

ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND MISSIONARIES: BROTHERS UNDER THE SKIN

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This article explores the ambiguous relationship between anthropologists and missionaries, both in their work and in their writings. It describes, first, the well-known stereotypes by which anthropologists and missionaries are opposed, as conservers *v.* converters, doubters *v.* knowers, and listeners *v.* preachers, and then discusses some striking similarities which have been largely ignored, if not suppressed, particularly by anthropologists. Anthropologists act like missionaries in spreading the beliefs of their discipline and interpreting other religions in terms of their own faith. A further similarity gives missionaries an advantage over anthropologists: they stay longer among 'their' people, have a better command of the language and are likely to become more integrated into the communities in which they work. It is suggested that the rejection of these hidden similarities by most anthropologists leads to further strains in their relationship with missionaries.

Metaphysical issues underpin most if not all scientific work (Jarvie 1984: 3).

Nun sag, wie hast du's mit der Religion? (Faust I, vs 3415)

The relationship between anthropologists and missionaries is ambivalent, uneasy and fraught with contradictions. This article examines the background of that relationship. The immediate reason for writing it is somewhat autobiographical. Before I became an anthropologist, I spent about one and a half years as a missionary in Ghana. Later on, during my anthropological fieldwork in that same country, I enjoyed cordial relationships with many missionaries, but after I had written up my research material, I realised that they had practically vanished from my notes (cf. Van der Geest & Kirby n.d.). This made me ponder the ambiguity which characterizes anthropologist-missionary relationships. I submit that my experiences both as an anthropologist and as a missionary enable me to represent both parties' viewpoints reasonably well.

The well-known differences

The differences and conflicts between anthropologists and missionaries are legendary. In the training of anthropologists, the image of the missionary¹ is presented and 'cherished' as a deterrent, as an example of what anthropologists should *not* be. It is not surprising, therefore, that anthropological stereotypes of missionaries are unflattering.² They personify what anthropologists find most distasteful – ethnocentrism – for they proclaim their own way of thinking and living as the only true one. Missionaries are therefore seen as the anthropologists' polar opposites. They are talkers (preachers) and people who bring about change (converters), whereas anthropologists like to see

themselves as listeners and custodians of culture. Missionaries destroy culture. They make traditional knowledge, values and practices, and ('pagan') rituals and objects of art, disappear. Anthropologists, by contrast, preserve and record them. The former's interference is contrasted with the latter's non-intervention. Mission leads to alienation, anthropology to recognition.

From a scientific point of view missionaries seem to belong to the Middle Ages: their thinking and acting are directed by religion. Anthropologists, however, consider themselves to be rational and critical scientists. The missionaries' self-assurance causes anthropologists some irritation but also makes them chuckle, for they are convinced that missionaries are 'primitive philosophers', imprisoned in their own religious world-view.

Missionaries do not want to discuss their beliefs. Convinced of their own doctrine they attempt to convert others to it. Anthropologists, on the contrary, are relativists. They continuously seek to test their convictions by confronting them with alternatives. As Agar (1980) puts it in the title of a book, anthropologists are 'professional strangers', not only in the culture where they conduct their research, but in their own society as well. As relativists, they have no 'homeland'. If the preacher is the professional 'knower', the anthropologist is the professional doubter.

Now I have stereotyped the stereotypes. The differentiations will come later. A passage from Delfendahl (1981: 89) summarizes this collection of well-known differences:

A missionary, *as such*, invites himself to teach mankind, convinced that he is endowed with what others lack and that it is his mission to convert them to it... The anthropologist, *as such*, goes to learn from mankind. The two attitudes are *essentially* opposed, even though in individuals, they may be mingled.

The well-known similarities

Nevertheless, many similarities between anthropologists and missionaries are also recognized. The most prominent, without doubt, is that both are guests in a foreign culture where they meet. They have, one could say, a common destiny. I suspect that anthropologists and missionaries who meet abroad are more pleased with one another's company than they admit in their writings. The arrival of a compatriot, or someone who is nearly so, often heralds a welcome change after a long period of 'isolation' – certainly this was often the case in the past. I put 'isolation' between quotation marks, because the local populace is often not considered 'true' company, despite missionary claims of 'brotherhood' and anthropological claims of 'participation' and 'communication'. Moreover, most missionaries, due to their long-term residence in the area, have managed to acquire some material comfort for themselves in the 'wilderness'. Such a place may become an important refuge for the drifting anthropologist.³

Another well-known similarity is the ethnographic interest which anthropologists and missionaries share, however disparagingly the former may speak about the latter's ethnographic knowledge. There can be no doubt that, through their prolonged stays in a community, missionaries often acquire a vast and detailed knowledge of that community. They are even likely to become the anthropologists' key informants.⁴ Conversely, if anthropologists, in spite of their short stays in the field, succeed in gaining profound insights into a particular culture, missionaries profit from their studies. They realise that ethnographic knowledge and anthropological understanding can

benefit their work. Thus anthropology becomes a subject in the training of missionaries.⁵

It is not surprising, therefore, that many missionaries have become professional anthropologists⁶ who publish first-class ethnographic work. It is impossible to list them all here, but some of the most prominent can be mentioned briefly: Codrington and Leenhardt (cf. Clifford 1982) in the Pacific and Junod, Westermann and Edwin W. Smith in Africa.⁷ Usually, however, anthropologists mistrust the missionaries' ethnographic activities. They claim that missionaries are unable to prevent their religious presuppositions from getting mixed up with their ethnographic research, so that they produce biased pictures of indigenous cultures. Clifford's (1982) great appreciation of Leenhardt as an anthropologist is, among other things, based on the way Leenhardt has managed to avoid the pitfalls and exploit the advantages of his 'double role'. But Leenhardt may have been an exception. Things get worse in the anthropologists' view when missionaries conduct their ethnographic research expressly for a missionary purpose, to 'crack a foreign cultural code', as it were.⁸ Rattray, it is said, feared that missionaries would 'baptize' the Asante folktales which he had collected and use them in their Christian preaching (Machin n.d.).⁹

Such examples of missionaries practising anthropology illustrate the intertwining of similarities and differences between them and anthropologists. A similarity or rapprochement which is not accepted by the other party increases their alienation from one another or may aggravate the conflict. That ambiguity of overture and rejection also shows itself in other 'similarities', which are either recognized or denied.

Anthropologists have often pointed to the missionaries' involvement in the colonial enterprise (for an overview, see Etherington 1983), but for a long time they overlooked their own role in colonialism. Asad's (1975) book was probably the most decisive in putting an end to that self-deception. Most anthropologists now recognize the contribution that anthropology made in the establishment of the colonies¹⁰ and admit that their work, like that of the missionaries, profited from the colonial presence.¹¹

Most likely the local populations saw (and see) missionaries and anthropologists as more or less equivalent. The Sioux anthropologist Deloria is very clear on this point. About the missionary he writes:

One of the major problems of the Indian people is the missionary. It has been said of missionaries that when they arrived they only had the Book and we had the land; now we have the Book and they have the land (Deloria 1970: 105).

But the anthropologist is hardly better:

Into each life, it is said, some rain must fall... But Indians have been cursed above all other people in history. Indians have anthropologists (Deloria 1970: 83).

Both anthropologists and missionaries are often seen as undesirable aliens (see also Miller 1970; 1981). If we ask why Deloria is so bitterly opposed to anthropologists, we find still another, unexpected, resemblance between the anthropologist and the missionary. One of the reasons why anthropologists are a curse for the Sioux, according to Deloria, is that they rob the Indians of their identity by imposing upon them an exotic-cultural identity from an imagined past. It is not only the missionary who violates a people's cultural identity; it is also the anthropologist who claims ostensibly to respect and preserve that identity. That leads us to consider a number of 'hidden similarities'.

Hidden similarities 1: the anthropologist as a missionary

In January 1971, the World Council of Churches organized a conference in Barbados on the fight against racism. Twenty participants, mainly anthropologists, discussed the problems of Indians in Latin America. Eleven of them produced the 'Barbados Declaration', in which they launched a sharp attack on the interference of Christian churches in the life of the Indian population and called for a stop to all missionary activities. The text of the declaration is instructive; it repeats most of the stereotypes mentioned at the beginning of this article. The anthropologists pose as defenders of indigenous cultures, the missionaries are depicted as destroyers. The essence of missionary work is formulated thus:

The missionary presence has always implied the imposition of criteria and patterns of thought and behavior alien to the colonized Indian societies.... The inherent ethnocentric aspect of the evangelization process is also a component of the colonialist ideology... (Declaration of Barbados 1973: 270).

If, however, anthropologists take ethnocentrism and the imposition of alien premisses as characteristics of the missionary, they also define themselves as missionaries. Anthropologists have designed all kinds of terms to present their viewpoint and activities as the opposite of ethnocentric: 'grasping the native's point of view', 'to realise *his* vision of *his* world' (Malinowski 1922: 25), 'the emic point of view', 'the idiom of the soul' (Smith, cited by Rattray 1928: 98), and 'thick description' (Geertz 1973). Nevertheless, anthropological *practice* is different. Practising anthropology means translating and reinterpreting. The anthropology of religion provides a clear example. What 'the others' believe is not understood and described from within, as the 'natives' experience it, but on the basis of the anthropologist's theoretical presuppositions.

One could say that in most cases the anthropologist deprives religion of its original meaning and redefines it as something which is relevant and interesting within anthropological discourse. Religion thus becomes 'ritual', 'social control', 'a survival strategy', 'an etiology', 'a philosophy'. It becomes a moral, an ecological, a political, a semantic and a cultural system (cf. Fabian n.d.). In other words, it becomes something which makes sense to the anthropologist. Evans-Pritchard (1962: 36) has remarked that for most anthropologists religion is merely 'superstition to be explained... not something an anthropologist, or indeed any rational person, could himself believe in'. Fabian (n.d: 1) finds that we are dealing with an instance of cheating: 'If research starts, as has been classically the case, with the conviction that the object and contents of religion are not "real", then all subsequent clever reasoning has an element of dishonesty. Here plays a player who has seen to it that he will win the game'. Stipe (1980: 167-8) also writes that for most anthropologists 'religious beliefs are essentially meaningless', and he cites Radcliffe-Brown's advice: 'it is on the rites rather than the beliefs that we should first concentrate our attention'.

Hiebert (1978: 168-9), a missionary and anthropologist, criticizes the anthropologists for not taking religion seriously:

Scientific methodology, as it came to be used in anthropology, dehumanized people.... Given a growing atheistic and deterministic stance, it is not surprising that early anthropologists gave little respect to the people's explanations of their own activities. They treated religions as irrational superstitions, and gave scientific explanations for human beliefs and activities in terms of economic and environmental factors on the one hand, or of sociopolitical factors on the other. Anthropologists were no less philosophically ethnocentric in their relationship to other world views than were most Christian missionaries.

This anthropological alienation of religion has taken different forms in different theoretical orientations such as evolutionist and ecological perspectives, structural functionalism and the more recent cognitive approaches. Sandor describes the now popular metaphoric interpretation of 'other' modes of thought as another attempt by anthropologists to reconcile these 'strange' phenomena with their own faith:

...taking literal statements for metaphorical ones because that is the only way they can make sense of them. The urge to see metaphors everywhere hinders us from understanding what other people think and how they do it. We universalize in the name of metaphor, forcing our way of thinking, our logic, on others (Sandor 1986: 102).

It is ironic that anthropologists, who have put up so much resistance against scientific reduction, prove to be entirely dependent on the natural sciences in their personal beliefs.¹² Their personal logic, which directs their academic work, does not allow for anything which appears absurd or impossible from a natural-science point of view. Sandor exemplifies his point with the Kwakiutl statement that a Kwakiutl is a salmon. A literal understanding of this pronouncement is out of the question for the anthropologist. The most likely explanation he will present is a metaphoric or metonymic one. The latter would suggest that the Kwakiutl organize their world in such a way that they regard themselves as belonging to the same category as salmon. Whatever he does in fact say, the anthropologist will probably not consider the possibility that a Kwakiutl *is* a salmon. He will be prepared to accept that the Kwakiutl *believe* that they are salmon, but *he* has a better explanation. His interpretation is superior. The Kwakiutl thoughts are called 'religion' or 'local knowledge', but the anthropologist's ideas are considered 'universal science'. The difference between the missionary proclaiming his superior knowledge in the name of Jesus and the anthropologist doing the same in the name of Metaphor shrinks.

In some comments on Stipe's (1980) article, the anthropologist's ethnocentrism has indeed been compared to that of the missionary. Nuñez (1980: 171) speaks of 'competing ideologies', while Salamone (1980: 174) writes that anthropologists can be as 'fundamentalist' as missionaries, fundamentalism being 'that attitude of mind which characterizes persons who believe they possess complete truth'. Guiart (1980: 171) remarks that 'the failings of the missionaries parallel and complement those of anthropologists, each bringing with them, as their greatest hindrance, a complete set of symbols and ideas which they strive to impose upon people'. He adds to this that 'missionaries are easier to see through than anthropologists because the latter claim to be without presuppositions'.

The suggestion that there is no essential difference between the faith of missionaries and the theories of anthropologists has also been strongly criticized, however, for example by Feldman (1983) and Abbink (1985; 1990). Their argument that religious belief cannot be compared to knowledge acquired by empirical observation will be accepted, I expect, by any sensible person. The point is, however, that the decision – be it conscious or unconscious – to limit oneself to what can be empirically verified or linguistically explained itself entails a metaphysical stance which resembles the missionary's belief that 'there is more' than that which can be empirically observed.

The refusal to take religion seriously is rationalized by the anthropologists' simplification of religion. Sticking to their own certainties, anthropologists are neither able to see the black hole at the end of their explanations nor to recognize that religious

hypotheses fall within the range of rationality if one 'thinks further'. Hiebert (1978: 174) writes:

The question of ultimate truth arises. Earlier anthropology had wrestled with the concept of cultural relativism. Now it faces philosophical relativism. To take other thought systems seriously is to raise the question of their truthfulness *vis-à-vis* science. Anthropology is being forced to confront the problem missions faced earlier, namely, what is truth, and how does one thought system that claims to be true relate to other thought systems.

The anthropologists' view of Christian religion as a medieval science should itself be dated back to just after the Middle Ages. Christian theologians do not think that religion is rendered redundant by the progress of the natural sciences, and many Christians may prove more 'atheistic' than the 'innocent anthropologist' has thought possible. Mary Douglas's (1970: 73) rhetorical question to her colleague anthropologists still applies: 'How naive can we get about the beliefs of others?'

Let us now return for a moment to Sandor's (1986) discussion concerning the Kwakiutl's 'salmon-ness' and his reproaches to anthropologists who are not prepared to take the Kwakiutl's words literally.¹³ Their metaphoric interpretation, as we have seen, violates Kwakiutl reality. Sandor seeks to entice his colleague anthropologists into a greater openness towards the Kwakiutl way of thinking by comparing their statement with the case of an insect which exists in four stages but does not have a name embracing all of them. The caterpillar and the butterfly are the same insect, but people have given them different names. The caterpillar could rightfully say 'I am a butterfly', for together the two stages form a whole without a name. Sandor proposes that we look at the Kwakiutl case from that perspective. Salmon and Kwakiutl presuppose one another and are part of a greater whole which may not be empirically verifiable but is real nevertheless. The comparison is perhaps clumsy and will not convince the unbelievers, but Sandor's point is well taken: 'Seeing metaphors everywhere means assimilating other worlds to a particular world: it is ethnocentric and works against understanding strange worlds' (Sandor 1986: 101).¹⁴ In the end, everything boils down to the anthropologist's inability to think 'outside himself'; his 'emic' pretensions prove untenable. The similarity between the anthropologist and missionary is indeed remarkable. Both appropriate a culture by understanding it in terms of their own beliefs.¹⁵

Anthropologists and missionaries do not only resemble one another in their ethnocentrism, however. There is also a striking parallel in the way they present their premisses for discussion.¹⁶ Both are conscious of their ethnocentric points of departure and of their bondage to prevailing political and economic powers, and try to free themselves from these – though not always successfully. Both anthropologists and missionaries seek ways to approach the others 'from below' and 'from within'.¹⁷ Increasingly, anthropologists let their informants tell their own story (e.g. Crapanzano 1980; Shostak 1981), acting as 'feeders' who allow the 'natives' to appear in front of the footlights. These ethnographers seem to be content with the humble role of stenographers who note down what their informants say (but appearances are deceptive; the speakers rarely have anything to say about the final editing of the notes). The number of autochthonous anthropologists is also increasing, but it is fair to say that they as yet carry little weight in anthropology at the international level. The type of anthropology which is setting the trend at present does not come from below or from within: it only wishes – and sometimes pretends – to do so. In the final analysis it should be said that anthropology is still fairly colonial.

On this point missionaries and theologians compare favourably with anthropologists. They have been more successful in coming to terms with their colonial past and have made more progress in the decolonization of their profession. Christian churches now play a leading role in struggles against repressive regimes, and in international theological discussions Third World theologians form the avant-garde of their profession. Representatives of 'liberation theology' (originating from Latin America) and 'black theology' are indeed setting trends in modern theology and missiology. Anthropology's arrears are obvious.

In 1975 an issue of the *International Review of Mission* (No. 254) was entirely devoted to a proposed moratorium (a stop to both material and personnel assistance) on churches in the so-called developing countries, calling for a withdrawal of all existing aid. It was argued that Western dominance would remain as long as the help continued since 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'. In all fairness it should be said, however, that the call for a moratorium was rejected by most churches 'on theological and practical grounds' (cf. Lutzbetak 1985: 28-9).

Though successes in building up anthropological research or missionary work from below may be meagre, the simultaneity of these attempts is significant. It confirms another hidden similarity: the desire for development from repressive to liberating practices. Miller (1981: 130) considers the resemblance to be so great that he addresses missionaries and anthropologists in one breath on this issue:

Westerners, be they missionaries or anthropologists, no longer represent preachers with the word. The message, or more accurately, the messages, no longer are expected to go *out from* Western nations to the rest of the world. Unaccustomed as Westerners are to listening, it has taken a long time for this truth to sink in. The future of anthropology as a discipline will be shaped largely by how well we listen and how prepared we are to establish meaningful dialogue with the people of the world we have been inclined to study.

A final hidden similarity will be mentioned briefly: not only missionaries but also anthropologists bring about cultural change (Whiteman 1983 prefers the term 'cultural broker' for the missionary). Deloria's critique (see the quotation above) referred to a passive type of cultural 'change': depriving a community of its dynamism by imposing a static identity upon it. If one accepts change as 'normal', it will be agreed that the prevention of change is indeed 'change' in another more complex sense of the term. But there is also a simpler - and often unintended - form of change to which missionaries as well as anthropologists contribute. Their mere presence is in itself a formidable factor of change. The culture which missionaries and anthropologists carry with them is 'contagious'. Local communities must cope with their presence and respond to their cultural representations (cf. Sutlive 1985). Whether they like it or not, anthropologists also make conversions, if only to the 'gospel of a clean shirt' (Herskovits 1962).

A final remark will help to put my argument so far in perspective. I have referred in general terms to 'anthropologists' and 'missionaries', but reality is of course far more complex. Many individual missionaries answer more to the stereotype of the anthropologist and vice-versa (cf. Lutzbetak 1985; Sutlive 1985; and Whiteman 1983). Remember Salamone's remark that fundamentalists may be found among both missionaries and anthropologists. So also may agnostics, wherein lies yet another similarity.

Hidden similarities 2: the missionary as an anthropologist

The above heading is somewhat biased by my desire for symmetry. It could also have been: 'Hidden differences' or 'the missionary as a better anthropologist'. I will discuss

a number of activities and characteristics of missionaries which seem to suggest that at least some missionaries fulfil the anthropological ideal better than the anthropologists themselves. That ideal can be roughly described as: the outsider who becomes an insider, understands and respects 'the others' and takes their side.

The Ghanaian anthropologist Owusu (1978: 314) has remarked that a good command of the local language is indispensable in anthropological fieldwork, for scientific as well as practical and humanitarian purposes. Very few anthropologists would disagree with him; on the contrary, the importance of speaking the language is increasingly stressed as the opinion grows that culture manifests itself most prominently in language. Along with it goes the conviction that so-called research data are constructed in language processes. How many anthropologists do without this indispensable ingredient for good fieldwork is a well-preserved secret. It is fashionable for them to emphasize their cordial relationships and friendships (Casagrande 1960) with informants in the field, and to give the impression that they conversed in the local language. This is suggested, for example, by the frequent use of vernacular terms in ethnographic studies. But, I repeat, we do not know how many really spoke that language. My cautious estimate for Dutch anthropologists is that less than a quarter of all those who have written a doctoral dissertation based on ethnographic research were sufficiently fluent in the local language to be able to conduct their research without the help of an interpreter, while less than ten per cent. were able to follow a conversation held by others.¹⁸ Of course, I am only referring to anthropologists who carried out their research in a community where no European language was spoken. My estimate is based mainly on the fact that most fieldwork lasts less than two years, a period too short to master a really *foreign* language if one is also, and in the first place, occupied by the research itself.

Missionaries compare favourably on this point. While fieldwork is a *rite de passage* for anthropologists, for many missionaries their stay abroad is more or less their destination. A stay of ten years or more in the same area is (and certainly used to be) quite normal. Language study is therefore a logical investment. Many missionaries begin their work with language training which may take six months or longer. It thus seems likely that a good command of the language is encountered far more commonly among missionaries than among anthropologists.

The longer period which missionaries spend abroad also has other consequences which seem to make them better anthropologists than the anthropologists themselves. Because of their longer stay, missionaries become more integrated into the communities in which they work. Not only are they *seen* as such by the local populace who become fully accustomed to their presence, they also *feel* that way. Their interests lie *there*. The fact that their destiny partly overlaps that of the local population is bound to have a deep influence on their position in 'the field'. One could call the missionary an immigrant who builds up a new existence abroad and who must establish lasting – though not necessarily good – relationships with the environment.¹⁹ Anthropologists, however, resemble visitors. The shortness of their stay marks their experiences and their relationships with others. The term 'participant observation' appears pretentious and misleading. What the anthropologist sees and feels while 'participating' is of an entirely different order from what the local inhabitants see and feel. That difference is explained by the fact that the anthropologist is non-committed and free to leave, whereas the inhabitants are tied to the place and must survive there. So, being a

missionary has methodological and epistemological advantages which being an anthropologist lacks.

My picture of the missionary as an anthropologist may look rather rosy. I am not suggesting that all missionaries speak the local language fluently, nor that they all identify themselves with their environment, but I do believe that the fact that they hold out so long makes their perspective on the society more 'realistic'. The missionary's experiences will reflect more of a common destiny and solidarity with the 'locals' than those of the anthropologist. Speaking in general terms, if not in stereotypes, I agree with Hiebert (1978: 169) who compares missionaries and anthropologists as follows:

Despite their [the anthropologists'] intimate association with people during their fieldwork, they remained ultimately segregated from them. Anthropologists returned to the safety of their academic environments where they could talk about 'their people'. In the long run they shared even less identification with the 'natives' than the missionaries.

The epistemological lead of the missionary over the anthropologist applies particularly to the study of religion. I have already indicated that anthropologists who study religion encounter great difficulties because they are unable to take the religious part of the religion seriously. It is my impression that most anthropologists are confronted with this problem even though they might not consider it a problem as such. Thousands of pages have been written by anthropologists about witchcraft, but I doubt if a single one of these was written by a 'believer'. Some anthropologists 'play' with the idea that they may believe in such a thing as witchcraft, but if you ask them straight out (as Gretchen does of Faust) whether or not they believe in it, they prevaricate in psychological or literary accounts. Evans-Pritchard, for example, did not believe in Azande witchcraft, despite his claim that:

In no department of their life was I more successful in 'thinking black', or as it should more correctly be said 'feeling black', than in the sphere of witchcraft. I, too, used to react to misfortunes in the idiom of witchcraft (1937: 99).

Elsewhere he puts it plainly: 'Witches, as the Azande conceive them, cannot exist' (1937: 63). But, he continues, a belief in witchcraft provides them with a philosophy which explains the relation between people and misfortune and which furnishes ready-made suggestions for practical action in the case of misfortune. Evans-Pritchard's argument is characteristic of the anthropological approach: the object is fitted into the anthropological frame of mind.

I suspect that missionaries have less difficulty in sharing the informants' perspective, although witchcraft may not be such a good example here. The missionaries' greater openness to transcendental experiences can make them receptive to local religious opinions. Even if they are strongly opposed to certain religious ideas or practices, as many missionaries indeed are, that attitude shows more empathy for the religious experience than the glib reactions of anthropologists who find it 'very interesting' but are not touched by it. Evans-Pritchard, a practising Catholic, was very conscious of this. Citing a remark of Wilhelm Schmidt, he compared the unbeliever writing about religion to a blind person talking about colours (Evans-Pritchard 1985: 121).²⁰

My last point is derived from an unusual anthropological study, Burridge's *Encountering Aborigines*. Burridge suggests that anthropological interest in 'others' stems from a missionary tradition. Christianity in Europe broke through its cultural boundaries and developed an interest in and appreciation for other ways of life. He goes on to claim that 'anthropologists have been and are imbued with missionary purpose' (1973: 18). They, too, see themselves as executors of a civilizing mission. In Burridge's eyes

they are simply a variant of the missionary.²¹ The first question asked by the early missionaries, according to Burrige, was whether these alien peoples did indeed belong to the human race. The positive reply to that question had enormous consequences. Foreign cultures were drawn into the sphere of interest of Christian European society: they roused the missionaries' curiosity and sparked off action. The zeal of missionaries to convert, however negatively one may judge it, was unmistakably a sign of their interest in 'others'.

At first sight one is inclined to regard missionary work as alienating and objectifying, but one should not overlook the human concern implied in it. The entire missionary enterprise becomes unintelligible if that concern is denied. It remains to be seen whether more or less objectification and appropriation take place in the missionary practice, where people are changed into Christians, than in anthropological research where they are transformed into data.

The idea that anthropology could stem from a missionary tradition and that the missionary would then be the anthropologist's father is difficult for most anthropologists to digest. Van Oss (1980) writes that the anthropologist may suffer from a missionary Oedipus-complex. The frequent ridicule of missionaries by anthropologists (see also note 3) may well be a symptom of that complex.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this article may sound paradoxical: the hidden similarities which have been discussed constitute an important breaking point in the relationship between missionaries and anthropologists (cf. Sutlive 1985). The idea that they are incognito 'missionaries' is unacceptable to most anthropologists as is the suggestion that missionaries may be more successful as anthropologists than they are. The alleged similarities are rejected and may provoke even further hostilities.

Confusion at the existential level, both for missionaries and anthropologists, is added to all this. Anthropologists present themselves as agnostics *par excellence*, thus personifying the forbidden thoughts of missionaries. As professional sceptics, they confront missionaries with thoughts the latter may have denied themselves. The anthropological luxury to doubt everything is not granted to missionaries who may envy the anthropologists for it (cf. Delfendahl 1981).

But the ambivalence also works the other way. Anthropologists recognize in the missionary the repressed consequences of their own theories, that is, the possible answers to questions they decided not to ask. The missionary is a living example of the anthropological definition of 'human': producing meaning. It is characteristic of humans, according to the anthropologist, that they have an ultimate, comprehensive explanation for their being, namely, a religion. Ironically, that description does not apply to the anthropologists themselves. In the mirror of the missionary, anthropologists see themselves as exceptions to their own definition, as human anomalies. Their relativism presents itself as a poorly-reflected religion.²² Anthropologists and missionaries thus both threaten and complement one another's thinking.

NOTES

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¹ The term 'missionaries' includes both men and women, Roman Catholics (usually celibate) as well as Protestants (usually married).

² Priest (1987: 35) describes the use of negative missionary stereotypes in anthropology lectures as 'an attempt to exploit a symbol of ethnocentrism which would effectively immunize students against such a disease'. According to Stipe (1985), the stinging criticisms levelled by some anthropologists (in Hvalkov & Aaby 1981) against the activities of missionaries among South American Indians is a symptom of that animosity. Stipe rejects the claim expressed in the book's subtitle that the authors present an 'anthropological perspective' on missionary work. Their criticism rather reflects an ideology labelled as 'anthropology'. Canfield (1983: 59) reaches a similar conclusion: 'Anthropology ought not to be used as a mask for yellow journalism or propaganda'. Keesing (1981: 402), in his handbook, has the following to say about mutual stereotyping: 'The caricatured missionary is a strait-laced repressed, and narrow-minded Bible thumper trying to get the native women to cover their bosoms decently; the anthropologist is a bearded degenerate given to taking his clothes off and sampling wild rites'.

³ Missionaries like to write about this topic (e.g. Nida 1966; Lutzbetak 1985), but anthropologists prefer to remain silent about it. Hochegger (1980) knows the reason: the anthropologists feel ashamed to admit that a great deal of their 'fieldwork' took place in the comfortable houses of missionaries. The home front expects a more exciting and exotic report from them. Barley (1986) is an exception; he writes that he would never have survived in the field if there had been no missionaries there.

⁴ Missionaries complain, however, that their contributions to anthropologists' ethnographic studies are hardly mentioned (e.g. Nida 1966). I wonder how many anthropological publications could be branded as plagiarism, both by native and missionary informants.

⁵ The use of anthropology for missionary purposes is frequently discussed in the journal *Missiology* (before 1973 *Practical Anthropology*). In the past the journal *Africa* also devoted attention to the anthropological skills of missionaries (cf. Westermann 1931).

⁶ It should be noted that the reverse – an anthropologist becoming a professional missionary – has never occurred so far as I and Du Toit (1984: 631) know. It is remarkable that this fact has never been discussed in the (by now numerous) publications on anthropologist-missionary relationships. I know of only one case of an anthropologist who became a (non-professional) missionary: Jules-Rosette (1975), who met the Prophet Maranke during her fieldwork in Zambia, was converted to his church. After her return to the USA, people asked her to help them to join that church.

Examples of anthropologists who, during their fieldwork, were converted to some kind of religion are more numerous. In a conversation with the missionary Ahrens, the anthropologist Andrew Strathern remarked that he was initially strongly opposed to the work of missionaries in the highlands of Papua New Guinea because they destroyed the local culture. Taking part in the meetings of the 'Filadelfia Church', a Pentecostal movement, he gradually changed his mind. His 'conversion' was a logical consequence of his growing involvement with the people he was studying. His first research, he says, was 'looking at them from the outside'; after his conversion, he referred to his research as 'an inner experience' (Strathern & Ahrens 1986: 11).

⁷ For more examples, see Rosenstiel (1959), Whiteman (1983) and Lutzbetak (1985).

⁸ Shapiro (1981: 147), referring to some fundamentalist Protestant missionaries who learn native languages in order to translate the Bible into them, writes that 'they are, as it were, in the service of God's Central Intelligence Agency, learning to intercept messages in a foreign code so that they can use that same code to transmit messages of their own'.

⁹ Ironically, Rattray (1907) published his first collection of (Malawian) folktales with the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) and he invited a missionary to write the introduction (personal communication from M. Schoffeleers).

¹⁰ It should also be pointed out that missionaries and anthropologists both put up resistance to colonial dominance (see, for example, Fields 1982). Occasionally, they have actively supported native resistance movements.

¹¹ It is interesting that Beidelman (1982), in his account of a missionary 'tribe' in pre-independence Tanzania, does not pay attention to the indebtedness of anthropologists to the colonial authorities. Writing about 'colonial evangelization', he seemed to overlook 'colonial anthropology'.

¹² Fabian (n.d.: 2): 'More often than not he [the anthropologist] simply attributes to science the qualities he denies to religion. He plays a trick on us when he declares religion to be the object of his science while science is his religion'.

¹³ A similar example is provided by the claim of many Catholics that the consecrated wafer which is consumed during their Holy Mass, is really the body of Christ. I suspect that this statement is even harder to swallow for anthropologists. Fernandez has in fact applied a metaphoric interpretation to the Catholic Mass, which means that he views the ceremony as an attempt 'to concretize a part of the inchoate whole of corporeal and social experience' (1974: 129).

¹⁴ On this issue, see also the discussion between Beattie (1973) and Horton (1976).

¹⁵ Tippet uses the Greek term - and euphemism - 'parallaxis' to discuss the cultural bias which is unavoidable in inter-cultural communication. He emphasizes that both missionaries and anthropologists should be conscious of this (1985: 96-9).

¹⁶ Pels makes a similar observation when he refers to the simultaneous rise of liberation theology and reflexive/critical anthropology:

...while reflexive anthropologists brought home the necessity to study themselves first ...liberation theologians urged missionaries to convert themselves first [to another culture]Reflexive anthropologists try to show how culturally determined their own scientific conceptions are....while modern missiologists argue that their own culture is polygamist... pagan...or syncretistic (Pels 1987: 6-7).

Sutlive (n.d.), a missionary, reports that he was 'converted' by anthropology to its principles of holism, pluralism and relativism.

¹⁷ The following advice given by the founder of the Little Sisters of Jesus to her co-sisters should also appeal to anthropologists:

Comme Jésus pendant sa vie humaine, fais-toi toute à tous: arabe au milieu des arabes, nomade au milieu des nomades, ouvrière au milieu des ouvrières...mais avant tout humaine au milieu des humaines (cited in Shapiro 1981: 131).

¹⁸ Owusu (1978) claims that even such renowned anthropologists as Evans-Pritchard and Fortes had a poor command of the local language. That applies also to Radcliffe-Brown (see Brandewie 1985: 375).

¹⁹ A colourful and without doubt exceptional example of missionaries as 'immigrants' who adapted to their new environment is described by Mudenge and cited by Etherington (1983: 129):

Eighteenth-century Dominicans in the Zambesi Valley mined, drank, acquired riches and concubines along with unorthodox supernatural prestige. One priest was revered by local spirit mediums for decades after his death.

Schebesta mentions that the cult of this priest, Fr Pedro da SS. Trindade, still continued in 1862, more than a century after his death. He writes:

Man zollt ihm einen den Ahnen ähnlichen Kult. Man bringt ihm Opfer dar und ruft ihm zur Zeit der Trockenheit um Regen an. Ein Heilöl gegen Rheuma wird nach ihm 'Oleo de Fr Pedro' benannt und gilt als wunderkräftig Ein Gegengift, das Pfeilgift unschädlich machte, trug den Namen 'Frei Pedro' (Schebesta 1966: 195).

²⁰ Schmidt and Radcliffe-Brown entered into a debate about this issue in the journal *Man* (1910). Radcliffe-Brown wrote that a Christian conviction would prevent an anthropologist from approaching another religion without prejudice. Schmidt reacted: 'only the amusing simplicity of some reactionary imagines that an unprejudiced view of the science of religion is the privilege of the unbeliever' (cited by Brandewie 1985: 376). Following their debate one gets the impression that it would be possible to write about Radcliffe-Brown's fieldwork on the Andaman Islands in the style of Freeman's book about Mead's research on Samoa.

²¹ Reining (cited by Hiebert 1978: 166) makes a similar remark with reference to the beginning of British anthropology, which, he says, originated in missionary and humanitarian movements in the first half of the nineteenth century, e.g. the Society for the Abolition of Slavery, the Aborigines' Protection Society and Wesley's Christian revival movement.

²² Strathern writes: 'in the end, anthropology without any kind of belief behind it is quite sterile' (Strathern & Ahrens 1986: 8). Also see Taylor (1986), who focuses on the 'last questions' in Harris's and Lévi-Strauss's work. One of the few anthropologists who does see religion as a kind of extension of anthropological thinking is Van Baal (1981).

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Anthropologues et missionnaires: frères(?)

Résumé

Cet article explore la relation ambiguë entre anthropologues et missionnaires dans leur travail comme dans leurs écrits. Il décrit premièrement des stéréotypes bien connus par lesquels anthropologues et missionnaires sont opposés tels que conservateurs contre convertisseurs, incrédules contre sages, écouteurs contre prédicateurs et discute ensuite des similarités remarquables qui ont été généralement ignorées si non supprimées particulièrement par les anthropologues. Les anthropologues agissent comme les missionnaires en propageant les croyances de leur discipline et en interprétant d'autres religions en termes de leur propre foi. Une similarité supplémentaire donne aux missionnaires un avantage sur les anthropologues: ils demeurent plus longtemps parmi leur gens, ont une meilleure maîtrise de la langue et peuvent probablement devenir plus intégrés dans la communauté parmi laquelle ils travaillent. Il est suggéré que le rejet de ces similarités cachées par la plupart des anthropologues mène à davantage de tensions dans leur relation avec les missionnaires.