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REVITALIZED WORDS FROM "THE PARROT'S EGG" AND
"THE BULL THAT CRASHES IN THE KRAAL":
AFRICAN CULT SERMONS¹

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"The Word was made flesh and dwelt
among us" (Revelation 19:12-13).

"Does one think in language? One
thinks rather in images. It is
Joyce's error--a rush of words,
without punctuation, that attempts
to express the interior language.
But people don't think like that"
(V. Nabokov).

An interesting emergence in many if not all of the so-called higher religions is the institution of preaching. No doubt sheer religious activity, the ritual act, must everywhere be brought into meaningful association with some exegetical body of knowledge. We have plenty of anthropological evidence of instruction and exhortation during periods of religious ceremony--more particularly perhaps during rituals of passage. But such a concentrated crucible of charismatic proclamation and ecclesiastical instruction as we see, for example, in Christian preaching would seem to be dependent upon a degree of priestly specialization and intellectualization of worship quite unusual in most anthropological data. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, however, as our scriptural text proclaims, the Word is primordial. And this original emphasis upon logos in worship has been further energized in Protestantism by Luther's injunction that "the Word and the Word alone is the vehicle of Grace."

Recently, as part of ongoing research into African Religious Movements (Fernandez 1964) I have been hearing some preaching--have even been preached at. In these movements--revitalistic in much of their attempt to create a new and more satisfying culture for their adherents--we find independently derived syncretisms of Christianity and traditional African religion. From any Christian perspective these syncretisms tend towards the ritualistic (Sundkler 1961:180-182), so entirely given over to kinesthetic expression in ritual, dance and song as to have given up that grappling with the "logos" which is so defining a feature of much of African missionary Christianity. It is true that the membership of these cults would adhere primarily to the precept that he who knows the power of the dance dwells in God, choosing to experience the supernatural in direct activity rather than to consider it through the vehicle of words.

Nevertheless in a good many African cultures, and certainly in the ones in which I have done work, there is position and prestige attached to rhetorical skills and oratorical powers (Fernandez 1966b). This emphasis has been syncretized within the cults with the Christian emphasis on preaching. The resulting sermons may not be as central and crucial to worship as they are in the Christian Church, nevertheless they cannot be ignored in the role they play in the member's religious experience. These sermons also provide an arena for verbal art--the artful use of words. Here we shall take an interest in some aspects of this artfulness. These sermons are testimonies to the Word becoming flesh, but we shall be really interested in how the flesh becomes word.

We shall examine sermons characteristic of two remarkable cult leaders: Ekang Engono, creative leader (Nima na Kombo) of the Asumege Ening Bwiti chapel, headquartered in 1960 at Kougoulou, Kango, Gabon; and William Richmond, minister and bishop (mfundisi, umbishopi) of the Church of God in Christ (CGC), headquartered in 1965 in Sydenham, Durban, South Africa. Both of these men preach in their vernacular, Ekang Engono in the Meke dialect of the Fang language and William Richmond in the Zulu proper of Zululand north of the Tugela. Neither of these men speak the dominant European languages of their country, French and English respectively, with any confidence and their sermons are entirely in the vernacular.² We are aware that a speech event is much more than that corpus which is the traditional material of linguistic analysis (Hymes 1964), and we shall be paying attention to more than the text itself. We shall first of all examine the contextual and metalinguistic settings for these sermons before discussing their referential, poetic and expressive functions. There are important differences in these two sermons which shall be the subject of our conclusion. I hope that we can work as much in the appreciative as in the analytic mode.

What's in a Word

We may mention to begin with that the styles of these two men are distinctly different and this fact is neatly reflected in the praise names by which they are known to their followers and by which they often refer to themselves. The Bwiti name of Ekang Engono is Akikos Zambi Avanga³--"The Parrot's Egg/God Who Prepares." William Richmond is known as Hlabisahlanguana which may be translated "The Bull Who Crashes in the Kraal" if we may be permitted to employ onomatopoeic alliteration to represent a similar device among the Zulu.⁴ In the case of the sermons of Ekang Engono, the apposite quality of his name is seen in the fact that the sermons are esoteric, condensed, involuted, replete with many calculated hidden meanings, all delivered with brevity and in a calm, emotionally unfluctuating voice. In studying them we find represented in a nutshell--or a parrot's eggshell as it were--many of the principle thematic concerns and organizing values of cult life. The sermons of William Richmond on the other hand are episodes of stormy rhetoric buoyed along with an emotional vigor which runs the gamut from angry and unintelligible shouts to confidential and almost inaudible whispers. There are subtleties in the content but they are not bound into a condensed form. The sermons ramble, punctuated with songs and the repetitiousness

which the Zulu value. The listener is to be overwhelmed as the cattle in the kraal are cowed by the bull who crashes against them with his horns.

We can go further into the associations of these two names-- the images they conjure up--for these have relevance in a contextual way to our materials. In Bwiti mythology it was the African Gray parrot, kos, who brought the word to man--kos za bege bot bafia. The African Gray is a proficient talker recognized not only by the Fang. He nests high in the Adzap tree--closest of all living beings to heaven, for the Adzap is the tallest tree in the equatorial forest. His red tail feathers, according to Bwiti legend, were dipped in the blood of the beaten Christ. He knew the crucifixion first hand. He is impressive at dusk as he whirrs home over head in rapid and direct flight from his far feeding places just as the ancestor spirits begin to flock home out of the deep forest to their villages and the Bwiti cult house. The parrot is a holy bird to the Bwitist, and it is imaginatively appropriate that the leader of the cult, he who holds out the promise of relating the members to the ancestors and to the heavenly supernaturals, should by extension embody the similar promise contained in the parrot's egg.

As for the "Bull that Crashes in the Kraal," by the kraal we mean specifically the cattle pen, isibaya, within the Zulu hamlet, that circle of beehive huts which is often altogether called a kraal in South Africa (properly--umuzi). The gravity of this image to the Zulu as to most cattle-keeping people is manifest. The isibaya occupies a central place in Zulu domestic life for all activity revolves around it. The occasionally restless movements of the cattle within it at night are solace to the ears of the kraalhead--unumuzane--and bring to him a contented and restful sleep. The absence of any animal which has escaped the evening ingathering of the herdboys renders him, on the contrary, wakeful and concerned. His position and self respect among his fellows is bound up in the kraal and its herd. But not only are the animals there the chief currency in the brideprice and hence the chief means by which the family line is extended and strengthened, they are also a source of esthetic pleasure and a constant topic of conversation. Lienhardt (1961:15) has pointed out for the Dinka how cattle imagery extends itself into all phases of Dinka talk as relevant metaphor for much of their experience outside that held directly with cattle. This is certainly the case with the Zulu and specifically the case with the name of Hlabisahlangana.⁵ For William Richmond's power to move and gather together his milling followers, for his ability to conjure up and recreate again a meaningful vital center to their universe, and for his reassertion of the virile and patriarchal qualities of the Zulu male,⁶ he is appropriately called Hlabisahlangana, rather than simply father or pastor. In the term Hlabisahlangana are bound up pastoral images as appropriate to the Zulu notion of spiritual guardianship as the term pastor is to the Judeo-Christian. It is a metaphor of considerable imaginative power.

By taking time to examine the associations bound up in the names of our two preachers, we emphasize that verbal art must be examined, if its impact is to be adequately appreciated, on the level of the imagery it elicits in the mind of the listener. Verbal art is often a matter of similes and metaphors which condense within themselves

associations somehow apt and appropriate to the condition of the creator and listener. These associations imaginatively reinvigorate and elaborate a model of the universe which promises to enable the worshipper to cope more effectively with experience if only by re-shaping it.

Rather serious methodological problems are raised when we speak about the associations of words--the images evoked by them--for, though we question our informants about them, a good deal that is resonant remains implicit. And we may too easily fall back upon the sovereignty of empathy and intuition, particularly if we are working on the resonance between images and attempting to build a cultural configuration (Metraux 1953:354-355). I would like to say that I am not sure that all the images I have suggested as associations for the two names are active in the average Bwitist or CGC member. Some I am sure are, and I am sure that for some members these names are more laden with imagination than for others. But that during the sermons a succession of images are flashing through the minds of the membership we cannot doubt. Providing we are reasonably tentative, our responsibility is to say what these images might be by pointing up other contexts to which the words in question may refer. One confronts the fact here that the old-style multi-aspect ethnography is more useful in this task than a highly focused hypothesis testing job of fieldwork. This is because the ethnographer in broadscale pursuits in many different aspects of culture is more likely to encounter the various contexts in which the keywords of verbal art appear and which are evoked by them and give them their currency.

What's To Be Done with the Words

We have called these two movements, both Bwiti and the CGC, revitalistic. The membership to some degree, but particularly the leadership, is motivated by a sense of disparity between the impulses of their condition and the challenges of the larger world around them. And hence they have set about in a conscious way to create a new and more satisfying cultural universe in which to live and a new and more adequate character for the individuals who are to live in it. But there is a substantial difference in how these two groups conceive revitalization is to take place, and these conceptions affect the style of preaching. Mainly, Bwiti lays emphasis upon reconstructing the universe, and the CGC upon change in character.

We have only to note the immediate consequences of the verbal action on the membership. In Bwiti the membership is quiescent throughout the short sermon, rising to continue the ritual action at its conclusion. Immediate impact upon them is rarely evident, though the sermon may be discussed the following day and its contents may be used in judgement of intra-cult quarrels. The quiescent reaction of the membership is in keeping with the subdued style of the sermon. Salvation in Bwiti is best assured by imitating in terrestrial ritual, with as much harmony and mimetic exactitude as possible, the ideal patterns of the shades in their ceaseless heavenly activity. Ritual is frequently introduced into this cult by the leaders with the explanation that a recent vision has shown them that such things were done in heaven. The sermon, likewise, is taken in large part as intelligence

brought to the Nima Na Kombo from the land of the shades. Before the sermon Ekang Engono has spent several hours in a grave pit under the altar where, in a somnolent lightly drugged state (the drug is the alkaloid eboka--Tabernenthes eboka), he communes with the hereafter. The sermon, in short, is a continuation in another, verbal, medium of that reflection of the beyond which the entire liturgy represents. Hence we have high stylization, we might well say ritualization, in the sermon. For the Words are projected out into the chapel as if they had an existence of their own. The Nima Na Kombo stands virtually motionless.⁷

In the Church of God in Christ salvation is primarily the product of the activity of the Holy Spirit (umoya oyingcwele) which enters the worshipper's body in the process of worship to overcome the evil spirits and influences that are active there. Worship provides an arena in which the Holy Spirit can be invoked and act. The climax of worship comes in the early hours of the morning in the laying on of hands. At this time the cult leaders and particularly William Richmond pass on their abundance of Holy Spirit to the needy membership. (The flow of electricity is the simile by which this process is explained.)⁸ But the build up of the Holy Spirit and its transfer begins before the actual laying on of hands. It begins with the sermon. Here the preacher is expected to demonstrate his possession of the Holy Spirit both in the power of his words to move the membership and in the energistic displays of enthusiasm which accompany their emission. He shouts and jumps to make his points and partially to communicate that the Holy Spirit is within him. In very contrast to the Bwiti Sermon the visually responsive members frequently will interject sounds of assent to the justice and conviction of the preacher's words. Not unusually, various members will be struck into a state of possession simply by the power of the words. Hlabisahlanguana takes some pride when a member is so struck. Thus the words themselves are a vehicle of the Holy Spirit projected into the membership by the preacher. For this reason he may feel it necessary to energize his words by displays of physical vigor.

I could not find in the Church of God in Christ any recognition or concern with a universal order nor much interest in the life of the spirits and deities in the hereafter. In its way the CGC is a very pragmatic cult with a strong concern with maladies and misfortunes of everyday life. In Bwiti, on the other hand, we do find an interest in the procedures of heaven and in universal order. The Bwitist, one may say, is bound to reproduce heaven on earth in an attempt at harmony in the universe. The primary preoccupation of the CGC is the conjuring up of such sufficient power out of the void as will be capable of counteracting illnesses and misfortunes. The sermons are a portion of that conjuring--an adumbration of that power later to be layed on directly, a manifest of its presence and reality.

However we are to account for this difference in approach--the Fang are Sudanic in origin and may inherit that cultural concern for cosmologies as is demonstrated for Sudanic peoples by Griaule and his followers--it has its inevitable impact upon the way words are used and as to whether their function is to be primarily referential or expressive, directive or poetic.

Words about Words

It seems fair to argue that art lies in the relationship between artist and critic and that the originator is influenced in important ways by those he originates to. In point of fact, art is usually defined by clients and critics and not by artists themselves. In respect to verbal art, in any case, one is bound to consider the critical vocabulary by which it is assessed, for this metalinguistic material is bound to give us some hint as to the guidelines within which the verbal artist is working. We will examine here, together with their implications, some of the terms that one would commonly hear in the two cult houses in response to the sermons.

In the Bwiti cult and in accordance with a traditional Fang preference for a measure of tranquility (mvwaa) and self-control in the rhetorical situation (see footnote 7), we find an impressive impassivity in the preacher Ekang Engono. But this impassivity belies and, indeed, gives dramatic tension to the great weight of his words. The sermons of Ekang Engono are admired by the membership as "nkobo akunge" the skillful or clever speech (sometimes nkobo akyenge--the miraculous speech). They are said to be at once awesome (nseme) because they body forth the unseen, pleasurable (mbung) because the Nima Na Kombo plays with words (a vwin bifia), and difficult (njuk) because one word has many meanings--eyole evore ve a kane meyile. We may say that the critical response of the members of Bwiti at once reflects and promotes a concentration on subtlety in the use of words. This is not the emphasis in the sermons in the CGC. Unlike the members of Bwiti, the followers of William Richmond do not seem to be especially attentive to intricacy of statement.

The sermons of Hlabisahlangana are most commonly admired as iciko which we note applies not only to a person gifted in speech but also in singing. The word comes from the ideophone ciko which is expressive of a swinging motion and hence implies critical approval of fluency and rhythm in speech accompanied by emotional gesture. We notice here that the substance of what is said is not in question. The term igagu is also applied to William Richmond and similarly refers to one who is expert at music or speaking. The ideophone which is the source here is gagu--the stressing of salient points in speaking or singing. It may imply the capacity to select the salient points of one's communication and hence it can be a critique of content. But basically the term is complimentary of speech which follows the well known stress patterns characteristic of the musical qualities of Zulu. It is a critical term more appropriately applied to recitations, but William Richmond's sermons are lengthy enough to be remarked as igagu.

Other critical terms which conform to the tendency to admire William Richmond for form and style rather than for content are umfutho, usinga and iphimbo. The word umfutho is derived from the word for bellows and means literally puffing, spitting. In relation to speech it has the derived meaning of having drive and force in one's words. The association is with the blowing out through the bellows. The contrasting term ilula is applied to a talk of no force which, light in weight and impression upon the listener, is lacking in personality. The consequence of umfutho in speech is usinga--a state of overpowering impulse or inspiration in the listener (intshumayelo yakhe ivusa usinga). We have noted that occasionally William

Richmond's sermons in mid-flight produce states of possession. Thus is usinga produced in them by the overpowering words. On one occasion, Hlabisahlangana relates, his thinking and speaking about the blood of Christ so aroused his spirit that he became too forceful--umfutho kakhulu--and had to check himself "lest the people go mad with the power of the spirit I was releasing from myself. I was afraid that those possessed with certain evil spirits--fufunyane--would break away and go wild as I spoke."

The term iphimbo is applied to an eloquent or stirring voice-- a voice of range and modulation that can make itself heard without shouting itself hoarse and yet is capable of reduction to a projected whisper. This range is fully employed by Hlabisahlangana.

The Zulu critical vocabulary for verbal performance is extensive, as is that of the Fang. There are terms for cogency and incisiveness of presentation, for disjointedness and wandering in speech, for proper and excessive repetition, and for ability to make one's points without confusion. Insofar as a critical vocabulary is manifested in relation to William Richmond's sermons, the emphasis is upon personal dynamism in presentation--an emphasis upon manner and not upon substance. But William Richmond must still face the dilemma presented to any Zulu speaker. That is he must convey strength of personality--izizotha or isithunzi--without becoming so demonstrative as to sink into a meaningless concatenation of gestures and gesticulations, isiphakaphaka, where dignity is lost.⁹ At times William Richmond comes close to this latter state but the overwhelming impression on the members is that of izizotha--a strength of personality charismatic in its effect.

William Richmond's methods are not the only one by which a man obtains charisma in communication. E kang Engono certainly obtains to charismatic influence in the lives of his followers. We may state here as a point to emerge in subsequent discussion that there is a danger both to verbal art as well as to William Richmond himself in his style. We turn now to compare sermons of these two leaders so as to obtain better purchase on these and other questions.

Powerful Words of Persuasion and Expression

The sermon of Hlabisahlangana which we have to examine is a long one and presents us with 45 foolscap pages of text.¹⁰ We can only make a selective appraisal of some of its devices. Discussion with William Richmond himself reveals that he feels the sermon to be the most important part of the service. (This opinion is not shared by his followers who regard prayer and song as equally important and the laying on of hands as the most important.) "Everything comes from the sermon," he tells us (yonke into iphuma entshumyeleni). It is through the sermon that the love of God is taught to man. The sermon creates love--uthando--and the songs make the membership rejoice in their religion. The laying on of hands brings the Holy Spirit to the members in an effective way. It does no good to lay hands on a person unless he has been prepared by the sermon. "It is through the word, izwi, that we are enabled to have the spirit, umoya," he emphasizes.

The sermon is seen by Hlabisahlangana as preparing him and his followers for the laying on of hands. "My words reveal me to them as

he who bears the Word and thus as one capable of laying hands on them effectively. At the same time my words cause the congregation to examine themselves and focus on the evil things in themselves. They are thus prepared to remove these things by receiving the Holy Spirit." We note from this commentary by Hlabisahlangana that the sermon has a double role: at once to demonstrate the power of the sermonizer and at the same time to instruct the membership in their condition. Of importance is the fact that Hlabisahlangana speaks of absorbing the Word in order to correct his followers and hence to protect them through the Spirit.¹¹ What he seems to mean is that the Word is absorbed and becomes Spirit. In any case, in the double role of the sermon there is a contradiction. This is the contradiction between word--izwi--and spirit--umoya. We should note that the object of the whole worship, if not of the sermon itself, is to move from the consideration of the Word to the reception of the Spirit.¹²

Hlabisahlangana has definite criteria on which he models a sermon. The first requirement is that it should follow closely after the scriptural text. An inadequate preacher does not emphasize nor closely correlate with the scriptures (akakugcizelayo akakuqondanise nevesi). Secondly, the likenesses (parables), imifanekiso, which illustrate the sermon must be in line and appropriate to the scriptures (imifanekiso mayiqondane nokulotshiwe). William Richmond and other cult leaders point to the importance of painting a verbal picture by images (izifanekiso) which is at once appropriate to the text as well as to the condition of those present. He calls these images devices--iquinda--that reveal the message and which are the bricks out of which the sermon is built. Skillfully used they forestall any possible questions the congregants might have, he says, and which, troubling them, prevent them from understanding what he is saying. William Richmond seems to be putting emphasis upon what we have called imaginative aptness in verbal art.

The main problems with which William Richmond is struggling in his sermon cause his communication to function largely as persuasion and expression. He has the customary preacherly responsibility of making the Biblical text¹³ relevant and applicable to the lives of the membership. More specifically, he must convince them that their condition is in need of the beneficial powers of the Holy Spirit which will come to them as a consequence of the acceptance of the Word. Since most of the membership is convinced that their condition does require this intercession he must show how it is contingent upon acceptance of the Word. But Hlabisahlangana does not really expect that his membership will adopt a posture of cerebral inspection of the logical connection between the Word and the Spirit--between exalted religious activity and its intellectual implications. Hlabisahlangana's answer to the problem is to express the Word with such persuasive enthusiasm as to give, in the very act of preaching, evidence of the presence of the Spirit.

It would seem evident that there is difficulty in any act of communication in maintaining, at once, a posture of sober contemplation of the word and at the same time cultivating therapeutic exaltation by reason of incorporation of the Spirit. Choices in any given religious tradition have to be made in favor of one posture or another. In Hlabisahlangana the tension between Word and Spirit is resolved quickly and enthusiastically in favor of the Spirit. However, unlike

the Bwitist preacher Ekang Engono, William Richmond is heavily influenced by a fundamentalist missionary tradition which has exalted the Bible and the Word it contains. (The Word is exalted more extensively in missionary Christianity, perhaps, for the simple reason that missionizing is a propagandistic and persuasive enterprise in which new moral principles of behaviour are being inculcated.) In practically all his sermons, therefore, the Biblical text is repetitiously pointed up. William Richmond in this sermon and others asks over and over again: What is the word--Izwi yini? It is apparent that the preacher himself has difficulty in giving any straightforward answer to the question. One answer is to transmute the word into persuasive images. It is the wonders of nature, the strong and healthy body, success in life and the esteem of others. Hlabisahlanguana does not often struggle with the ethical problem of what practices are imposed by the Word--what behaviour it actually requires and refers to. The Word contains primarily a promise and not an injunction, and the preacher concentrates primarily on producing images in which that promise can bear fruit. Hlabisahlanguana finds in the Word the seed of religious enthusiasms which are incited by his imagination.

Resonance between Words

William Richmond's enthusiasm acts in some measure to betray the possibility of verbal art. At least we do not find such concentrated construction and intricate interassociation of images as is the case in Bwiti sermons. A good number of Hlabisahlanguana's phrases and metaphors are simply interjections into the sermon from the body of cliches employed in missionary preaching. They do not often receive effective reinterpretation and integration into the text. There is, for example, a good deal of hellfire and brimstone preaching as well as flat statements about the love of God and the intractability of man. However, no member to my knowledge ever complained of these gratuitous insertions. These associations seem to be meaningful regardless of how unartfully they are integrated into the sermon.

Despite this criticism, however, we can usually note in every sermon images which are carried through and presented in different perspectives so as to give an artful integrity. There are, though we cannot treat them here, some very apt and telling analogies drawn between the Biblical experience and the contemporary urban experience of the Zulu. Hlabisahlanguana is very good at these. For example, he compares the unstable Fatherhood of God to the tentative paternalism of the South African employer. He compares the importance of the word in the Christian lifeway to the importance of paying careful attention to signs on superhighways. Life may seem to go by very fast and smooth, he implies, but if we do not pay attention to the Word we will be victims of a quick disaster. The aptness of this analogy relates to the high motor accident rate in South Africa as well as to a recent disaster in which a truckful of Bantu fruitpickers had overturned on a national road. This last analogy, by the way, comes towards the end of the sermon where Hlabisahlanguana is sufficiently exalted, inflated with the Word himself and with his verbal powers demonstrated in the sermon, as to claim that he is the signpost, the only Bearer of the Word to his followers.¹⁴ It is not unusual to find in Zionist preachers that their imitation of Christ becomes so successful, their

representation of the Word so virtual, that they themselves become the Way to their followers.¹⁵

I would now like to trace the development of two words in this sermon, body and water, to show how the cumulative use of these words in various images and in various perspectives gives a resonance and a certain integrity to the sermon as a whole. One of the problems here is that at times William Richmond is making literal statements about the body or about water and at other times he is using these as symbols representing something else. In general the underlying thematic concern for which the body image is a representation is the concern with health. The underlying concern in the case with water is the concern for purification. The shifting back and forth between literal statement and analogies may not be as important, however, as might be thought, since both are image evoking and therefore equally relevant to the imaginative process (Metraux 1953:351). But more than that, just as denotative statements have connotations, so literal statements may also be representative of other matters.

In respect to the concerns which these two words represent, it would seem that they would have a natural relationship just as purification is associated with health. And in fact we find them "in cluster": associated and giving resonance to one another (Metraux 1953:351). This occurs towards the end of the sermon where the two words are brought into conjunction in an image which represents salvation. The image by which this is accomplished is that of the body, filled with the Holy Spirit in an intense state of agitation, perspiring copiously until it feels as if it could fly.¹⁶ The image of the body turning itself into water, purifying itself away as it were, represents the triumph of the spiritual over the corporeal, the Word once made flesh becoming Spirit. To bring this transubstantiation about--we may rightfully call it that--is, as we have said, one of the principal objects of the sermon. The accomplishment is represented in the conjunction of two of the principal images of the sermon.

In the early portions of the sermon Hlabisahlangana mostly demeans the body by comparison to the Word. In Augustinian fashion he locates in the body carnal instincts which must be mortified for spiritual progress.¹⁷ Those who only pay attention to the dressing out of the body waste their time, we are told, for the body is only good to feed lice. Yet as the sermon moves forward and Hlabisahlangana begins to discuss the very corporeal act of the laying on of hands, the body image begins to move into a more positive dimension. As testimony to his own allegiance to the Word and the beneficial consequences to himself of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, he begins to boast of the eminent fitness of his own body. He beats himself upon the chest and asks rhetorically who has ever seen him sick. If any sickness threatens he has only to go to the sea and take a little sea water and be restored to health. He praises the glistening healthiness of body of several of his visitors. They shine as if they were polished with wax. It is an indication of their spiritual healthiness. Mention is made of the emaciated state, veritably skeletal, of many of his followers when they first came to him and until the Holy Spirit returned them to good health. Such strength do they now have that they can go to the sea in the winter months. The flesh fearful before the cold sea is yet strengthened by the Spirit. This more positive attitude towards the

body is in keeping with traditional valuation of the corporeal and with the notion that good fortune and well-being is, first and foremost, a state of body, inyama, whatever else it may be in respect to spirit and prestige, isithunzi (Vilakazi 1962:87-94).

But the image is not so simply stabilized. Later William Richmond goes on to speak of the Word as being the only kind of armour for the protection of the body. This is followed by further testimonies, both verbal and physical, to his own bodily strength. This notion leads him once again, following his version of the Biblical words "I shall abide in you for you are my temple," (uthi Jesu Khristu "ngiyakuhlala kuwe ulitempele lami") to maintain that the body is a hollow temple waiting to be filled by the Holy Spirit. This observation, in its turn, returns him to the notion that most men are simply hollow within their shell of fine clothes. They must realize that they are only a temple of the Holy Spirit.

What we mean to do here in following some of the vicissitudes of the word, body, in its various images and its thematic reiteration throughout the sermon, is to make clear how this integration gives some artful integration to the sermon. More than that, however, the various images give to the body an ambivalence, a multivocal condensation of a number of different attitudes and associations both affirmative and deprecatory, traditional and modern. This multivocality--the word is Victor Turner's--makes the word a highly effective metaphor for that uncertainty about well-being characteristic in a rapidly changing society in which the self-image is in a state of flux. In particular we have two incongruent associations to be artfully related--a traditional pride in body on the one hand, with the Christian tendency toward denial and mortification on the other. In the face of the tensions between the various feeling states as regards corporeality the answer offered by the CGC and this particular sermon is ecstatic incorporation of the Holy Spirit. Hlabisahlanguana makes a highly emotional effort to direct his congregation towards that end.

In the same way water, in its various images, represents Zulu concerns with purity and impurity. The traditional religious importance of purification by water in the streams and rivers of Zululand has been preserved in practically all the present day prophetic movements of Zionist types (Sundkler 1961:201-211). Very early on in the sermon reference is made to the constant movement of the waters in the sea as a sign of the power and everpresence of the Holy Spirit. And the sermon is concluded by offering the congregants a choice between the fiery soup (esobheni lomlilo) of hell and the bracing and revitalizing baptism of the sea.

The two most interesting images of water occur in an elaborate metaphor of the flow of water to the sea and the use of the lung of a cow dipped in water as a cure for spiritual cowardice. In the former, William Richmond wants to make clear to his followers that the sea water has a soul like a man (kusho ukuthi anomphumelo njengomuntu). This leads him to ask whether there are any rivers going up country. Of course all run towards the sea. "Why, then," he asks the membership, "do you move upstream? How will you climb the hill for there is no river that runs to the top of the hill." What is being said here is a recondite way is that the religion of Hlabisahlanguana which baptizes in the sea rather than, as traditionally, in the river will, as all the rivers run to the sea, offer salvation, a

final disposition, to those who used to purify themselves in the rivers and streams. The reference to the mountain is to a traditional custom (usually for those undergoing the diviner's initiation) of seeking visionary contact with the ancestors on hills and mountains. But, points out Hlabisahlangana, water does not run uphill. It runs to the sea and there you must find your only effective purification and salvation.

In view of the associations of body and water discussed previously, the imaginative reference to the lung of a cow dipped in water as a cure for cowardice will have a particular resonance. The preacher is referring to those who lack the courage to accept the Word and gain the Spirit.¹⁸ I am uncertain of the traditional associations of this reference in Zulu medicine but that it is apt and arresting in this sermon we cannot deny. For the lung I would argue acts on us as a surrogate body image. It is dipped in water as the purified believer is dipped in sweat through the strengthening and purifying action of the Holy Spirit. The lung itself, of course, is the very organ of the wind of the body (also umoya), and it would seem a very apt synecdoche for the entire body given over to the service and absorption of the Holy Spirit (umoya oyincwele). This interpretation may be overelaborate. Still, it is available to us in the context of other things said with and about the body and water in the sermon. Unfortunately, though my informants agreed readily to the suitability of this interpretation, it was not given me spontaneously. The only thing we can be sure of is that the mind is capable of greater subtleties than this, for some of which it can undoubtedly find words.

Subtle Words of Poetry and Reference

It is much more difficult to obtain commentary from Ekang Engono (The Parrot's Egg) upon his sermons (in French called evangiles). He not only delivers them in a distant and reserved manner but in general he holds himself aloof from the membership and the visitors to his chapel. Commentary upon the sermons and explorations of their meaning are generally carried out with his knowledgeable assistant, the Yemba. On a number of occasions, however, the Nima Na Kombo has expressed pride in his manipulation of "likenesses" (efonan--bifonan) and in his sensitivity to using these forms of representation. He has said that there is a fundamental unity of things apparent to those who understand "likenesses." For if one has this understanding he sees that many things which seem different are actually analogous. He has told the members repeatedly, though not in the sermon we examine here, that witches, beyim, have no other object than to confuse people and prevent them from seeing the unity of things.

Not all members of the cult have or appreciate this skill in employing "likenesses." But it must be mentioned that the capacity of a cult member to make progress in his membership and move up the hierarchy depends in part in his aptness in appreciating clever speech--nkobo akunge--and in particular the use of "likenesses." A man who is skillful with such things as analogy and allusion is strongly armed in the difficult battle of holding cult membership and attracting new members. In such a highly egalitarian and unstructured society as that of the Fang the size of social groupings is in part a

function of the force of personality of leaders. And this force, in turn, partially rests in verbal powers. The situation is not so much different than that confronting Hlabisahlangana, although the way in which the two men verbally respond to this challenge is much different.

I have elsewhere made a detailed examination of the subtle words which are woven into these Bwiti sermons (Fernandez 1966a). We have concentrated on William Richmond here. But we shall examine one of Ekang Engono's succinct "evangiles" in its entirety pointing up some of its artful qualities of condensation and recondite representation. We shall not discuss his penchant for playing on words. The following is one of his shortest sermons--he rarely speaks in any case over 15 minutes. This sermon was given on the sixth day of the Easter Festival, Miwandzi Mwanga, Thursday the 24th of April, 1960.

The Ngombi is Fang. The Ngombi is something to take great care of. The Ngombi is the fruit that is full of juice, it is something that can act badly, can feel badly, can cause irritation and trouble. It is better that it should be irritating, that it should burst open. The man who knows well the Fang Ngombi he has his treasure in the land of the dead. Men must not steal iron because it comes from the forge, it is a man's brother, it is the equivalent of man. The blood of the nursing mother is the food of the afterbirth. We don't know the miracle of the spirit. The Ngombi leaves this on earth with us. We are unfortunate because man does not know the significance of eboka. We are the destroyers of the earth. Our destruction makes noise to God. The miracle is between our thighs. Listen to the words of the wind; listen to the words of the Fang Ngombi, listen to the words of the village. They are of great meaning to you. The widow can not cause trouble through her chatter unless she and another like her marry the same husband. The man without witchcraft is an Angel, he is a dove, hence the ancestors said the poorman is one of two things. He is either worn out or he is without witchcraft.¹⁹

On first approach the sermon seems esoteric in the extreme. Partially this is because key words appear here which are frequently used in Ekang's sermons and are therefore part of a sermon tradition to which we are not privy. But this is only part of the general problem of representational devices. Similes and metaphors that work well in one culture may be based upon culture-bound associations and accepted canons of connection between vehicle and tenor with which we are unfamiliar. It might also be suggested that non-literate peoples "are more practiced than we are at understanding symbolic statement" (Leach 1954:26). In any case the metaphor employed here is difficult and lofty. That is, the relationship between what is literally meant and what is metaphorically substituted must be inferred by esoteric knowledge usually not present in the sermon text. The images in this sermon, in short, do not seem to be fruitful representations of any thematic concerns we ourselves in our own cultures feel compelled to imagine. And it is only by arduous indirections that we can find directions out.

What Ekang Engono is talking about here, as is so frequently the case in his sermons, is his concern with the fertility of the

Fang. His concern corresponds realistically to a substantial fall in the birth rate which the Fang have undergone in the last 40 years. This has been caused by substantial increase in venereal disease rates and is associated with an anomie to which Bwiti is a revitalistic response. The Ngombi to which he refers is the sacred harp of the Bwitist and is often used as a synecdoche for Bwiti, particularly when the issue of fertility is being raised. This is because the sound of the Ngombi is conceived to be the voice of Nyingwan Mebege, the female deity in the universe who is the source of female fecundity. It is also because the sound cavity of the harp is conceived of as a stomach in which pregnancies later to occur among the membership are first arranged. This association of the harp is picked up by reference to it as a ripe fruit heavy with a watery flesh which sloshes about within it--(kengeng). We take this as a pregnancy image. The Ngombi (Bwiti), like a pregnancy, must be carefully taken care of. The inconveniences and annoyances of Bwiti, as of a pregnancy, must be supported lest it burst.

After interjecting the stereotyped promise that he who understands the Ngombi has treasure laid up for him in heaven, Ekang goes on to warn against stealing iron. It is a man's brother and equivalent to him. This equivalence is established because iron is symbolic of the male principle to the Fang. Iron is also symbolic of marriage since, traditionally, it formed the essentials of the bride-price. Just as he has advised respectful treatment of the female principle as symbolized by the ripe fruit, so here he advises symbolically against offense to the male principle, all of course, in favor of increasing fertility. This indirect injunction is followed by the apparent irrelevancy that the blood of the nursing mother is the food of the afterbirth. But clearly we have moved in the statement from the promotion of fertility to completed pregnancy. The reference is to the Fang taboo against intercourse with the nursing mother and to a Bwiti rationale that the menstrual blood of this taboo period, often three years, provides sustenance in some spiritual way for the afterbirth conceived of as a spiritual and tutelary twin (of the opposite sex) to the actual living infant. This is one of the miracles of the spirit which the Ngombi leaves on earth. Man's misfortune comes from his failure to understand the symbolic meaning of the hallucinogen eboka (synecdoche for Bwiti). The statement "The miracle lies between our legs" comes as close as any statement in the sermon to approaching the concern out of which the various words and images of the sermon are arising. The final image of the chattering widow being unable to cause trouble unless she and another like her be married to the same man, moves away from the fruition of fertility to the barrenness of loquacious widowhood. But this should not cause trouble unless a man not following the principles of Bwiti, which discourages the levirate, should marry without regard for the fertile consequences of the match.

We have not examined all the elements in this sermon, and in particular the play on words which is important, but we have examined the major theme around which many of the images cluster. This theme achieves a remarkable compacted and artful statement with, I hope I have been able to show, much resonance between the various images expressive of the underlying concern. Rarely is Ekang Engono didactic, directive or persuasive except in a very indirect or oblique way. He

is never emotionally expressive. He concentrates on making his statement as artful as possible, trying to give a unique statement to very commonplace concerns. We may say that his sermon is referential despite the esoteric nature of its references because he keeps fairly consistently in mind what he is talking about and does not, as so often happens to Hlabisahlangana, become betrayed by his own "presence."

Conclusion--How to Revitalize Words

Important differences in style and integrity of content have emerged in our comparison of these two sermons. We have pointed up the emphasis upon the expressive and persuasive function in the sermons of Hlabisahlangana and upon the artistic and referential function in the words of Ekang Engono. (We are talking here of dominant emphasis as all functions can, and were, identified in both sermons.) By saying that we find more artistry in Ekang Engono than in William Richmond, we mean that we find more concern to coerce words to say things better than they have been said before. There is in Ekang Engono a much stronger will-to-form: a will to "impress and enforce a dominant form on the natural material of bone, flesh and blood: out of which the impulse to communicate arises" (Rank 1959:134-136). William Richmond tends to be betrayed by "bone, flesh and blood"--betrayed by the personal dynamism involved in the communicative urge. In his enthusiastic expression and powerful persuasion his verbal art tends to be swallowed up in the dynamics of his personality expressing itself too formlessly.

Both these preachers are charismatic figures. In the eyes of their membership they are the holders of those specific gifts of body and spirit of which Weber speaks (1958:245). The devotion held towards them is born of the distress felt by their followers and the enthusiastic revitalization they provide in the cult life they lead. It is well known that charismatic leadership is unstable since it is legitimized by nothing more than a personal strength which has to be constantly reestablished. We see plenty of evidence in Hlabisahlangana's sermons of his need to prove himself by demonstrating his strength both in body and word. But he protests too much. And the danger is that the self-consecration he achieves may have the volatility reserved for all enthusiasms with only a personal referent.

Ekang Engono has the better strategy. He concentrates on consecrating his message--upon, by verbal means, making its authority irresistible. He shines in the reflected light of the message. He is legitimized by it for he is the only one capable of bringing such words out of the supernatural to the membership. William Richmond's problem is that he too closely identifies himself with his words. He leaves no means by which he might be objectively legitimized. Charisma rests finally only on inner authority and inner restraint. In having more discipline and more restraint Ekang Engono better creates the illusion of an outside authority in whose service he is legitimized.

A law in linguistics purports to tell us that in any message where the referential and expressive functions--meaning and intonation--are in contest the latter tends to prevail (DeGroot 1959:4). We see this in William Richmond, although in his idiom it might better

be expressed as the inevitable domination of the Spirit over the Word. All we may be saying here is that this prevalence of expression--of Spirit--is detrimental to the viability of the religious enterprise, though not to transitory religious experience. In the long run it is always preferable that the flesh be made word than that the word be made flesh.

We have not produced in the process of our discussion those principles which, if followed, would enable the reader to perform the function of giving a sermon in Bwiti or the CGC. An important line of recent work in anthropology is teaching us how to generate sequentially such-and-such a behavioral phenomenon occurring in another culture. Perhaps the problem in our approach here is that art, as product and process, is usually understood as an ineffable distillate for which, at best, we can give only a partial account. That is, to take the banal example, you can only give so much advice on how to win friends and influence people. The rest passes beyond speech.

In point of fact I cannot tell you--I do not fully know myself--how to give a sermon in Bwiti or Zulu in any successful way. I simply lack the enculturation which would give me the feeling states appropriate to the task. Ekang Engono and William Richmond have ideas about the state of themselves, the state of the membership, the state of the world and the state of the supernatural. Because of incongruities and tensions between these various states they are impelled to find appropriate words and images, that will somehow tie together the residues of the various stimuli the organism has received from itself, from others, from the past, from the present. We can examine the words. We can examine the images. It is another thing, much less empirically based, to think we have got at those feeling states, those willful ideas that have coerced words and images more or less imperfectly to their intentions. For art after all lies in aptness. It lies in that sense of having hammered out some mobile which in its slow revolving transformations approximates to the unsettled weather of the mind--it lies in that sense of having, with tactility and dexterity, turned a wellwrought urn which can momentarily contain the succeeding states of cerebral tension. How shall we provide a programmed instruction in this aptitude? How shall we be taught to revitalize friends and convert people? I do not mean to strand us in the appreciative mode. But as long as we have raised the issue of verbal art, we ought frankly to recognize our problems.

In fact some useful things can be said. Useful things have been said by rhetoricians for centuries. What we have done here gives us no basis for correcting syntax or pronunciation. We have worked at the level of the succession of images proffered in these sermons as speech, not as language. What can be advised--if one wants to engage in revitalization in Africa--is to study the characteristic images, similes, metaphors put forward in these sermons. Learn their associations, their condensations--the linkages they are given to! These are the pebbles which we must put into our mouth if we are to get over our academic lisp. All of these devices may give us some idea of the thematic concerns for which they are representative. All of this demands adequate enculturation--a very broad ethnographic experience in the culture, something of which has had to be reproduced in the textual commentary we have made here. If one follows this

advice, one may be able to give his words a gravity of expression-- a biodynamic intonation sufficient to revitalize them. In this way one can avoid mouthing dead metaphors. He can perhaps achieve in his listeners the shock of recognition that apt images achieve. Such counsel is so obvious and has been around for so long that it probably escapes our attention. Yet it is surely basic to the study of verbal art.

NOTES

1. I want to thank Warren d'Azevedo, Dell Hymes and J. R. Manyoni for commentary and discussions useful to my thinking here.

2. The sermons were tape-recorded and later transcribed and translated interlinearly. Having spent two years among the Fang, I have considerably more competence in that language than in Zulu, in which language I am in the way of being an intermediate student.

3. The first part of the nickname is Fang; the second portion--Zambi Avanga--appears to be Mitsogo, possibly Kikongo. The Bwiti cult has its own latin which is a mostly unintelligible version of the southern Gabonese languages originally associated with Bwiti.

4. Neither Fivaz (1963) nor Doke and Vilakazi (1964) list hlaba as an ideophone though several of my informants suggested that it had that character. Hlabisahlangana is a compound of two verbs. Hlabisa (causative of hlaba) "to attack, thrust, cause pain, and particularly to drive cattle." By metaphoric extension it means to criticise, hurt the feelings, wound mentally. Because of the exhortationism in William Richmond's sermons this is certainly a relevant associated meaning to his nickname. Hlangana means to come together, assemble hence be in agreement through association. The entire nickname is thus--"to drive with painful force together into agreement." The image this provoked in informants was that of a bull driving together the milling cattle of the kraal.

5. Within the particular sermon of William Richmond we examine here he refers to himself as the bull who stabs spiritually. He specifically compares the spiritual guardianship implied in that image with the pastoral guardianship of the shepherd's staff--the isikhali--the Zionist's spiritual weapon. "Step aside and allow the bull who has horns and who stabs at Sydenham, and I will direct you in through the gates holding my beautiful staff, here is my staff..." "Awudedela kungene inkunzi enezimpondo ehlababa eMbongokazi besengisho ngithi ngena lapha eMasangweni ngibambe induku yami enhle nasi isikhali sami..."

6. The status deprivation suffered by the African male in the colonial situation is well known. The South African situation has the same effect. In the last decade the women's role in political protest has been ruefully remarked by the men as a sign of their own emasculation.

7. Traditionally in the argument of moots or greater judicial disputes among the Fang there was a high emphasis upon control in arguing one's case. A device for limiting gesticulation and expressiveness was the "ntum adzo" (the staff of the palabra) a long staff held in the right hand with which one was permitted to strike the ground in emphasizing one's points but which otherwise limited one's actions. Ekang Engono's sermonizing would seem to follow this canon.

8. In the sermon given by William Richmond which we have under consideration here. If you have paid heed to the word, a burst of the spirit is emitted and you feel as if you were held by an electric current: "kanti umakade ulilalela Izwi kuba khona isifutho somoya kubasengathi ubanjwa ngogesi."

9. From the ideophone of excitement of opening the eyes wide--
phaka.

10. The sermon was given in the Sydenham chapel on Friday night the 23rd, July, 1965. The sermon began about 11:30 and, interspersed with songs, ran until 1:30 AM. It was followed by testimonies, a collection, and then by the laying on of hands.

11. Izwi ngiyaligwinya ngilungisela umoya nabo ngibe ngigqinahisa.

12. A Zionist Cult leader in Durban (Argyle Road), when confronted with this relationship between word and spirit, argued that though it was in the sermon that we saw the word at work and in the laying on of hands the spirit at work, it is in the song that we see word and spirit working together.

13. The particular scriptural passage read immediately before the sermon was Deuteronomy 28. Other bits of scripture were quoted in process as William Richmond is a proficient student of the Bible.

14. "Now you see the signboard as it is. I am standing here. I am the signboard for you to see the way to heaven." (Manje uyayibona Ibodi nakhunje ngimile ngiyibodi njelapha youkubona indlela yokuya ezulwini.)

15. The identification of Hlabisahlanguana with Jesus is very close. His followers frequently flatter him on his resemblance. He sometimes refers to his widowed mother as the Virgin who bore him--only half jocularly I suspect.

16. Manje ujuluke uhleli kubesengathi ungandiza.

17. Akezwani noNkulunkulu neze ufuna nje ngesidumbu sakhe uthi ngiyafuna.

18. Igwala kuye kuthathwe iphaphu thina ngesiZulu sithi ibhakhuba licwiliswe emanzini kuthiwe thi ngani ngoba nyesaba.

19. Ngonbi a ne mwan Fang. Ngombi a ne dzum ba yekh. Ngombi a ne ébuma kengeng, a ne edzam e ne na, o ye bo abé a wok abé; a ye bo edung ye mbwale. O nga yekh na aza tole. A ne mbung na a dung dang na a tolé. Emot a yim ngombi Fang emien a bele ntam wé esi awu. Mot a taa dzip ekeng akal da so akua, e ne mwan yang mot, e ne mvera mwan mot. Meki me ndzidzeng emo me ne bidzi be kue. Bi ne kaa yim akyenge nsisim. Ngombi Fang edzo dza ligeh ye si, bi ne engongol akal mot aa yim eban eboghe. Bi ne fe azange asi, asange bia dung Zame. Akyenge e ne bia mebeng été. Wogan medzo me ye mfonge. Wogan medzo me ue ngombi Fang. Wogan medzo me ye adzal. Me ne mine eban enen. Nkur o se bo zigha ka na be enyi mbok be ne nom. Mimia ewo o ne Ange, ewo one nzum. Edo betara be nga dzo na nzvinzvi o ne mam mebung, ne a se atuk ve a ne mimia. Tara a yenege bia engongol.

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