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Religious Ferment among the Indians of British Guiana at the Turn of the 19th Century.

Aleksander Posern-Zieliński*

The history of socio-religious movements and syncretic cults of South American indigenous population continues to be insufficiently researched, save perhaps for the Andean region¹ and the territories inside Paraguay and Brazil.² Guiana, for one, has never held strong attraction for ethnohistorians, what with precious few sources available and the invariably serious obstacles encountered by all those trying to reach Indian communities living there. Up till 1960 when A. Butt published her article on the Indian syncretic religion Hallelujah,³ practically nothing had been heard of the transformations of traditional beliefs and outlooks taking place deep inside the interior of British Guiana and white missionaries' contribution thereto. But the article, regrettably, failed to arouse the interest of comparative analysts of socio-religious movements, even though some of them did acknowledge it in their bibliographies.⁴

To be sure, the ignoring of the evidence offered by the areas which, at the beginning of the 19th century, witnessed the early stages of the Protestant missionary drive does not add to our knowledge of the multifarious processes of acculturation and syncretisation which took place in South America. Hence, a reconstruction of the basic stages of transformation of the Guiana Indians' beliefs, provoked by

* Traducido del polaco por Jan Sęk

¹ A. Posern-Zieliński: *Ruchy społeczno-religijne Indian hiszpańskiej Ameryki Południowej XVI-XX w. [Social and Religious Movements of Indians in Spanish South America. 16th-20th Centuries]*, Wrocław 1974; J. M. Ossio A. (ed.): *Ideología mesiánica del mundo andino*, Lima 1973.

² First of all, the books by A. Metraux, C. Nimuendaju, E. Schaden and M. I. Pereira de Queiroz.

³ A. J. Butt: *The Birth of a Religion*, «The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland», Vol. 90, 1960, pp. 66-106.

⁴ See e.g. B. R. Wilson: *Magic and the Millennium. A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-World Peoples*, London 1973.

English-speaking colonisers and Protestant apostles of Christendom, seems to be very much in order. A new Indian religion, known as Hallelujah, was the outcome of these transformations. It took root among the Caribi-speaking tribes inhabiting the borderland of British Guiana, Venezuela and Brazil or, more precisely, the Arekuna, Taulebang and Makusi as well as Akawaio and Patamona Indians. Hallelujah was a creative combination of shamanistic practices and Protestant teaching. By attending such rituals as gatherings and dancing and singing fetes, as well as by building churches and helping to convert their heathen brethren, its followers gave expression to their nagging anxiety over the outcome of ever closer contacts with Christian civilisation they frantically tried to adopt as their own.

It is the intention of the author of this paper to shed some light on this little known chapter in the „non-Latin American” history of South American Indians and, by the same, token, to point to the peculiarities of the charismatic environment of the 19th century South Guiana - a country which was only very loosely connected with the British colonial system of the day. Among the hundreds of religious movements which have since then emerged anywhere in the world, the pride of place has invariably been held by those which came into being in the later phases of socio-economic changes. Such religions typify the so called periods of restructuring, whereby a new ideology helps an endangered cultural system regain equilibrium.⁵ However, the few examples offered by New Guinea (cargo cults)⁶ and South America (migratory movements of Tupi-Guaraní)⁷ seem to indicate that in some cases religious ferment caused by millenarian expectations left far behind the period of structural socio-cultural and politico-economic changes which were part and parcel of colonial

⁵ K.H. Schwerin: *The Mechanism of Culture Change* in: V. Goldschmidt, H. Hoiyer (eds): *The Social Anthropology of Latin America. Essays in Honor of Ralph Lean Beals*, «Latin American Studies», Vol. 14, Los Angeles 1970, pp. 285-286.

⁶ R. M. Berndt: *A Cargo Movement in the Eastern Central Highlands of New Guinea*, «Oceania», Vol. 23, 1952, pp. 40-65, 137-158.

⁷ A. Metraux: *Les Migrations historiques des Tupi-Guarani*, «Journal de la Société des Americanistes de Paris», Vol. 19, 1927, pp. 1-14; A. Posern-Zieliński: *Funkcje millenarystycznego mitu w ruchach społeczno-religijnych Tupi-Guarani* [The Functions of the Millenarian Myth in Socio-Religious Movements of Tupi-Guarani Indians], «Etnografia Polska», Vol. 16, fasc. 2, pp. 93-116.

conquest and European domination. The Indians of British Guiana fit in this pattern of special cases and, therefore, merit particular attention.

What is more, I intend to turn the spotlight on those precursory religious movements which blazed the trail for the syncretic Hallelujah cult towards the end of the last century. It is worth adding that this issue which is crucial to the understanding of the genesis of Hallelujah and its links with its ephemeral predecessors has not as yet been tackled.

The sources upon which I relied include reports by those few white travellers and missionaries who ventured into Southern Guiana in the 19th century. Interesting comparative material can also be found in a couple of research works, such as the one by A. Butt Colson⁸ containing the stenograms, of interviews, tape-recorded by the traveller C. Henfrey and offering insight into the oral tradition of the beginnings of Hallelujah.

But before we get down to the task of highlighting the results of the Christianisation of the Guiana Indians, let us recall in brief the most important developments antedating the first tidal wave of religious movements which surged forward in mid-19th century. Initially, the colonisation of Guiana was in the hands of private Dutch, English and French companies. These were very amicably disposed towards the Indians and did not intend to exploit native manpower, as was the case with Brazil. In the 17th century the Dutch established a new, symbiotic type of interethnic relationship with the Carib-speaking people, particularly so with the Akawaio groups inhabiting an area sandwiched in between the coast and the interior. This type of „special relationship” was aptly nicknamed „slave-hunting partnership” by J. Gillin⁹ as, in fact, it boiled down to the tracking down by the Indians of runaway plantation slaves who were handed back to their owners in exchange for goods of different kinds. This was conducive to the intensification of Indian-Dutch contacts which

⁸ A. Butt Colson: *Hallelujah among the Patamona Indians*, «Anthropologica», Vol. 28, Caracas 1971, pp. 25-58.

⁹ J. Gillin: *Tribes of the Guianas*, «Handbook of South American Indians», Vol. 3, Washington 1948, p. 818.

developed outside the tribal homelands with no basic interference in the life-styles of the native population.

In the eighth decade of the 18th century Great Britain joined in the struggle for the rights to colonial exploitation of Guiana. It ended in 1831 when the Dutch lost Western Guiana and a new British colony was established on what was then Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice.¹⁰ The change of administration had a dramatic impact on the life of the Indian.

The abolition of slavery put an end to the perquisites with which the Indians were awarded for their police-like services. Their status also changed when they ceased to be the heathen partners of slave owners to subsequently become potential Protestant converts. The advent of the English resulted in an intensification of mutual contacts, which still failed to assume meaningful proportions in the 19th century in the areas bordering on Brazil and Venezuela. Nevertheless, they sufficed to encourage the Indians, especially the Akawaio and Makusi to take up barter which they subsequently expanded by organizing trading expeditions to far-flung places on the Atlantic coast and/or the Orinoco.¹¹

On their part, white travellers, and particularly so the missionaries, ventured deep into the areas inhabited by the Caribs. Missionary work among the Indians was started in British Guiana in the 30-ties of the 18th century by the Moravian Brothers who operated along the border with Surinam. However, their views soon clashed with those of Dutch settlers and missionaries who had adopted a different policy line vis-a-vis the indigenous population and were anxious to maintain their influence thereon. In an attempt to stem the drive of the Moravian Brothers, the Dutch began to spread rumours that the real intention of the missionaries was to enslave the Indians. This psychological gimmick worked superbly and resulted in an Indian exodus from the missions. But this unquestionable setback did not kill the movement right away. In fact, representatives of this pietist religious order survived there up till the beginning of the 19th

¹⁰ R. Farley: *The Unification of British Guiana*, «Social and Economic Studies», Vol. 4, Jamaica 1955.

¹¹ T. Koch-Grünberg, G. Hiibner: *Die Makuschi und Wapishuina*. «Zeitschrift für Ethnologie», 1908, fasc. I, pp. 3-4.

century, braving the waves of epidemics which decimated their flock of neophytes and facing up to rebellious Negro slaves who put the torch to their centres. To sum up, it can be safely assumed that during Dutch rule the interior of the country was not covered by any missionary action of real consequence, and proselytic work in upper Berbice and Corantyn was narrow in scope.¹²

In the 20-ties of the 19th century, there appeared in Guiana Anglican missionaries, among others members of the Church Missionary Society, who began to operate primarily in the north of the country. In the south, in the Rupununi savannah bordering on Brazil, conversion work was also started by Catholic missionaries whose impact, however, was never great. The further development of the Anglican missions took place in the years 1833-1845 and coincided with the first signs of native religious movements among the Indians.

By mid-19th century about one third of British Guiana's native population had come under the permanent influence of missionaries representing all kinds of denominations.¹³ Not infrequently, the inhabitants of remote areas with no missions of their own, trekked to larger centres up north or visited those situated along the country's major rivers where some of them would stay for several months doing all kinds of work while others barterde their handicrafted products for European-made tools, weapons or pottery. Then they returned home bringing along, in addition to the afore-said products and newly-acquired experience, their own interpretation of new religious ideas. These aroused keen interest of their respective communities which had had no previous contact with the missionaries. It is interesting to note in this connection that the majority of leaders of religious movements, promoters of syncretic cults and native prophets had precisely that kind of background.¹⁴

¹² J. H. Bernau: *Missionary Labour in British Guiana with Remarks on the Manners, Customs and Superstitious Rites of the Aborigines*, London 1847, pp. 64-70.

¹³ L. A. Fainberg: *Iz istorii indeicev Britanskoj Gviany* in: *Gviana: Gaiana, Francuzskaja Gviana, Surinam*, Moskva 1969, pp. 79-80.

¹⁴ See M. Posern-Zielińska, A. Posern-Zieliński: *Charismatic Leader in American Indian Socio-religious Movements*, «Ethnologia Polona», Vol. 2, 1976, pp. 72-73. This is also confirmed by materials from other areas of South America.

Pastor Brett¹⁵ is the one to be thanked for the earliest known record of religious ferment which gripped the Indians of British Guiana. He deplored the kind of notoriety enjoyed by a „self-styled prophet” who was effectively neutralizing the missionaries’ influence upon the natives. The developments reported by Brett occurred in the years 1845-1846 and covered large areas of the country, although the activity of the new religious leader centred on the lands on the upper reaches of the Mazuruni river, inhabited by the Akawaio Indians. However, the news of him spread swiftly to the north of the country, brought there primarily by special emissaries who subsequently encouraged large numbers of Indians living in settlements along the Essequibo, Pomeron and even the Barima and Barama rivers to go on pilgrimage in order „to see God”.

Unfortunately, only scanty information is available on the contents of the new prophecies. We can only say that it combined the elements of millenarian hope for a better future and those of eschatological fear of imminent catastrophe. Those Indians who joined their charismatic leader believed they would soon become owners of wonder plots of land, all yielding bumper crops with gruelling tillage no longer required. All a man would have to do would be to plant just one sprout and then watch it grow and spread until it had covered the whole field. That would be a reward for all those who would obey the order of the Messiah and hurry to the place of his choice. Those who would not, would certainly perish in flames that would soon engulf the earth, or would drown during a flood. This catastrophic motif will have been made up of both the elements of native mythology and Christian ideas. It also arose from real-life experience of inhabitants, of jungle areas flooded by rivers, of or savannahs laid waste by huge fires during dry seasons.¹⁶

Who was the man whose call made large numbers of Indians forget their tribal differences and risk the hazards of migration to remote parts? Nobody knows that. Brett seems to intimate that he was not a native

¹⁵ V. H. Brett: *The Indian Tribes of Guiana. Their Conditions and Habits with Remarks into Their Past History, Superstitions, Legends, Antiquities, Languages etc.*, London 1868, pp. 180-182, 257-258; *idem*: *Legends and Myths of the Aboriginal Indians of British Guiana*, London (1891), p. 158.

¹⁶ E. Im Thurn: *Among the Indians of Guiana Being Sketches Chiefly Anthropologic from the Interior of British Guiana*, London 1883, pp. 372-375.

at all, and there is no evidence with which to refute this contention. He is known to have posed as Jesus Christ communicating to the Indians the will of his Heavenly Father. He also maintained that he had arrived from Heaven or that he was an envoy of Makunaima, a mythical culture hero of the Akawaio and Makusi Indians, who had already punished the earth with a deluge once in times immemorial.¹⁷ From this it follows that the character in question - who sounded like a prophet and a Messiah rolled into one - based his charisma on a syncretically conceived supranatural world, whereby Christ and Makunaima were viewed as one and the same deity. Curiously, R. Schomburgk's coverage of his own travels in the vicinity of the Roraima in the years 1840-1844, which corresponds both geographically and chronologically to the developments under analysis, seems to give substance to the above opinion. When asked about Makunaima, his Indian informant answered that he was „Jesus Christ”¹⁸ Koch-Grünberg¹⁹ maintains that the contamination of an indigenous hero and the Christian saviour was probably one result of the activities of English missionaries. The Indians of Southern Guiana were ignorant of the conception of Supreme Being which confronted the missionaries operating in the area at that time with a difficult task of translating this fundamental concept of Christianity into local languages and images.²⁰ Like in the case of Tupi-Guarani,²¹ here too the name of the mythical creator of men and animals became synonymous with Christian God.

By invoking alternately Christ and an indigenous hero, the Indian prophet appealed to both would-be converts who had arrived from areas penetrated by missionaries, and those Indians who had never come into closer contact with the Christian doctrine before. But still, this approach did not work and he suffered defeat. The pilgrims, who

¹⁷ T. Hilhouse: *Notices of the Indians Settled in the Interior of British Guiana*, «Journal of the Royal Geographic Society», vol. 2, 1832, p. 244.

¹⁸ H. Schomburgk: *Reisen in Britisch Guiana in den Jahren 1840-1844*, Leipzig 1848, vol.2, p. 254.

¹⁹ T. Koch-Grünberg: *Von Roraima zum Orinoco. Ergebnisse einer Reise in Norabasilien und Venezuela in den Jahren 1911-1913*, vol.2 (Mythen und Legenden der Taulipang und Arekuna Indianer), Berlin 1916, p. 5.

²⁰ E. W. Roth: *An Inquiry into Animism and Folklore of the Guiana Indians*, «Annual Report. Bureau of American Ethnology», Vol. 30, 1908/1909, Washington 1915, p. 117.

²¹ A. Metraux: *La religion des Tupinamba et ses rapports avec celle des autres tribus Tupi-Guarani*, Paris 1928, pp. 52-56.

had arrived to meet the prophet and have a taste of the promised era of bliss and plenty, never saw it materialise. They waited in their camps for months on end, singing, dancing and drinking „paiwari” (an alcoholic beverage made of manioc), these extatic rites tiding them over the moments of crisis. But then, food became scarce, and so the disillusioned Indians began to trek back home. A new, frantic, face-saving venture, embarked upon by the prophet who hoped to hold them back by handing them out scraps of paper purportedly, carrying a new magic message from the world above, failed as miserably, and the whole movement collapsed in shambles thereafter.

These data, modest as they are, still clearly indicate that Christ-Makunaima’s efforts had all the characteristic features of pacifist religious movements offering escapist programmes of reconstruction of the world, especially those started by the Tupinamba Indians on the Brazilian sea-coast back in the 16th and 17th centuries. However, unlike the others, it carried the seeds of an Indian version of Christianity which later became known as Hallelujah. These seeds could be identified as syncretism - a combination of traditional beliefs and imported ideas, anti-missionary accents neutralizing the influence of the English clergy and the elements of Carib pan-tribalism doing away with old prejudice among different indigenous groups. It is a pity we do not know anything about the movement’s attitude towards the white man and his civilisation. So it is only a matter of guess-work that on this score it resembled a movement of South Guiana which came into existence about the same time, that is in 1846.

Information on this particular subject was compiled by a German traveller, C. F Appun, who, acting upon orders from King Frederick William IV hacked his way through Brazilian jungles getting as far as Southern Venezuela and was the second European to reach the region of the Roraima inhabited by the Arekuna Indians,²²

²² F. Appun, *Unter den Tropen. Wanderungen durch Venezuela, am Orinoco, durch Britisch Guyana und Amazonestrome in den Jahren 1849-1868*, Jena 1871, vol. 2, pp. 257-264. Appun also says that his story was originally published by the periodical «Familienjournal» in 1869 (Nos. 14 -17), under the title *Der Zauberer von Beckerania*. The author of this paper tried hard to find the right editions thereof in many German libraries, including the Deutsche Bücherei, but the search proved inconclusive.

Schomburgk having been the first. During his travels Appun met a participant in the afore-said developments which had stirred up so many Indian communities. Although some 18 years had elapsed since then, the man remembered them fairly well and there were many details in his story. The English explorer of Guiana, Im Thurn, was sceptical about the latter as it was poles apart from his own experience. Nevertheless, he admitted that in his time he had heard Indians spin only too many versions of it.²³ Also the present-day analysis of the 1846 religious movement, while acknowledging the local cultural context and the regularities of similar movements elsewhere in America, seems to bow to the belief that the principal tenets of the story could not have been thought up by Appun, or by his Indian informants. Let us add that said relation has failed to attract the attention of scholars. Only Wallis and Schaden made brief references to it in their works.²⁴ The Polish traveller and writer Arkady Fiedler,²⁵ fitted Appun's story in his book on Guiana Indians but did not bother to comment on it.

The leader of the movement conceived at the foot of the „holy” mountain Roraima was a 25-year-old Indian named Awakaipu. He had the reputation of being a sorcerer and a shaman (*piai*). His biography brings to mind those of many other native Messiahs and prophets. He lived in Georgetown for some time where he came into contact not only with the English but also with coloured aliens (Negroes and Hindus). Several years before he had made himself known as the redeemer of his brethren, he had joined Richard Schomburgk's expedition as an oarsman. While in this capacity, the Indian tramp did not demonstrate any exceptional talents that would hint at a possibility of his subsequent rise to prophethood.²⁶ Having assumed the new role he exploited Indian beliefs and shamanistic practices when he maintained that he had communicated with Makunaima who had equipped him with extraordinary powers and

²³ E. Im Thurn: *op. cit.*, pp. 359-360.

²⁴ D. Wallis: *Messiahs: Christian and Pagan*, Boston 1918, p. 146.147; E. Schaden: *Aculturação indígena. Ensaio sobre fatóres e tendencias da mundança cultural de tribós indias am contacto com mundo dos brancos*, São Paulo 1965, pp. 238-239.

²⁵ A. Fiedler: *Spotkałem szczęśliwych Indian [I Have Met Happy Indians]*, Warszawa 1968, pp. 94-97.

²⁶ R. Schornburgk: *op. cit.*, pp. 38, 176.

foresight. This mythical being, worshipped by the Makusi, Akawaio and Arekuna Indians, and put on a par with Christian God by some natives, was hailed by the new movement as a supranatural protector of people, willing to guide them along and better their lot through the agency of his terrestrial plenipotentiary. The proximity of the holy Roraima mountain, believed by the Indians to be one of the more important earthly abodes of Makunaima, added to the attractiveness of the revelations Awakaipu preached in the name of their mythical benefactor.²⁷

Awakaipu, just as the anonymous prophet of the Akawaio, sent his emissaries scurrying throughout the land in an attempt to persuade the Carib Indians to leave their villages and go to the Roraima. They promised a, miracle-working agent which would provide them with some welcome features of white people if they did. This appeal fell on fertile soil. Members of hostile groups would forget their mutual prejudice and set out for the rallying point where they spent many nights on ritual drunken feasts, complete with singing and dancing. But first, psychological hurdles had to be surmounted for the Arekunas had until then lived in permanent conflict with their neighbours, the Akawaio, who, in turn, often fought the Makusi. On top of that, cross-country trekking over ethnically alien territories to remote destinations had always been regarded as exceptionally dangerous, if only because „*kanaima*” or „*edodo*” - as sorcerers from other tribes were called - were believed to be capable of casting charms on people, resulting in death or grave illness.²⁸ This time, however, the new attractive millenarian ideas neutralised the traditional prejudices and lessened the fear of black magic. But - Apun writes - those Indians who had earlier been converted to Christianity did not participate in the movement, which might be explained by the dearth of syncretic elements in it and the preponderance of traditional beliefs.

The crowds of Indians that converged on the Roraima mountain did not wait but took to the building of a settlement under the guidance of

²⁷ C. Barrington Brown: *Canoe and Camp Life in British Guiana*, London 1876, p. 276.

²⁸ A. J. Butt: *Ritual Blowing: "Taling" - A Causation and Cure of Illness among the Akawaio*, «Man», Vol. 56, 1956, pp. 51-53.

their spiritual leader. The name of the settlement - Beckeranta - contained a key to the understanding of Awakaipu's programme. It was a corrupt form of the Creole-Dutch word *beckeland*, meaning simply „the white man's land." A prophecy had it that Makunaima no longer wanted to stand by and watch idly white settlers drive Indians deeper into the forest. The deity also frowned upon the injustice of inequality between the Europeans, who enjoyed all the benefits of civilisation, and the natives who wanted to have them too. To improve the latter's chances, Makunaima decided to make the Indians equal, or even superior, to white people by changing the colour of their skin into white and giving them fire-arms in place of bows and arrows. Following this miraculous metamorphosis, only those Indians would have remained dark who had ignored the call of the prophet. The wretches would remain subordinated to the new *élite* of white Indians who would then proceed to deprive the European colonisers of their privileged status. Viewed in this context, Beckeranta was to have become the nucleus of a new, civilised, Indian Guiana.

In this prophecy one can distinguish elements of the so-called reversed segregation and exchange of social *rôle*, much in evidence in many socio-religious movements of Africa and the Pacific islands²⁹ but less frequently encountered in South America where Indian millenarian myths predicted the abolition of inequality through a victorious struggle of aboriginal demons with Christian God or, for that matter, a wholesale extermination of white people by such Heaven-sent calamities as deluge, pestilence, a plague of pests and a great fire of the earth. The Canela Indians of Brazil, on their part, expressed their longing for „civilisation" in a manner reminiscent of the followers of Awakaipu: in 1963, influenced by prophetic revelations they believed that white people would soon be driven deep into forests to lead the lives of subsistence hunters, leaving their towns, cars and planes to the Indians.³⁰ These two predictions are very much alike, although they are separated by well over a hundred years. True, the

²⁹ W. E. Mühlmann: *Chiliasmus und Nativismus. Studien zur Psychologie, Soziologie und historischen Kasuistik der Umsturzbewegungen*, Berlin 1961, pp. 307 – 312.

³⁰ E. Galvão: *Indians and Whites in the Brazilian Amazon*, "Zeitschrift für Ethnologie," Vol. 95, 1970, No.2, p. 225.

Carib-speaking Indians of British Guiana had never seen planes and cars - for obvious reasons. But still, rifles, steel knives, hatchets, looking-glasses and other European products of the day were well nigh as difficult to come by.

The desire to come into possession of these goods constituted a vital element of most of the programmes of salvation put forward by the Indian socio-religious movements east of the Andes. It was, in fact, convergent with the Melanesian concept of „cargo cults” containing pro-acculturative attitudes evident in the selective adaptation of elements of an alien culture. This trend was most pronounced wherever the cultures involved showed the greatest discrepancies in their levels of development.³¹ Such situations emerged even in the total absence of direct colonial domination, control and exploitation, Guiana and New Guinea being the cases in point. The awakened aspirations of the Indians, the confrontation of cultures and their material products and, last but not least, difficulty in obtaining the latter were all responsible for feeling of relative deprivation skilfully fanned by those individuals who themselves were to much larger extent exposed to acculturational stresses and frustrations generated by experience they had gained beyond the confines of their own culture. In this way, prophecies, born of the inferiority complex of an individual, stimulated collective dreams of the indigenous masses.³² There is no doubt that Awakaipu was one such individual.

The territories on which the Awakaipu inspired movement came into being were not in those days under direct colonial control. Neither were they exposed to systematic missionary activities. This notwithstanding, a considerable number of Indians living there penetrated the areas farther north where the situation of the indigenous populations was much worse due to the offensive launched by missionaries, who usually brought epidemics with them, and the gradual marginalization of the Indians, pushed deeper and deeper into the country by the tidal wave of white and coloured

³¹ A. Posern-Zieliński: *From Comparative Studies of the Socio-Religious Movements of the Indians in Spanish South America*, «Ethnologia Polona», Vol. 1, 1975, pp. 164-165.

³² W. La Barre: *The Dream, Charisma and the Culture Hero*, in: G.E. von Grunebaum, R. Cailliois (eds): *The Dream. in Human Societies*, Berkeley 1966, pp. 234-235.

immigrants.³³ The fear of similar developments in the interior also had a role to play in Awakaipu's movement, as evidenced by the imagery of the prophecies quoted above.

Both Awakaipu and his rival posing as Jesus Christ were using bits of paper as magical objects. Paper was a striking element of many religious movements of Guiana Indians, and therefore, merits more attention here. The pilgrims arriving at Beckeranta were handed bits of newspapers which Makunaima's earthly spokesman had probably received from Schomburgk. They believed that, in exchange for precious gifts they were bringing him, Awakaipu was thus equipping them with magic powers which would shield them against evil spells. Many years later Appun would meet Indians who were still keeping those tiny bits and scraps in their huts as if they were holy relics.³⁴

Unfortunately, nobody knows for sure what real meaning had been attached to shreds of printed paper back in the days of Awakaipu, but it seems that Hallelujah which came onto the scene a little later could offer some guidance in this matter. The adherents of his Indian version of Christianity regarded both the bits of newspaper and loose book pages as their own *Bible* which Bichiung, the first prophet of Hallelujah had received personally from God. They believed that, just as the Scripture of the white man had made him powerful, so would the Indian Bible, too, help the holders thereof to improve their lot. One cannot eliminate a hypothesis that it was the 19th century Anglican missionaries who were responsible for the emergence of this magic-like attitude among the natives towards a basic tenet of European civilisation. It is an established fact that in the 19th century they used their Indian agents to supply villages with illustrated church books to arouse the natives' curiosity and, consequently, attract them to the missions. Not without consequence, either, was importance attached by the missionaries to the *Bible* itself and the allegories it contained.³⁵ This the Indians saw and interpreted in their own way.

³³ F. Appun: *op. cit.*, quotes the demographic data for 1861 which testify to the presence there of as many as 150 thousand non-Indians and only 7 to 20 thousand natives.

³⁴ *Ibidem*: pp. 197-198, 265.

³⁵ A. J. Butt: *The Birth of a Religion ...*, p. 83; A. Butt Colson: *op. cit.*, p. 34.

Makunaima, speaking through his prophet, also laid down the conditions which had to be met for the prophecy to be fulfilled. To bring about racial metamorphosis, the Indians were told to kill one another first. Then they would rise from the dead as white people. Awakaipu was initially successful with the first, gruesome part of the prophecy. To set a good example - Appun says - he killed several of his companions during one drunken feast causing a veritable bloodbath which cost the lives of some 400 people. This figure may be inflated which still does not diminish the horror of the incident itself. The other Indians together with their leader vainly waited for a resurrection of the slain for two weeks. Then they turned their weapons against Awakaipu killing him on the spot. After these tragic developments the wave of religious ferment began to subside and the disillusioned Indians returned to their tribal homelands.

The tragic epilogue of the 1846 events seems to be an isolated case. Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that this part of Appun's story was well grounded in fact as well. The history of religious movements offers ample evidence of self-annihilation as a form of soteric technique - even if they were extreme cases. Suffice it to mention the Russian 17th century chiliasts who committed self-immolation,³⁶ or the 16th century Peruvian extatic movement, named Taki Ongoy, whose members jumped from high rocks or threw themselves into rivers³⁷ to accelerate their deliverance from the grip of earthly evil. Some instances of collective suicide motivated by belief in prompt resurrection have also been quoted recently by missionaries working in New Guinea.³⁸

Although they differed in the use of soteric techniques, the two religious movements presented above, demonstrate a remarkable quantity of common traits. The passive expectation of an imminent cataclysm, followed by a reconstruction of the world along new lines, demonstrated by the former, Awakaipu replaced in the latter with the

³⁶ E. Sarkisyanz : *Russland und der Messianismus des Orients*, Tübingen 1955, p. 74 ff.

³⁷ C. de Molina: *Relación de las fabulas y ritos de los Incas*, in: *Colección de los libros y documentos referentes a la historia del Peru*, vol. 1, Lima 1916, pp. 99 -101.

³⁸ T. Dworecki (ed.): *Z kraju kamiennej siekiery. Misjonarze werbiści w Nowej Gwinei 1910-1973* [*From the Land of the Stone Axe Polish SVD Missionaries about New Guinea 1910-1973*], Warszawa 1975, p. 217.

act of self-annihilation which, being a kind of transition rite, was supposed to lead chosen Indians into a new role-reversal world. But both these movements were driven along by one and the same motive power, namely, the vision of a happy world of bumper crops and white civilisation goods accessible to all Indians. And the best way of opening this new period of the natives' history was by obeying the call of the prophets and migrating to the rallying points to attend extatic singing and dancing gatherings. The latter were so deeply rooted in the cultural tradition of the Indians inhabiting this part of America that practically no important social developments within the community were deemed valid without them. Equal weight was attached to dancing which was practiced by many religious movements as a magical means of attaining millenarian goals.³⁹ The Guaraní Indians who hoped to reach a mythical „Land without Evil”⁴⁰ are a good case in point.

Although Awakaipu failed miserably, the Indians kept alive their hope of toppling the white man one day and taking his place at the top. This also bore the reflection of their own conception of posthumous metamorphosis, whereby a dead man shed his skin in a snake-like fashion to come back to life wearing a new one. The idea of transmigration of the soul was also of no small importance. In the years 1877-1879 Im Thurn on many occasions spoke with Indians who harboured delusive hope that after death their souls would enter the bodies of white people.⁴¹ Barrington Brown's report corroborates this. In 1871 his native guides told him that the dwellers of settlements situated east of the Ireng river, i.e. the Makusi and Akawaio Indians, were undergoing strange metamorphosis. They said the people in question „were turning white and in time would be white people.”⁴² It is highly probable that this report echoed the birth of Hallelujah whose first advocates operated precisely there and then.

³⁹ R. Karsten: *Studies in the Religion of the South-American Indians East of the Andes*, Helsinki 1964, pp. 115-116; A. Metraux: *Religion and Shamanism*, «Handbook of South American Indians», Vol. 5, Washington 1949, p. 584.

⁴⁰ C. Nimuendajú (Unkel): *Die Sagen von der Erschaffung und Vernichtung der Welt als Grundlagen der Religion der Apapocuva-Guarani*, «Zeitschrift für Ethnologie», Vol. 46, 1914, pp. 284-403.

⁴¹ E. Im Thurn: *op. cit.*, p. 359; E. W. Roth: *op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁴² C. Barrington Brown: *op. cit.*, p. 281.

This story is borne out by the tradition of the Akawaio prophet Abel who was active during the last two decades of the 19th century. Abel was the local founder and leader of Hallelujah on the ethnic territories of the said Indian group. During one „visit” to Heaven his soul paid while he was asleep God told him that the Indians would soon be rewarded for their dedication to Hallelujah with European arms, dress tools, food and even women⁴³; in other words, they would become white masters themselves. The idea of reversed segregation first voiced by Awakaipu surged back to life there as. Eloquent proof of the Indians’ genuine desire to have their own religion - and, more important, one equal to that of the white man which would secure for them change in both their cultural and interethnic situation.

Apart from the idea of reversed segregation, catastrophism was also a lasting element of the 19th century religious movements of the Guiana Indians. Prophecies, bringing to mind those of Christ-Makunaima of 1846, were voiced a quarter century later by another Roraima Indian. Barrington Brown wrote about a northbound pilgrimage in 1869 from Serra Pacaraima in what is Brazil today to see „an Indian sorcerer [...] who had the power of making [...] invisible at will.”⁴⁴ Two years later the same (probably) „sorcerer” still enjoyed immense prestige among the Indians, drawing like a magnet the crowds desirous of witnessing extraordinary events and fearful of a deluge and other calamities which were to come in the wake of an imminent arrival of whites. It is quite probable that Appun met this character in that region in 1864. the Akawaio’s name was Manuel and he spoke English which he had learnt during his stay at the sea-coast. Later, he rose to prominence as an influential shaman. It is interesting to note that he displayed a strong aversion to white explorers, urging Indians to give up barter with the strangers.⁴⁵ This characteristic of Manuel corresponds well with the Guiana model of spiritual leader who owes his high prestige in a traditional

⁴³ A. J. Butt: *The Birth of a Religion*..., pp. 82-83.

⁴⁴ C. Barrington Brown: *op. cit.*, pp. 119, 283-285. The “*kanaimas*” - sorcerers practicing black magic - were usually credited with the ability of making themselves invisible at will. See J. Gillin: *The Barama River Caribs of British Guiana*, in: *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*, Cambridge, Mass., 1936, p. 150.

⁴⁵ F. Appun: *op. cit.*, p. 213.

community to his knowledge and experience gained among the whites which he subsequently uses against them fully convinced that the European's cultural and social preponderance is an evil that can be expeditiously dealt with by making a recourse to magic and religious means. One can also infer from these shreds of information that the Roraima sorcerer also promised the Indians to spare them from annihilation which was clearly awaiting the white intruders and all those natives who had dared to turn a deaf ear to the prophecy. Let us add at this point that some catastrophic elements were also evident in Hallelujah after 1910, but they were of little consequence and could be traced back to the Seventh Day Adventists and their chiliastic ideology - whose influence had just began to show - rather than native tradition.⁴⁶

The afore-said examples of religious movements which came into being in the second half of the 19th century point to a relationship of some of their elements with Hallelujah which let us stress it, was conceived in an atmosphere of charismatic exaltation created both by millenarian slogans of the former age and the growing propaganda effort of Protestant missionaries. More about this relationship below.

Between mid-19th century and the beginning of the 20th century there emerged in Guiana a specific type of reaction to culture contact, known in literature as „mass movements” and „crowd-psychological movements”. It was little more than the zeal of Indian groups to embrace Christianity, displayed in anticipation of an arrival of missionaries. This sudden interest in Christian faith and a steep rise in the number of natives being taught at missions was noted in many parts of the Third World. In their naïve proselytic enthusiasm the missionaries believed that the natives were thus responding to the call of God who assisted them in the conversion of the heathens. They only failed to take note of the fact that „these masses of people usually belong[ed] to the simpler culture groups, the lower classes, the poor, the oppressed, and the ostracised”⁴⁷ in other words to those

⁴⁶ F. V. Kenswil: *Children of the Silence*, Georgetown 1946, pp. 14 -15, quoted after A. J. Butt: *The Birth of a Religion...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.

⁴⁷ H. M. T. Price: *Christian Missions and Oriental Civilizations. A Study in Culture Contact. The Reactions of non-Christian Peoples to Protestant Missions from the Standpoint of Individual and Group Behavior: Outline, Materials, Problems and Tentative Interpretations*, Shanghai 1924, p. 394.

categories of people who would go out of their way to change their plight hoping that the new religion, brought to them by the alien people, would help them but of their predicament. This hope produced the millenarian slogans of the day which, in consequence, could be used by both the missionaries' enemies - as proved by the majority of socio-religious movements in the colonies - and their friends. The striving for an adoption of a totally alien religion also testified to a drop of native culture values, which revolutionary change and innovation were expected to halt.⁴⁸

One Indian manifestation of adherence to a „mass movement” was expectation of an arrival of missionaries combined with belief in visions of a happy life, often inspired by prophetic dreams featuring a man holding a black book in his hand.⁴⁹ Desirous of speeding up the advent of this glorious moment, Indian communities sent out messengers to the nearest missions asking the *domini* to come and join them in their villages. *Domini* was the 19th century Guianan vernacular word for Christian clergymen.⁵⁰ Travellers and explorers were also approached for help in this regard. Such a situation was recorded by, among others, Im Thurn towards the end of the eighteen seventies, who also covered preparations made by the inhabitants of one Indian settlement on the Potaru (a tributary of the Essequibo) for the arrival of missionaries. They intended to put up a church, obviously designed to resemble traditional communal house, in which to celebrate their own rites, with *paiwari* galore,⁵¹ in expectation of the *domini*.

The initiative quoted above - instantly bringing to mind practices of New Guinea cargo cult followers, notorious for their building of warehouses, air strips and or ports in their places of domicile - was by no means an isolated case in Guiana, as evidenced by the Indians living on the banks of the Barama river. These people also built houses for missionaries and sent out their emissaries to them with the

⁴⁸ A. Posem-Zieliński : *Tendencias conservadoras y revolucionarias indígenas. Los movimientos social-religiosos en las comunidades indígenas marginales del siglo XX en Sudamerica*, «Estudios Latinoamericanos», Vol. 2, 1974, pp. 96 -103.

⁴⁹ R. H. Pierson, J. O. Emmerson: *Paddles over the Kameronang*, n.d., p. 32.

⁵⁰ R. Schomburgk: *op. cit.*, p. 515.

⁵¹ E. Im Thurn: *op. cit.*, p. 79.

express purpose of bringing them back there but, when all these efforts and long waiting proved- inconclusive, they began to trek to the missions to be initiated in the new religion there (1846 and 1863).⁵² But the story does not end there. Attempts at imitating some religious practices and the building of churches can be quoted as yet another proof of an interest Indians displayed in Christian faith. When the only preacher who lived amongst the Makusi in the eighteen forties left his flock, they took over his functions, delivering sermons and finding many other ways of giving local image to Christianity⁵³. One cannot rule out the possibility that a similar process gave rise to the native Hallelujah cult which, while undergoing development and expanding over wide areas of the country, worked out its own, genuine forms of worship.

Let us stop for a while now to think of the motives behind such apparently irrational behaviour. Although these look religious at the first glance, a more careful scrutiny reveals their cultural and social background. Indians were pushed towards change by their growing awareness of cultural inferiority. Therefore, they treated conversion to Christianity as a magical move helping to bridge the gap between themselves and white people. The Indians of British Guiana whose about only white connections were missionaries, clearly associated the world of European civilisation, the white man's cultural supremacy, his high social prestige and power, with Christian faith in which they saw a key to the satisfaction of their new material needs, inseparably linked with the new life-styles advocated by the missions. Significantly, the missionaries themselves approached the issue in a similar way: for them the infinitive „to convert” meant simply „to civilise,” to transform naked and savage pagans into docile and obedient neophytes moulded on the cut-and-dried patterns of Euro-American culture.⁵⁴ Another factor which helped trigger off the religious ferment of such proportions was the religious propaganda of Protestant preachers who frequently invoked

⁵² W. H. Brett: *op. cit.*, pp. 234, 260.

⁵³ C. A. Lloyd: *Stray Notes from Pirara*, «Timehri», Vol. 9, 1895, p. 232, quoted after A. J. Butt: *The Birth of a Religion...*, 85.

⁵⁴ R. F. Berkhofer Jr: *Salvation and the Savage. An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response 1787-1862*, University of Kentucky Press, 1965, pp. 5-10.

suggestive biblical case-points for native consumption. Reinterpreted by the Indians, the stories kindled their faith in an anticipation of imminent changes in their lives.

The years 1840-1870 saw a vigorous development of Anglican missions on the sea-front and along the main rivers of Guiana. Their impact on the vast expanses of the interior, however, was anything but strong. Their deployment, precluding easy fanning' out across the land, and hence the impossibility to meet half-way the growing „social demand” for missionaries, made contact with the *domini* an attractive proposition. Eagerness with which Christianity was being embraced back in those days can also be attributed, in part, to the collapse of the traditional religious authority of the shamans who cut sorry figures in the new interethnic situation, unable to face up to it or operate within its structural framework in a way acceptable to their erstwhile followers. Let us also remember that some Indian groups migrating to missions had earlier upheld the ill-fated prophets and messiahs whose fall and the concomitant fiasco of their auguries may also have precipitated the Indians' decision to shelve their indigenous prophets in preference of their European rivals who, complete with their ideas, projected the image of the entire power and prestige of an alien folk.

All these factors combined to create a charismatic milieu which assisted both the expansion of the new syncretic aboriginal religion and the Seventh Day Adventists as well as that of akin denominations operating in British Guiana since the beginning of the 20th century.⁵⁵ The would-be converts whose thirst for change in status remained unquelled, or who were disappointed by what they saw in the missions, became the natural allies of Hallelujah which, by establishing links between traditional cult forms and the Indian interpretation of Christianity, psychologically put the natives on a par with the whites. If anything, it made a mechanism of compensation. And so we come face to face with a significant evolution of social

⁵⁵ The Adventists were highly successful in Guiana which had been swept by religious ferment before their actual arrival. Things looked different in Peruvian Montana. The Adventist millenarism coupled with the crisis of the socio-cultural situation there, gave rise to a native religious movement. See J. H. Bodley: *A Transformative Movement among the Campa of Eastern Peru*, «Anthropos», Vol. 67, 1972, pp. 220-228.

forms of religious manifestation, correlated chronologically with the progress of exploration and colonisation of the country's interior. The incipient millenarian movements founded upon traditional beliefs, gradually concede ground to mass espousal of Christianity, replaced, in turn, by an aboriginal, syncretic religion. This kind of regularity can also be observed in Toba Indians inhabiting Argentine Chaco who, having found themselves under the influence of the religious propaganda of Pentecostals conceived a syncretic denomination known as *cultos evangelicos*.⁵⁶

In the second half of the 19th century the Indians of British Guiana demonstrated two parallel attitudes towards Christian missions. One could be defined as a mass drive to adopt the new faith as a precondition of achieving equality with the whites. The other was anti-missionary reaction bolstered by conviction that the white man's religion was no good for the Indian.⁵⁷ Hallelujah was a synthesis of these opposing attitudes: one could trace in it both a desire to become a Christian, and a resentment against missionary control. A poorly developed network of missions helped the new religion gain momentum, and the emissaries of the syncretic cult made headway among those people who were out of the reach of English and/or American preachers.

Butt maintains that Hallelujah's germination period occurred in the years 1845 -1885, although the period between 1880 and 1910 must be viewed as crucial for its formation and subsequent success. So, in real terms, this period ushered in the second phase of the activity of Anglicans, Adventists and also Catholics deep inside Guiana,⁵⁸ although the Catholics' efforts were of little consequence really. It was back in those days that the first account was written of a new, strange, religious ecstasy the natives living at the foot of the Roraima would go into when on Christmas Day in 1884. Im Thurn actually saw them start a drinking *fiesta* culminating in the cries of „Hallelujah, Hallelujah”. These were uttered when darkness enshrouded the peaks of the mountain. Im Thurn also noted that the

⁵⁶ E. S. Miller: *The Argentine Toba Evangelical Religious Service*, «Ethnology», Vol. 10, 1971, No.2, pp. 149-159.

⁵⁷ W. H. Brett: *op. cit.*, p. 177.

⁵⁸ A. J. Butt: *The Birth of a Religion...*, p. 98.

Indians were „under the influence of a most remarkable ecclesiastical mania.”⁵⁹ And although he did not realise that he was watching a new Indian religion in action, his account seems to indicate that by the mid-eighties of the past century the word „Hallelujah” had assumed a symbolic, magical connotation, that traditional rites were held on Christian holidays and that they were attended by people inhabiting the areas around the „holy” Roraima. About a quarter century later the German traveller Koch-Grünberg also noticed that the natives living there enjoyed their new dances called „Alleluya” which - forcing out old dances – were winning popularity among the Makusi and Taulebang Indians. Like his predecessor, Koch-Grünberg caught a glimpse of only the outer layer of the new aboriginal religion, making record of the form of the dances and the syncretic nature of the songs - all based on Anglican church chant that accompanied them.⁶⁰ Six years later, in 1917, to be exact, missionary Cary-Elwes was surprised to find that in the villages strung out along the Ireng river „all the inhabitants were Alleluiates,”⁶¹ thus giving another confirmation of the existence of the new religion.

These modest historical data supplemented by the reconstruction of the routes of Hallelujah’s advance, made by Butt who had drawn on the oral tradition of its followers, point to a great deal of interest displayed by the Indians in the new religion, and the undisguised enthusiasm of the initial years of its existence. Suffice it to say that the places where Hallelujah prophets and leaders lived and worked attracted delegations of far-flung communities willing to learn and carry back home the principles of the new religion, its unfamiliar dances and songs. This also explains how the groups which had never before been in direct contact with missionaries came under the influence of this syncretic religion.⁶²

These facts resemble progress made by some of the cargo cults in New Guinea, whose popularity sometimes antedated the natives’ first,

⁵⁹ E. Im Thurn: *Roraima*, "Timehri. Journal of the Royal Agriculture and Commercial Society" (Georgetown), 1885, part 2, p. 266.

⁶⁰ T. Koch-Grünberg: *op. cit.*, Berlin 1916, vol. 1, pp. 63-64; Stuttgart 1923, vol. 3, pp. 161-162.

⁶¹ C. Cary-Elwes: *MS*, ch. 29, pp. 562-565, quoted after A. Butt Colson: *op. cit.* p. 30.

⁶² A. J. Butt: *The Birth of a Religion...*, pp. 76, 88, 97.

direct and permanent contact with white people. It also seems likely that in the early stages of its success, Hallelujah was on many counts imitative of Christian practices. This was particularly true of its external forms which made it resemble „mass movements”. On the other hand, there were some rudiments of millenarian ideology inherent in it, drawing upon the principles of earlier religious movements. As the interethnic contacts developed and grew in intensity, the Indians became increasingly aware of their own social position; they saw themselves dominated by white people and threatened with marginalization. This reflection became an integral part of the „doctrine” of Hallelujah, a religion through which the aborigines - as Butt Colson rightly observed – „express their identity and cohesion as people with specific culture and tradition of their own to be proud of. Also through Hallelujah they are confident that they have a place in the world [...]”⁶³ These reflections were accompanied by elements of Christian biblical lore and Protestant religious practices as well as a whole host of animistic-shamanistic images, ideas and patterns of behaviour.

Such a syncretic composition did away with the barrier separating ancient Indian beliefs from alien Christianity whose missionary version was regarded with hostility by many adherents of Hallelujah. Preri Bashi, the female leader of the new cult among the Arekunas, preached in the first years of this century that Indians should avoid missionaries and stick to their own religion.⁶⁴ Yet another prophet urged them not to rely on the Bible whose teachings they could not grasp. They should have their own Holy Scripture instead – the argument ran - consisting of bits of newspapers and pages torn out of books. Followers of Hallelujah often demonstrated their dislike of missionaries by persuading the new converts to leave the missions, and by spreading propaganda aimed at alienating missionaries in their respective regions. Opposition against the latter was also fuelled by the assumptions of Hallelujah’s doctrine which projected it as the only religion received directly from God. The new faith successfully neutralised the missionaries’ prestige by claiming that they worked to

⁶³ A. Butt Colson: *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁶⁴ F. W. Kenswil: *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

the aborigines' detriment by refusing to share with them their secret knowledge of God and barring them from contact with Heaven which the Indians viewed as the fountain-head of life-giving vigour.⁶⁵ That was where the white people drew their power and superior qualities from. Small wonder, then, that they did not want to share it all with the Indians. Hallelujah, for a change, flung the gates of Heaven wide open to its faithful, imbuing them with spiritual stamina and holding for them a promise of material success. But not to forfeit that chance, the Indians should adopt the missionaries' ways, in other words they should closely guard the secrets handed down to them by supernatural forces. Should they neglect this duty, white people will rob them again, as they did in the past, of their knowledge of English, thus barring them access to their secrets.⁶⁶

These injunctions are a mysticised attempt by the Indians at explaining away their own position as a dominated and incapacitated people. They also betray their desire to discredit the white man in order to bolster their own self-esteem, as evidenced by instances of equipping their ancestors with the same tenets of European culture (e.g. religion, language). This, again, brings to mind cargo cult followers who were convinced that European goods had in fact been produced by their ancestors in remote lands, and were subsequently and deceitfully taken from them by white people. Many of the examples quoted above echo pronouncements of leaders of the millenarian type religious movements which seems to be another proof of Hallelujah's kinship with its ephemeral predecessors.

Continuous search for a place in the world was what Hallelujah was all about, whereas the new type of religious leadership eliminated alien sacral mediators, i.e. missionaries, standing between the worshippers and the world above. The new leaders usually built their authority on personal contacts with white people which in most cases had been established far from the areas of their subsequent activity. They were innovators and reformers, skilfully combining native and foreign, Christian and shamanistic elements. In real terms, they were

⁶⁵ A. J. Butt: *The Burning Fountain Whence It Come. A Study of the System of Beliefs of the Carib-Speaking Akawaio of British Guiana*, «Social and Economic Studies» (Jamaica University Coll.), vol. 2, 1954, No.1, p. 8.

⁶⁶ *Idem: The Birth of a Religion...*, pp. 82-83.

Christian shamans and nothing else, wielding a wide array of traditional methods of contacting „sacrum.”⁶⁷ Some of them would start off as *piai* or shamans and would later grow to become leaders of the new cult.⁶⁸ In this respect they did not differ from leaders of the cults which anteceded the hey-day of Hallelujah. In the meantime, however, the success of the new religion imperilled the position of both the missionaries and the shamans who were holding on to tradition. The former put the fear of infernal suffering into the hearts of the Indians, the latter invoked black magic to drive the point home. It is interesting to note that the followers of Hallelujah were convinced that their first leaders and prophets had perished when the hostile *kanaimas* had cast spells on them.⁶⁹

The syncretic nature of Hallelujah stands out clearly in the type of their religious experience and cult forms. Contact with the deity is established during sleep when the soul passes from earth to Heaven to receive instructions and magical items (wonder seedlings, medicines, the Indian Bible, etc.). This way of maintaining contact with the „sacrum” typifies the Guianan-Amazonian culture circle in which dream experiences not infrequently determined the real activity of Indians.⁷⁰ Neither would Hallelujah have been -an aboriginal religion without dances and songs. True, the missionaries had helped stamp out such habits as drunken feasts among the Indians who themselves took a stern line against these ancient forms of worship, viewing them as harmful and even conducive to loss of Hallelujah.⁷¹ But apart from this, new rituals were firmly rooted in past practices. The preservation of traditional traits in Hallelujah made this complex of beliefs an attractive native religion, in fact, added considerably to Hallelujah’s image making the Indians independent of missionaries and helping them eliminate inferiority

⁶⁷ *Idem: Réalité et idéal dans la pratique chamanique*, «L’Homme», Vol. 2, 1962, No. 3, pp. 21-24; A. Metraux: *Le shamanisme chez les Indiens de l’Amérique du Sud Tropicale*, II, «Acta Americana», Vol. 12, 1944, No.4, pp. 335-341.

⁶⁸ C. H. de Goeje: *Philosophy, Initiation and Myths of the Indians of Guiana and Adjacent Countries*, «Archives Internationales d’Ethnographie», Vol. 44, 1943, p. 85.

⁶⁹ J. A. Butt: *The Birth of a Religion...*, pp. 79, 82, 91.

⁷⁰ C. Nimuendaju: *The Tukuna*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1952, p. 105.

⁷¹ C. Henfrey: *The Gentle People*, London 1964, pp. 127-129.

complexes developed during the missionary colonisation of the interior of Guiana.

A similar view was expressed by Henfrey who observed the first symptoms of crisis of Hallelujah, brought about by the Adventist offensive on the one hand, and by the loss of faith in the effectiveness of the Indian religion - which in real terms had changed nothing in the situation of the natives - on the other.⁷² The Soviet scholar, Fainberg, clearly overrated the impact of Hallelujah when he found it to have been a messianic form of the national liberation movement.⁷³ Although there is no denying the fact in its first, formative phase, Hallelujah was a socio-religious movement, drawing on a whole host of earlier Indian anticolonial actions, we must also admit that its millenarian impact soon began to wane, giving way to religious rites and spiritual contacts with Heaven.⁷⁴ Hence, putting Hallelujah alongside the Evangelic cults pursued by the Toba Indians of Argentina, or the North American peyotism, seems more in order than comparing it with the escapist movements of the Tukuna Indians of Brazil – the mistake made by the aforementioned author. For the first three cases fit neatly in the same category of syncretic Indian religions, compensatory in nature, and sectarian in structure.

To round off this paper, let me recapitulate some of its general conclusions. First of all, I tried to prove that syncretic Hallelujah religion did not surface in Guiana all of a sudden, and by accident, in the wake of its first prophet's successes. I established that it was produced by religious ferment that embraced the Carib-speaking tribes inhabiting the interior of Guiana, as early as mid-19th century. Moreover, that ferment assumed different forms. The most important of them were the escapist movements preaching transformation of existing interethnic setups, and the „mass movements” striving for speedy conversion to Christianity as a precondition of the socio-cultural advancement of the Indians. One should observe here the

⁷² *Idem: Through Indians Eyes. A Journal among the Tribes of Guiana*, New York 1965.

⁷³ L. A. Fainberg: *Indeicy Brazili. Očerki socialnoy i etničeskoj istorii*, Moskva 1975, p. 133.

⁷⁴ This is a general regularity of the evolution of the millenarian myth. See M. Posern-Zielińska: *Soteric Theories in Ideologies of Politico-Religious Movements of the North American Indians*, «Ethnologia Polona», Vol. 1, 1975, pp. 171-187.

conspicuous absence of armed movements of any kind aimed against the domination of the white man. There is an explanation of this. First, the specific interethnic contacts in Guiana were to all intents and purposes confined to missions, whereas the little headway made by colonisers offered practically no opportunities for exploitation of the Indians in their places of domicile. Second, the continuity of religious movements among them in the 19th century, taking place invariably in the same area, produced a charismatic environment ensuring the success of both the leaders of Hallelujah and Adventist missionaries who offered their Indian flocks an attractive vision of salvation, admitting new converts to full participation in ritual events.⁷⁵ Third, it turned out that relative deprivation - usually a corollary of sudden crises of values, military setbacks, economic depressions, excessive exploitation and other such phenomena - can also break to the surface as a force capable of starting up a religious movement in the conditions of only superficial contact with civilisation which, although unquestionably superior in material terms, is still wanting effective instruments of control over the indigenous population. Missions and the Indian trekkings to the „centres of civilisation” were the principal sources of information on the strength and value of the culture of the colonisers. They stimulated the natives’ aspirations which, unsatisfied, made a good hatching ground for inferiority complex resulting in dreamland striving for emancipation. Fourth, it was proved once again that in the 19th and 20th centuries, the areas exposed to the influence of Protestant missions offered much better opportunities for the emergence of native syncretic religions than the territories covered by the activities of Catholic missions. There are many examples from Africa and North America to bear this out, and South America also provides some telling cases in point (British Guiana, Argentinian Chaco, the upper tributaries of the Rio Negro in Brazil, Gran Pajonal in Peru).⁷⁶ The scope of this paper precludes speculation on the

⁷⁵ For a critical appraisal of the Adventists’ success see A. Fiedler: op. cit., pp. 81-160. While in Guiana in 1964-1965 he visited the areas controlled by missionaries and wrote: "Adventists [...] have produced a new type of Indians on the banks of the Kamarang river: schizophrenic, hypocrite and incredible, split-personality actors [...]", p. 102.

⁷⁶ A. Posern-Zieliński: *From Comparative Studies* p. 163.

essence of differences and similarities existing between the respective Catholic and Protestant backgrounds to native religious movements, evident in their formative periods. The whole issue invites extensive research work, for little has been written on the subject so far. May I only say at this point that the success of Protestant missions representing different pietistic and chiliastic denominations, and their connection with aboriginal religious movements were primarily their reward for giving the Indians an attractive model of religious experience and a suggestive vision of salvation. The acceptance of both, and the enrichment thereof by native elements helped to take the heat out of psycho-social tensions which were caused by interethnic inequality and cultural differences.