

PREFACE

Dr. Sundkler has rendered missionary work in South Africa a signal service by his study of the Bantu separatist churches. It is a subject on which much is known in loose terms, but little with any accuracy. Here we have the facts set out before us in a spirit which is critical in the best sense of the term, objective, and full of a kindly understanding such as the subject undoubtedly merits. There are elements in the life of some of the Bantu separatist churches which are not Christian in any normally accepted sense of the word—there are elements of true faith and vision. It is doubtful whether any human being can wholly separate the wheat from the tares in this luxuriant field of religious activity, but Dr. Sundkler has done his best.

It is clear from the study which follows that nationalism plays a great part in Bantu separatist church organization and that the spirit of separatism, in spite of quite sincere attempts at union, is very strong. European Christianity in South Africa must face the fact that it is partly responsible for these phenomena. There has been a strong element of nationalism in certain fields of European Christianity and an emphasis on denominational differences which has done harm. It is probable that the very area which Dr. Sundkler surveys so thoroughly is, if one may coin a word, the most over-denominationalized missionary area in Africa. To-day the spirit of comity and co-operation has gone a long way to remove differences between missions. They still exist, but the unedifying competitiveness which was to be found in some areas in the past has been greatly lessened. Europeans none the less must bear their share of the responsibility for a good deal of the separatist church movement and, even when separation has sprung from worldly motives of hurt pride or ambition, it is to be remembered that European missionary superintendents have not infrequently, through an overbearing manner or through lack of understanding and imagination, contributed to secession.

So far I have spoken of separatist churches, but Dr. Sundkler rightly speaks of "independent Bantu churches", reminding us that not all the denominations which are studied have their origin in secession from established missionary churches. Not only in independent churches, but also in those which in their origin were separatist, there are elements which spring, not

PREFACE

from the faults and defects of European missionary work, but from the desire of the Zulu people to find some synthesis between their own tribal religion and Christianity. Dr. Sundkler's researches into this side of the movement are among the most interesting parts of his book.

I should not, of course, like to commit myself to every opinion or conclusion of the author, but I should like to pay tribute, in closing, to the spirit in which he has written; not merely an unbiased scientific spirit, but a spirit which shows true kindness, a positive attitude and a sympathetic understanding of Zulu ideas and aspirations.

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