

COMMUNITY AND SALVATION IN THE NIGERIAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES*

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An atmosphere of deep participation gripped the whole congregation as the members sang hymns of biblical and African origin. The drummers pounded incessantly enormous African drums, others clapped joyously their hands and danced happily as if all had a single birthday. Suddenly a member, taken up by the rousing hymns, fell into a trance-like state and shook considerably. Other sets of spontaneous, melodious songs were well interspersed with sufficient room for sermon, prayers and admonitions. After blessing a closing hymn brought the gathering to a happy end, the members returning home rather filled with inward gratification.

This is a very brief description of the congregational worship in *St. Joseph's Chosen Church* in the heart of Abak town on a Sunday in September 1974. For an untutored mind on African ways of life, this seems to be an ostentatious, wild display of an enthusiastic christianity by a completely aberrant and ignorant congregation since the activities displayed by such a congregation are strange to him. But this would be a very superficial judgement. If one endeavours to penetrate into what lies beneath one is amazed by the deep spiritual value expressed here in concrete ecstatic forms. For the participants at such a service this value means the experience of salvation in a community of brothers and sisters bound together by God's grace.

Abak is typically rich in such churches with pentecostal emphasis. The churches are either offshoots of the mission churches or have grown up under the careful leadership of a native figure. In both cases they are independent in administration and worship. Their main features are the pneumatological stress and the emphasis on the visible manifestations of God's power in their midst through the Holy Spirit¹. Only such churches will be considered in this article and for a working heading I shall give them the general designation *Independent Churches*².

* This article is mainly devoted to the independent churches in the Annang primal society. The ones in this area show the same characteristics as in other parts of Nigeria if not, in fact the whole of Africa as certain references will confirm in this contribution. Annang is made up of the administrative districts of Ikot Ekpene and Abak in South Eastern State, Nigeria.

¹ For a detailed description of the central features of Nigerian pentecotalism see HAROLD W. TURNER, *Pentecostal Movements in Nigeria*, in: *Orita*, VI/1 June 1972, 39—47

² The independent churches in Annang take different names as *Prayer Houses* (Ufok Akam), *Healing Church* (Ufok Abasi ukok udongo)

The Annang understanding of Community

Before we touch the heart of our theme, it is useful to cast a brief look at the understanding of community among the Annang. For the Annang, community is primarily a social and religious concern seen in a single oneness. In this totality is embedded anything or being that can come into communion with men, be they spirits, ancestors or even inanimate objects. God, known as Abasi in Annang language, speaks too to man in the community³ either in a personal encounter or through the myriads of divinities who frequently act as his agents.

Abasi possesses an abundance of power. Yet he seems not to exercise this power especially in his relations to ghosts, divinities and evil magic forces for these exert a terrifying influence and disagreeable nuisance upon the life of people without the all powerful God interfering⁴. He gives in this sense the impression of a withdrawn God. That is why people do not have any altar or shrine or grove for him but for the divinities. Interesting enough however, is the fact that people do not fail to call upon him by every sacrifice to the divinities like Obot (creation divinity) Idio (fertility divinity) Ndem Isong (chief divinity) etc. This serves to demonstrate the truth that although the omnipotent God does not exercise his power to prevent the causes of misfortune he doesn't remain dormant when sacrifices are offered to get rid of it. Abasi is the ultimate receiver of the propitiatory sacrifice and eliminates ills if he so wishes. He is powerless in causes yet mighty in elimination.

Anyone provoking the divinities by breaking a moral law or by not offering an appropriate sacrifice is believed to be surely met by a severe divine retribution either in the form of sickness or death. Sickness or any other form of misfortune is therefore attributed to a supernatural cause. This causality in the Annang system of thought seems to spread to the neighbouring northern Igbo, for SHELTON observes, „The Igbo insists that an effect has a cause and theoretical causes are generally explained in supernatural terms“⁵.

Unobservable forces (ekpo) inhabiting the observable universe function too as supernatural causes of specific events, if these ekpo are tapped by a functional specialist and directed intentionally to provoke a mischief. Ancestors too, when offended, can be malevolent.

³ Cf. JOHN C. JR. MESSENGER, *Reinterpretations of Christian and Indigenous belief in a Nigerian Nativist Church*, in: *American Anthropologist*, 60, April 1960, 269

⁴ MESSENGER attributes causes of mishaps to the malevolent powers over which the omnipotent Abasi exercises no control. JOHN C. JR. MESSENGER, *The Christian Concept of Forgiveness and Annang Morality*, in: *Practical Anthropology*, 6 (3) 1959, 97—98. 'Anang and Abasi' in the named article may be corrected here to Annang and Abasi

⁵ AUSTIN J. SHELTON, *Causality in African Thought: Igbo and Other*, in: *Practical Anthropology*, 15 (4) August 1968, 158

Since every event has a supernatural cause the Annang do not see any natural causes in any misfortune, illness or even natural occurrences. Consequently and as far as these supernatural agents are believed to traffic in the perceivable world the Annang see themselves constantly exposed to these numerous malevolent powers and as far as the Annang are not in difficulty with these powers they are in a state of peace. But immediately a misfortune comes their way, supposed to be sent by some evil influence, this peace is destroyed and they are in a state of chaos. There is a loss of balance in life. To bring back the original equilibrium in life the causes of the imbalance (misfortune, illness, death etc.) must be ascertained through divination and the causal agent appeased by propitiatory sacrifice. The maintenance of such balance in life, that is freedom from sickness or having a child after the misfortune of sterility, caused by the divinity Obot, has been cancelled, means salvation to the Annang. Although misfortunes are caused by the divinities, unseen forces or ancestors and propitiatory sacrifice offered to them in order to eliminate the mishaps, the actual receiver of the sacrifice is Abasi who is now approached in time of crises and from whom one expects a saving action over the mischievous agents who compounded the misfortunes. Thus an Annang, recovering from sickness would proclaim, „Abasi önö mi unyanga“ (God has sent me salvation) or „Abasi anam öfön (God has done well) when a family is blessed with a child after an agonizing barrenness. Abasi, therefore, in granting blessing to an Annang when events turn out to the favour of the latter, is granting him salvation.

Salvation can too be achieved in human relations. This takes shape in either the nucleus family where the bond of love is the unifying factor, or in the extended family where individuals find themselves among brothers and sisters, receiving necessary aid and support from one another or in the ethnic group into which one is born and where one grows up. In the ethnic group, family or social circle people depend upon one another to satisfy their survival interests. One's life is lived wholly within it.

In the Annang society the monotony of isolation has no place. An openness of man to man reigns, one knows not only all his neighbours but his knowledge extends to those living miles away and, in case of collective responsibility all stand firmly on the principle of collective co-operation. The principle of collective co-operation attains its culmination point in communal feasts which enforce a collective experience of oneness. The rhythm of life captivates and unites all in singing, dancing and merrymaking. The same blood flows in the veins of all participating members — a rare expression of satisfaction, an absolute manifestation of collective fascination of oneness.

From the short exposition of the Annang concept of society, this unit is a plane of social and religious interactions. There is no definite dividing line between the two spheres of reality. Both interblend so much

that the society means a horizontal as well as a vertical extension, well impregnated with divine and collective inspiration. Both poles converge together to construct an inseparable involvement of all in all. TAYLOR writing about the Ganda (Uganda) directs our attention to this oneness⁶. Seen from another angle, the unity of the social and religious is primarily a religious totality. Expressed more emphatically, the Annang society is a religious one. The social patterns serve only as manifestations of religious forms. In this totality embraces one his salvation⁷.

What does salvation mean to the Annang in the context of our present train of thought? From what we have hitherto discussed, we have gained some hints at the Annang understanding of salvation in the society, or, better said, in the community. Seen negatively, salvation for the Annang isn't a reality beyond the now and here or outside the society. It finds existence neither in hope nor in a future dimension but is an experienced reality in the present. In a positive light salvation finds expression in peace within the society, in the relationship between man and man and man and the divinities. This relationship must not be disturbed through imprecation, envy or mistrust. Where these negative factors gain a foothold, there all the members are insecure and an impending calamity is feared to be behind the corner. Fitting steps must be taken to remove the cause of the disorder and restore peace.

Salvation is understood also in terms of health and dynamic process of growth and increase. A sick person or a trader or farmer registering slackening economy in his trade is in a state of disaster and demolition. To avoid a total collapse and to restore the original state, necessary steps in the direction of divination and pacification gain the consideration of unavailability since the ill health of a member of the society or the dwindling economy of a single person within it can fling a menace upon the stability and peace of the whole society.

The same range of thought in a dynamic progress colours the Annang view about fertility in the family. A man without a child is considered a dead person in the community since there will be no one to remember him after his death and such a childless person renders no positive contribution to the continuation of the community's life⁸. A barren woman has a lot to bear in this regard. Since only fruitful parents are considered fully integrated in the community and here they enjoy their salvation, if they are struck by the hard blow of infertility steps to remove the fate, as in the case of sickness, are the only qualitative alternative, otherwise they are only marginal in the community and for them such a life is one

⁶ JOHN V. TAYLOR, *The Primal Vision* (London 1972), 64, 85

⁷ TAYLOR seems to be a spokesman for the Annang and confers an indisputable qualification on the Annang view of salvation, *ibid.* 87

⁸ PARRINDER considers barrenness as one of the greatest curses to an African. G. E. PARRINDER, *African Traditional Religion* (London 1974) 60

The ground has now been cleared in this brief survey of the Annang full of misery and unhappiness. concept of community in regard to salvation before we see how this view is reflected in the independent churches. If we are to understand how the members — permanent and transitional — of the independent churches in Annang conceive salvation in their community such a background understanding of salvation in the primal society is unavoidable.

Emergence of independent churches among the Annang

Since the first independent church among the Annang registered its advent at the beginning of the 1930s the Annang primal society has been besieged by an irresistible and exercise proliferation of such religious bodies⁹. Touched off by a chain of religious causes and intensely aggravated by the post war effects, Annang seems to be more affected by this new religious phenomena than any other single social and religious unit in Africa¹⁰. In 1972 it was reported at a seminar in the Department of Religion, Nsukka that these bodies have „become a family affair“¹¹ in Ibibio-land. In Abak town a particular street of about two kilometers in length displays a dense concentration of scores of such churches with distinct names and buildings.

The names sound often strikingly identical, for example, The Salvation Army and The Christ Army Church in Ekom Iman, Abak, either to reflect their common origin¹² or to emphasize their purpose¹³.

Salvation as Intention

Judging from their nature the Annang independent churches seem to have a multitude of religious contents with the intent of wielding salva-

⁹ The first was the Christ Army. In the neighbouring Ibibio the same church had started already since 1915 but its actual spread through the South Eastern State gained rapidly in 1932. JOHN C. JR. MESSENGER, in: *American Anthropologist*, 62/2 April 1960, 268. See too DAVIS B. BARRETT, *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (Nairobi/Addis Abeba/Lusaka 1968), 290

¹⁰ BARRETT records 78 such bodies in a triangle of 20 miles East and South of Ikot Ekpene. Abak town exhibits within a five mile radius of its centre 33 different denominations with 251 bodies. BARRETT, op. cit. 291. Cf. further *The Abak Story*, a team report presented to the Interchurch Group Study at Uyo 1966, 26

¹¹ ALEX O. ENYINDAH, *The Pentecostal Churches as I see them: Seminar on the Religious Situation in Nigeria Today*. Department of Religion (Nsukka 1972), 94. Ibibio is understood here to embrace the Ibibio, Efik and Annang primal societies

¹² Both the Salvation Army and the Christ Army Church splintered in 1925 and 1929 respectively from the Qua Iboe, established since 1910 in Ekom Iman. See *The Abak Story*, 18—19

¹³ The Salvation Army Church may stress Salvation gained after the break from the Qua Iboe Church while the Christ Army Church underlines the healing power of Christ and therefore practices healing, *ibid.* 19

tion to their members. Their whole sets of rituals, practices and institutions employed betray this fundamental aim. This same intention is clearly reflected in the names designated to the different churches by their owners. The Abak Story confronts us with such names: Salvation Army, The Baptist Church etc.¹⁴. The attractive names are charged too with a psychologically optic captivation with the intention of radiating immediate fascination upon even passers-by to arrest their attention¹⁵. But more than mere attraction they indicate the deep spiritual intention and reality from which they emerge. It is most important to bear this in mind as we approach the different ways in which this religious index is made manifest.

Interhuman relations

The independent churches understand themselves as a religious community. But this understanding doesn't carry the same meaning as we have in the historical churches where religious community primarily refers to a group of people living together for specific religious aims and characterized by the acceptance of the three evangelical counsels of poverty, obedience and the celibate life. For the independent churches a religious community, as evident in their life, expresses a solid social and religious unit where interhuman intimacy is awarded a great prominence. This unit sketches the setting where the openness of man to man and confidence reign; one feels accepted by his brothers and sisters, problems are accorded adequate attention and a true chain of love binds all of them together. Here one feels free to expose his heart not only in prayer to God in an unconventional mood, but also to his neighbour sitting next to him. The openness of man to man in an atmosphere of trust and brotherhood signifies the inner religious reality encountered by the members.

This warmth is most appreciated by the urban dwellers who feel exposed to all sorts of insecurity and personalism in the towns. For them the search for intimacy is a result of the present situation in Nigerian towns where the major priority of the dwellers lies in the hot hunt for immediate money. One has little time for his next neighbour, let alone his problems. The result is the loneliness and isolation within the masses of the society. To an African, who was formerly not used to such an isolated life, this means a total excommunication from a community of people. This could mean his death. For such a person therefore the emergence of a religious body is a blessing and a salvation bringing event¹⁶. Here he comes again to the original awareness of the human warmth experienced in his family before taking abode in the town. He

¹⁴ *ibid.* 25—28

¹⁵ ENYINDAH, *op. cit.* 94

¹⁶ This seems to explain why the independent churches gain more proliferation in towns than in the rural areas

realizes once again that human beings aren't isolated atoms, monists or insignificant particles of a society concerned only and exclusively with his own private affair. The African isn't such a person who comes to himself only in the interaction of the functional specificity of different branches of society stratification converging together to satisfy special needs as presented in the occupational world. The concomitant impersonality of such a world robs him of the nearness of neighbourhood solidarity any living human being longs to enjoy. In the historical mission churches the picture isn't quite different from that of the labour world. With their westernized pattern of christianity and increasing numerical strength personal anonymity is becoming a day to day problem and occurrence. It surprises none therefore, if their baptized christians form the bulk of nocturnal members flowing into the Ufok Akam every night. Here they seem to find more security, warmth, fellowship and, to some degree, a guidance for living¹⁷. The permanent adherents of these communities find themselves in a group to which they can belong, where man isn't a marginal figure but a fully accepted person. This experience of intimate proximity secures the members a deep collective personality enjoyed originally in the primal society, but now in a renewed form within a religious, christian setting. The Annang holds this acceptance he embraces in the religious group as a very contributive to his security. In a society where people fear the threat of witches and the evil power over which one can exert little restraint¹⁸ a face to face contact with other people in a community gives a tremendous psychological gratification and expulsion of fear and uncertainty.

Here another important factor raises its head. In Annang, where the turbulent, bloody disorders of the Nigerian civil war (1967—1970) had inflicted internal fears upon people, separation upon families, insecurity and suspicion upon relations between friends and friends and devastating effects upon the majority of people, especially refugees, the religious communities provide a ground where these ranges of unpleasant realities can be offered an effective combat and resistance in an atmosphere of confidential discourse. They offer too an outlet to problems and difficulties which burden men's heart. These war effects explain also why Annang is such a breeding ground for the massive extension of independent churches.

Encounter with the Divine

More than the interhuman relations, the encounter with the Divine strongly undergirds the understanding of the Ufok Akam in Annang as religious communities. Behind all their social and collective expressions of religion there is a deeper level of reality which man desires to

¹⁷ Cf. BARRETT, op. cit. 95. *The Nigerian Christian*, 8 (6) June 1973, 27

¹⁸ JOHN C. JR. MESSENGER, *The Christian Concept of Forgiveness and Anang Morality*, in: *Practical Anthropology*, 6 (3) 1959, 97—98

encounter. Without this deep desire to encounter the Divine and, in fact, the encounter itself I do not think these communities can ever be termed religious, for all social and human activities are only indicators of the deep reality behind them. Religion in the Annang society can never, too, be reduced only to the social order as the Annang primal society is primarily a religious society despite all social functions. There may be secondary intentions like projecting personal prestige in leadership or economic piracy under the mantel of religion some of in the independent churches¹⁹ but in reality, the primary intention that runs through these ufok Akam is the longing to communicate with the Divine. JOACHIM WACH sees this dynamic aspect of confrontation with the Ultimate Reality as lying behind the root of every religion²⁰. HAROLD TURNER reminds us that the encounter with the Transcendent Reality is the chief intention behind all the New Religious Movements in Africa and these Movements are therefore to be interpreted in this light²¹. Seen from this angle, the ones in Annang aren't a new religion, as far as they are of a religious nature, but a development of a new religious form through which man personally enters into communication with the Divine. Any such personal and unreserved encounter evokes in the communicant a deep feeling of satisfaction which the religious bodies interpret as edinyanga (salvation).

Yet this communication doesn't end at this point. Despite the rich and inner personal dimension of religion the role of religion plays in the community must not be forgotten, for every religious activity in a religious community is a part of the social life. The Annang independent churches have combined these two poles and extended them to include a christian understanding. Community, according to them, has a divine origin. In an interview with the owner of one of the numerous churches in Ikot Ekpene in August last year he underlined the fact that unity in his church is achieved through the participation in the divine nature²². The community is so far actualized in the midst of the members in the extent of their conscious unity with Christ as its head and with each other through the head. The historical churches seem to be governed by the same understanding of the church as a community. For them too the reality and the principal one at that is nothing else than, seen ontologically, a community between God and men and men among themselves in Jesus Christ²³. From this bond of divine unity flows their responsive

¹⁹ Cf. *The Abak Story*, 41

²⁰ J. WACH, *The Comperative Study of Religions* (New York and London 1958), 48

²¹ H. W. TURNER, *Problems in the Study of African Independent Churches*, in: *Numen*, XIII (1) January 1966, 30

²² I made this interview at Ikot Ekpene in August 1974

²³ See, for example, BERNHARD CASPER's exposition of the church as community: B. CASPER, *Einheit aller Wirklichkeit* (Freiburg 1971), 203—241

responsibility towards God in love of him and the other members. God, accordingly, is the founder of every community and Christ its head. Every member in it has a duty towards God and the members and in the unconditional execution of this duty lies the harmony between God and the community and the latter with its members and each member in turn with one another. This harmony means nothing else to the members than the experience of salvation.

Healing action

A noticeable realization of the responsibility towards the members of the community is made demonstrative in the healing actions. In the Annang language the word for healing is unyanga while edinyanga means salvation. Both words come from the verb ndinyanga, to heal or to save. Because of this common origin there is no clear distinction in the use of both words unyanga (healing) and edinyanga (salvation). Salvation and healing coincide therefore with one another and in fact so much so that when one says, „Ami mmebö unyanga“ (I have been healed) he means at the same time that salvation has occurred to him. Armed with this background understanding many prayer house owners run them under the name of ufok unyanga (healing home), that is, a community in which one can gain his salvation. It has been ascertained that healing is the „major reason for the rapid expansion of these Houses of Prayer“²⁴.

The first claim to the healing action rests upon the assumption and rather christian conviction that the power to heal comes from God, who in Christ, called the community into life and is present in it always in the Holy Ghost. HAROLD W. TURNER touching the healing actions of the West African Independent Churches writes, „In many of the prophet-healing churches there is a most impressive and convincing breakthrough into the dependence on faith in and prayer to the one living God of the Bible and this provides the basis for their healing practices“²⁵. Among the Annang precisely „faith healing is performed by the Evangelist who... obtains his power from ata abassi (almighty God) through the Holy Spirit“²⁶. Ata Abasi is seen therefore as the wellspring from whom all power to heal originates. Was it this Abasi who in communal sacrifices received indirectly the prayers offered to Obot or Ndem and exercised his supremacy over these divinities by granting the requests of the affected, it's he now, who in a christian congregational worship, is maintained to manifest his power in the cure of diseases. His power through the Holy Spirit enables the healer to see visions, to analyse the

²⁴ ENYINDAH, op. cit. 94

²⁵ H. W. TURNER, *Pagan features in West African Independent Churches*, in: *Practical Anthropology*, 12 (4) July—August 1965, 146

²⁶ JOHN C. JR. MESSENGER, *Reinterpretations of Christian and Indigenous belief in a Nigerian Nativist Church*, in: *American Anthropologist*, 60 April 1960, 269. Almighty God in brackets is my own interpretation

causes of illness and to perform cures, thus bringing the spiritual benefits of his church to needy individuals. This claim is favourably assisted by the pentecostal discourse of Peter (*Acts 2, 14—41*) and other places of the bible (*Joel 2, 28—32; Lk 9, 1—6*); (*1 Cor 12, 4—11*) which they quote at random to support their healing peculiarities. Anyone healed there sees it as a saving act of God and interprets the healing he has encountered in his person as salvation from God performed in a community where his Spirit dwells, directs and acts²⁷. It doesn't seem to worry the independent churches, however, whether this spirit they maintain to have is sufficiently related to the Christ of the bible or whether it is extracted from some other source. Their main concern is exclusively to cure.

Healing action takes two main forms. The general one as described by LEONHARD E. BARRETT in a Revival Church in Ghana usually takes place during the congregational service²⁸. During the service a healing period is observed and the crippled, sick and pregnant members of the congregation kneel in front of the healer who lays hands on their head, sprinkles them with holy water and prays over them. Whether they feel the healing effects of these actions or not is difficult to tell. But one thing is certain. They are sure that a divine influence is at work and consequently express contentment.

The particular healing action operates in the conviction that *edisana odudu* (Holy Spirit) will bring about God's saving action upon those in need. Healing houses are frequently located behind the prayer houses or churches where the ailing members, the barren and the unfortunate in jobs may lodge to remain „near the beneficent power of the Holy Ghost“²⁹. The evangelist performing the healing finds out through possession the cause of the sickness or the misfortune, prescribes the steps towards cure and executes the healing himself aided by other members of the community. During this process there is an abundant application of physical agents like holy water, oil, candle and white linen for the divine healing power combined with the strict spiritual discipline of confession of sins, repentance and fasting.

Strikingly connected with the healing action is the cooperative attitude and the pastoral care the community members offer to their clients and the sick among them. This is a remarkable exercise of christian love which individuals enjoy when in need. The pastoral concern is an attractive practice and one of the strongest missionary methods employed by the Annang independent churches, in fact, other African churches of this category too, to keep their members to themselves and to draw dissatisfied christians from the older churches who want either to become members or simply to participate in their healing services, where they find

²⁷ Cf. *ibid.* for more details

²⁸ L. E. BARRETT, *Religious Rejuvenation in Africa: Some impressions from West Africa*, in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 7 (1) 1970, 33

²⁹ J. C. JR., *Messenger*, op. cit. 275

once more the African cooperate life in which they had their salvation which they seem to have missed in the mission churches. The pastoral attention is „a notable christian achievement when compared with the widely acknowledged lack of pastoral ministry in the older churches, which is an important factor in the drift of their spiritually needy members towards the independent groups“³⁰.

Most of the time the healing actions do bring about the needed effect to the afflicted. Freedom from such nuisance which besiege man and make his life miserable is equal in meaning to salvation to the Annang and the African as a whole. As emphasized before, the members of the independent churches are convinced that it is God who works through the Holy Spirit in the community to alleviate physical and psychical ailments, caused according to them and the affected either through personal fault, hence the discipline of confession and fasting, but mostly by the evil, dark power. Thus they see the saving work of God in Christ through the Spirit actualized in the conquering of the evil force, restoration of health, granting of fertility to the barren who was hitherto maginal in the community and in turning away the evil intentions of co-workers from the 'persecuted' in their place of work. Indeed the belief in the exclusive saving power of God is so strong that members of certain independent churches with pentecostal flavours, for example, the Apostolic Faith decline vehemently the use of pharmaceuticals or treatment from medicinal drugs by a medical doctor.

The active and collective nature of worship

Is God's saving power through the Holy Spirit made evident in healing, in encounter with him, in the collective communication with the participating members, it's too made manifest in the active nature of worship in the Annang religious bodies as a sign of christian joy. In the historical churches the main drama falls exclusively upon the priest or preacher apart from the lectors and choir singing mainly hymns of Western origin³¹. A passive participation by listening to the few on the stage characterizes the rest of the congregation. In a visible contrast to this an atmosphere of total participation distinguishes the congregations in the independent churches as they spontaneously sing hymns composed by members of the congregations themselves. Their hymns are often biblical and African in origin and form -very melodious, rhythmic and rousing. There is an intense response and involvement in action, an out-

³⁰ H. W. TURNER, op. cit. 147. See too H. J. BECKEN, *Liturgisches Verhalten in Südafrikanischen Bantukirchen* in: *Evangelische Missionszeitschrift*, 26 (3) August 1969, 167, in which the same view is expressed about the independent churches in South Africa

³¹ After the Second Vatican Council there has been some changes in the hymns in the Catholic Church in Annang. Some hymns are African in origin but the greater number is still Western.

burst of ecstatic motor phenomena in forms of trances and glossolalia, dancing and clapping of hands as the drummers provide harmony with the African instruments as inseparable accompaniment to the hymns. Prayers are loud, interrupted often by readings from the sacred scriptures and the rather lengthy sermon. As general prayers progress each participant in the congregational worship is free to express his intentions which are often related to their needs. In one of the Abak churches I visited one woman petitioned God to turn her barren field into a fertile one. Periods for individual prayers are allotted apart from the general ones. In this moment no drums are played, no dancing is allowed and no reading from the bible follows. Each member returns to his heart in a meditative depth. I think the object of the meditation period is not only to allow for personal penetration in prayer and communication with the Divine but also to curb, to some degree, the emotion with which the congregation is sufficiently charged. Worth mentioning too is the warm community life that underlies the cooperative worship as the minister, his helpers and other congregation members pray and thank God for his kindness to all of them in their community. During this time a hymn of thanksgiving is sung and thankoffering collected.

Many from the mission churches and the Western countries are shocked by this ecstatic form of worship in the Annang independent churches. I think our sophisticated ideas about worship hinders us from understanding the beauty of such a worship. Definitely the emotional elements in the new churches do run the risk of exaggeration. Yet the Annang sees in the free dancing and prayer a breakthrough from the icy monotony that overwhelms the divine service in the mission churches. The face-to-face interaction promotes a spirit of cooperative rejoicing in the spirit as a mark of a spiritual value which the new religious communities are constantly trying to create. The members of such communities interpret this spiritual satisfaction as a sign of salvation which they think can only be acquired in their communities.

Résumé

Coming to the end of our article it seems unavoidably imperative to cast a brief look at what has hitherto been discussed in order to drive home to our understanding how the Annang independent churches conceive salvation in relation to community as understood by them and their members.

1. The independent churches are deeply rooted in the African world view concerning the society where the main events of life take place. If the day to day events, which are contributive to the maintenance of life, are not functioning well the life of the community and the individual is rendered miserable. Here emerges the aetiological question³². The elimi-

³² Cf. E. DAMMANN, *Die Religionen Afrikas* (Stuttgart 1962), 82

nation of the causes through appropriate means restores the machinery of life to perform its function in perfect harmony. This balance in community life is another word for edinyanga (salvation) both for the community itself and its members.

2. The community provides the Okut Nkukut (Seer) who diagnoses the cause of the imbalance and the Abia Ibok (Medicine man) who carries out the restoration through sacrifice. In the independent churches the healer and diviner play a major role as the okut Nkukut and the medicine man in the society. The healer and diviner claim to bind the malignant entities and witchcraft which constitute the perennial fear of the Africans and offer them the hope of a better living. The divine service in the prayer houses, charged sufficiently with healing activities, replace the old sacrifice to divinity before a shrine or an ant hill.

3. In the Annang society the division between the secular and the religious is extremely thin, if such a dichotomy exists at all. The society is a scene of encounter between the Divine and men. This view surfaces forcefully in the independent churches. The Divine (Abasi) is powerful in the community through the Holy Spirit. He is no more the Deus otiosus of the traditional religion who exerts little influence on the regions of wicked divinities that inflict havocs on men and make them insecure but a God whose power is shown in the cure of ailments, neutralizing of evil forces, annulling of barrenness and in granting of peace to those who call upon him with confidence. The marks a radical departure and a major one at that from the concept of a far to a near, loving and all powerful God of Christianity. The community members and their floating clients, the catholics not excluded from the latter category, are seriously concerned with seeing God's effects in their daily life³³. Such visible manifestation of the divine power in their daily life amounts to salvation.

4. Was the big family a place where security of the members was deeply anchored and co-operate responsibility enjoyed but where too suspicion and dispute could disrupt this stability it is now the religious community which promises the members security and where love instead of dispute and hatred is vigorously preached. The role of the big family goes over to the christian community.

5. The great inward joy and peace experienced and exuberantly expressed in outer manifestations during communal worship are interpreted by the members as a sure and indisputable sign of salvation. Their community is understood as in the traditional context as a common ground for neighbourhood feeling and nearness, communal concord and affective identification. The individual claims the community as his own and finds his identity through it. For the permanent members this is a great gain and for the non permanent ones, chiefly made up from the

³³ See HEALEY's impressions from his visits to Nigerian Churches, J. B. HEALEY, *Nigerian Odyssey: Encounters with the Spirit*, in: *America*, April 5 1975, 258

mission churches, whose churches they consider to have become tasteless and moribund and have "ceased to serve man's religious needs in a new situation, the new movement provides a thrust towards renewal or vitalization"³⁴.

Upon all the new and welcome religious and christian impacts the independent churches have made in Nigeria and Annang in particular, it seems to me that their understanding of salvation is very limited, being mostly confined to God's perceivable effects in their daily life. This is a point to which the independent churches should devote a more serious consideration. The vast drift of members from the historical churches to the independent ones, on the other hand, is a strong alarm signal to the former to check where immediate remedies could be needed.

³⁴ H. W. TURNER, *A New Field in the History of Religions*, in: *Religion: A Journal of Religion and Religions*, I (1) 1971, 16