual power entails protection against evil forces and enables the individual to progress in life, unimpeded by "spiritual obstacles". Both concepts must be understood in the context of beliefs concerning the activity and intervention of the supernatural in human affairs. It is generally held that in addition to the actions of deities and spirits, human beings may actively influence, if not manipulate, supernatural forces to achieve desired ends, whether good or evil. This they may do directly (if they have spiritual knowledge or power) or through intermediaries such as diviners, "native doctors" and prophets.

Many of the beliefs and practices which would come under the rubric of spiritual technology at the individual level exist as "additives" to the type of spiritual power and knowledge people normally hope to acquire from their regular major affiliations (unless of course they belong to a spiritual science organization). These supplementary sources are more eclectic in nature and range from objects sold as direct sources of power and protection, such as charms, concoctions, and magical rings, to more indirect sources such as books on faith-healing, yoga, hypnotism, powerful prayers, the "Astrology of Accidents", etc.²¹

We must also include the use people make of sacred objects which they extract from their "regular" contexts and employ in their personal worlds. For instance, holy oil, water and incense become agents of personal protection. The objects take on a manipulative and magical power in addition to their symbolic value. The Christian cross or images of Christ may be used in this way. Those who have had association with the spiritual churches tend to use their white soutanes as garments of protection — sleeping, working or travelling in them at times of "spiritual need". It is also possible to see people sitting in their offices on "sanctified handkerchiefs" or sprinkling holy water around their place of work in the early morning. For members of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star the letters of their leader's name — O.O.O. — are believed to have a sacred, protective quality and are seen painted on houses, car doors, lapel badges, etc. Rosicrucian paraphernalia have become popular for creating domestic altars and their Egyptian symbols are believed to be a source of special power.

The above symbols and artefacts are obtained from both local and international sources. An organization such as Okopedi Enterprises (Mystic Division) in Calabar, which advertizes itself as "Merchants, Mystic Adepts and Master Occultists", is able to obtain a wide variety of items and literature — herbal products, Indian amulets and talismans, "lucky jewelry", "love-potions", lodge accessories and books on Kabbalism, astrology, Egyptian religion, yoga and "secret" biblical texts.²² As in so many other areas of Nigerian life, overseas products seem to hold a greater attraction.

The appeal of this supplementary religiosity is its versatility. The power of manipulation and control can be obtained through a variety of sources: through personal consultations with specialists — the majority are locally based, although some may be peripatetic (for example, two "great divine masters, mystical consultants and professors in Metaphysics" — one a Nigerian, one a Sierra Leonean, both claiming a variety of Indian qualifications in astrology, spiritualism, homeopathy, psychotherapy and metaphysics — toured around Nigeria in 1981 for an "international healing

crusade”);²³ through objects and books which may be ordered by mail;²⁴ through prayer sheets, “orations” and chain letters received from organizations such as St Anthony of Padua Mission in America and the “Sociedad de Jesus, Maria y Jose” in Caracas, Venezuela; through a chance meeting in the street with an itinerant Hausa diviner, who will offer his blessing to anyone with the promise that their money will be doubled if his palm is crossed with silver;²⁵ and through personal practices such as fasting, prayer and libations.

An increasing number of techniques reflect Christianizing influences. Christian symbols and methods are frequently incorporated, partly because they are readily available and partly because many would consider the power of Christian (or Islamic as the case may be) symbols to be greater than traditional or occult ones. For example, the exorcism of evil spirits and “medicines” from homes and places of work, formerly undertaken by traditional specialists, is becoming more and more the responsibility of the spiritual churches. Many would claim that the spiritual churches in general have helped reduce the power of witches through their use of prayer. It is popularly believed that witches fear the name of Jesus, particularly when it is shouted. Fasting has also become popular as a technique as a result of the influence of the spiritual churches.

In contrast, destructive power (notably witchcraft) appears to draw more readily on traditional means. Many believe that witchcraft is a mystical force acquired from diviners or sorcerers. Many of the traditional channels of redress against witchcraft — accusations, poison ordeals, oath-taking, confessions — have been eradicated. And yet the conditions which generate witchcraft beliefs still exist — economic and political tensions, family and ethnic disputes, and personal failure. Most people would affirm that education and Christianity have not succeeded in eradicating the witchcraft phenomenon. The insecurities of a modern, urban existence have served to sustain, if not aggravate, witchcraft beliefs and fears.

V SPIRITUAL TECHNOLOGY: THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME?

In conclusion we need to examine the type of religiosity represented by the spiritual science movements and the religious needs fulfilled by the various aspects of spiritual technology. We are not concerned with assessing the contribution, negative or otherwise, of the former to Nigerian society or religion.²⁶

First and foremost, spiritual technology offers the possibility of a direct contact with the sacred, allowing the development of a “religious self-sufficiency”. Increased access to the sacred, while this may entail for some a more intensely emotional experience and a deeper and more satisfying spirituality, essentially encourages an instrumentalist and manipulationist type of religion, with the development of techniques and methods which lead to “higher”, “deeper” or “inner” levels of existence and consciousness. This spiritual power and knowledge is believed to have direct empirical and beneficial consequences in the life of an individual.

Ways in which the spiritual science movements differ from the mainline and exogenous Christian groups include their denial of the personal attributes of the divine, which is balanced by the central role played by charismatic “guru” figures in several of the movements. There is a tendency to reject historical traditions and conventional ecclesiastical structures and hierarchies. Individualism predominates over group structures; the Rosicrucians (AMORC) advertize “Your Home is Your Temple” with photographs of affluent-looking white males pouring over metaphysical texts in the comfort of their own armchair. Once the devotee has acquired the teachings and techniques, he/she is responsible for his/her own spiritual destiny; soteriological

responsibility has shifted away from the divine or divine/human mediator to the individual. This has obvious consequences for group structure and identity, but does not automatically entail a thoroughgoing anti-institutionalism. Some forms of social expression occur but they are not binding or absolute.²⁷

This type of religiosity has obvious attractions for those who are disillusioned and dissatisfied with more institutional and conventional forms.²⁸ Many of the spiritual science groups in fact renounce the status of "religion". Being involved with these groups may therefore constitute a source of supplementary religiosity in addition to church affiliation, for example. It is common to find people experimenting and dabbling with the various groups and techniques — what could be described as "amateur occultism".²⁹ Some groups are aware of their complementary status and have developed appropriate structures (mid-week meetings, mail order) to cater for this type of affiliational mobility.

Within the Western context, the spiritual sciences have been labelled as "counter-cultural" and as part of an "alternative reality tradition".³⁰ These terms are inappropriate in the Nigerian situation. As far as the churches are concerned, the spiritual sciences represent a deviant form of religiosity and constitute "modern and sophisticated forms of witchcraft and superstition". The spiritual churches of indigenous origin have displayed mixed reactions; some, such as the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, have openly incorporated occult teachings, others condemn such religious organizations under the rubric of "demonic" or "worldly societies". The greatest continuity and affinity would appear to be with the traditional world-view, with the emphasis on the integration of the spiritual and material worlds, the esoteric and initiatory aspects, as well as in terms of such concepts as "power". Many amateur occultists therefore see their attempts to attain higher levels of consciousness as a revitalization process and as consonant with the world-affirming and pragmatic orientation of traditional religious beliefs and practices.

While no statistics are currently available, it is still possible to observe the types of recruits which are drawn to the spiritual science movements. They are usually middle-aged men, well-educated professionals, civil servants, bankers, technologists or businessmen. There are very few women, except in those movements which emphasize creativity, such as Eckankar, or emotional and ecstatic experience. There is virtually no evidence to suggest that these religious groups in Nigeria have a greater appeal for alienated or marginal individuals, or those seeking a sophisticated form of escapism. Rather they are drawing into their ranks people who have become dissatisfied with conventional religious world-views and who are instead searching for new sources of meaning and spiritual power. They are enticed by the challenge of an "advanced path" and "superior knowledge", as well as by the time-honoured values of discipline, love and service. Elements of the traditional ethos here merge comfortably with the message of modernity. The nature of the clientele must also be linked with the fairly high standard of literacy which is required for immersion into the spiritual sciences, as well as the economic means to have access to these sources.³¹

It is perhaps too early to predict an "occult explosion", but we have nonetheless been able to demonstrate the interest being shown in these new movements and their techniques, as well as the influence they are having on religious attitudes and behaviour in general. As we emphasized earlier, there are significant implications for the concept of identity — the importance of the individual in the process of spiritual self-realization and development of spiritual power is encouraging the circumventing of conventional religious structures and authorities, and de-emphasizing the need for a sacred community as determinant, provider and legitimation for one's religious actions. We should not ignore either the way in which the (imported) spiritual

sciences are being modified by the Nigerian context: there seems little interest shown by Nigerian devotees in the concepts of "new community" and total commitment as promoted by some of the movements. There is therefore a tendency to promote a greater instrumentalism — the techniques and knowledge are seen as a means to an end, usually healing and an increase in personal power, rather than as an end in themselves, such as the "transformation of desire" or the "ultimate transformation of self".³² In other words, amongst spiritual science devotees and amateur occultists in Nigeria, an intensified, more "spiritual" religious experience is considered as a means to an end, rather than as religion for religion's sake. We would argue that this "applied spirituality" is a characteristic feature of Nigerian religion, in all its dynamism and vitality, and does not represent a regression from lofty, other-worldly spiritual ideals. The appeal of the spiritual sciences therefore, lies not just in their pragmatic spirituality, but also in their unique blend of tradition and modernity and religion and "science" on an international, even cosmic level. The combination of these features, together with their adaptability, their neutral, non-denominational stance and absence of fanaticism, suggest that this type of religious orientation will continue to develop within the Nigerian context.

END NOTES

1. Cf. L. Schneider and S.M. Dombusch, "Inspirational Religious Literature: From Latent to Manifest Functions of Religion" in *Religion, Culture and Society*, ed. L. Schneider (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), pp.157-158.
2. See R.I.J. Hackett, *From Ndem Cults to Rosicrucians: a Study of Religious Change, Pluralism and Interaction in the Town of Calabar, South-Eastern Nigeria*, Ph.D. dissertation, (University of Aberdeen, 1985/86).
3. It is not possible here to enter into a philosophical discussion concerning the rationality or scientific status of these movements, but since they tend to be concerned with super-sensible and non-experiential knowledge, we shall continue to use the terms "pseudo-scientific" and "pseudo-rational". Neither of these terms is however indicative of an empiricist aversion to, or criticism of, such knowledge.
4. See J. Gordon Melton, *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, vol. 2 (Wilmington, NC: McGrath, 1978), p. 178.
5. See R.S. Ellwood, jr. *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p.65.
6. Melton, vol. 2, p.88.
7. A.M. Shulman, *The Religious Heritage of America* (San Diego: A.S. Barnes, 1981), p.462.
8. Ellwood, pp.3-4.
9. Shulman, p.379.
10. The movement was begun during the First World War by Oscar Ernst Bernhard while a prisoner-of-war on the Isle of Man. He later moved to Austria where the headquarters are still based. He claimed to be an incarnation of the Holy Ghost and to bring the truth about the legends of the Holy Grail. There are possibly 1000 members in Nigeria, about 7% of the worldwide total. (Information received from C.J. Lammers, Lienden, the Netherlands.)
11. The movement claims to have 10,000 members in 150 local groups in Nigeria with many more in Cameroun and Zaire.
12. A. Peter Akpan, *The Path of Holiness*, ((Calabar: the author, 1977)), p.131.
13. Mr. Akpan claims to have read over 100 "mystical and spiritual books" from organizations such as AMORC, Rosicrucian Fellowship, Lopsong Rampa, White Eagle, the Arcane School and Theosophy. He has been a member of White Eagle, the Arcane School and the Rosicrucian Fellowship. Interview, Calabar, April 20, 1983.
14. See Prof. A. Inyang-Ibom, *Beyond Prejudice*, vol. 1 (Calabar: The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, reprint (of 1971? ed.)).

15. Courses at the school include Bible knowledge, Allied Alchemy and Hermetic Mathematics.
16. See H.W. Turner, "The Hidden Power of the Whites: the Secret Religion Withheld from the Primal peoples" in *Religious Innovation in Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), pp.271-88.
17. See for example, "We Are Born Seven Times" (*Sunday Times*, May 25, 1980) — an interview with Dr. John Nkameyin Ibok, a Lagos-based "parapsychologist, metaphysicist, research psychic and an accomplished traditional healer". This tendency to acculturation and eclecticism is also confirmed by investigation into healing homes in the town of Calabar; very few confine themselves to traditional healing techniques alone. For example one healing home signboard proclaims: "Homeopathic and Botanic Medical Clinic: Occultist, Astrologer, Physician".
18. See *Short History of the Crystal Cathedral Church* (Lagos: the Church, 1976), p.6f.
19. *Ibid.*, p.13.
20. London: Rex Collings, 1985 (in press).
21. A visit to the Ubeh Bookshop in Calabar in March 1983 revealed a religion section stocked with books on Zen, meditation, "Self-Control, Will and Word-Power", astrology, as well as a full range of Rosicrucian and Lopsong Rampa books. Cf. Harold Turner's article on "Searching and Syncretism: A West African Documentation", *International Review of Missions*, 49 (1960):189-94; republished in *Religious Innovation in Africa*, pp.159-164.
22. See their *Okopedi Healing Home Catalogue*, 1978/79 edition, where over 100 items are listed; one of the major sources appears to be De Lawrence of Chicago.
23. *The Nigerian Chronicle*, February 5, 1981.
24. Popular texts are the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, (an occult book), the Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ, as well as books on Egyptian magic, Kabbalism, spiritual healing, black magic, secret biblical texts, positive thinking, dianetics, yoga and meditation, astrology, astral science. Cf. Turner, "Searching and Syncretism" pp.159-164. It is common to see books on "occultism" advertized in local and national newspapers; for example, the *Sunday Times* (Lagos) carried a full-page advertisement on June 5, 1980 by the Hermetic Science Centres (Lagos, Benin City and Aba) for the 1000-plus books on occultism that one could order as a member of their book club. The books ranged from "Seven Keys to Power", "Alchemic Treatise", "Instant Mind-Power", "Esoteric Astrology", "Evolution through the Tarot" and "Islamic Science".
25. These wandering Muslim diviners became more numerous during the dry season, many of them having migrated down from northern Nigeria or Niger to avoid the drought.
26. Cf. Turner in "Pagan Features in West African Independent Churches", pp.165-172.
27. See Ellwood, p.20.
28. See M. Eliade, "The Occult and the Modern World" in his *Occultism, Witchcraft and Modern Fashions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p.63.
29. N.B. Occultism tends to predominate over mysticism and metaphysics.
30. Ellwood, p.42f.
31. The literature of the Grail Movement and AMORC is to be noted in this respect, although in general it could be argued that spiritual technology is very conducive to commercialization.
32. See J. Needleman, *The New Religions* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970), p.13; Ellwood, p.5f.

Related works by the author of this paper:

"Sacred Paradoxes: Women and Religious Plurality in Nigeria", in *Women, Religion and Social Change*, eds., Yvonne Y. Haddad and Ellison B. Findly. Albany: SUNY Press, 1985. pp. 247-271.
 "The Spiritual Sciences in Africa", *Religion Today* 3, 1 (January), 1986.
 Editor: *New Religious Movements in Nigeria: A Current Perspective*. New York and Lagos: Nok Publishers, forthcoming.