

# IDEA OF CULTURE "

## CULTURE AS FRUIT AND HARVEST

By Bernard Fonlon

In the first part of this article<sup>1</sup>, I considered culture as tillage and I said that it comprises, firstly, the action of the tiller, secondly, the state of refinement induced by that action into that which is tilled, thirdly, the growth that diligent tending and the state of cultivation promote in the plant, and fourthly, the fruit that is borne by this plant thanks to action, state and growth. Culture considered as action, is suffered by the subject, considered as state, is inherent in that subject, but culture considered as the fruit yielded by cultivated humanity, the enduring content of human civilization, is a **tertium quid** distinct from man, it survives him and is handed down from generation to generation.

It is this last aspect of culture that we will proceed to consider.

As I said before, every cultural element takes its birth from a specific human need. And, as man is a compound of flesh, sense, mind and will, there are definite elements of culture that have been created as a result of the needs of each of these components of the human being.

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1. See *Abbia* N° 11 pages 5-29.

## The Physical Strata

At the level of the flesh, the most basic needs of man are for food, clothing and shelter. To obtain these, man needs to know, to dominate and alter the material universe. To overmaster and transform the universe, to bring about motion and change, man has been engaged, from the beginning of his existence, in the quest for energy. It is this quest for energy excited in man by the need to allay his physical hunger, to slake his physical thirst, to shield himself against the inclement elements that has given rise to all the inventions of the physical sciences, from the discovery of fire to the fission of the atom, from the invention of the wheel to that of the space-crafts thanks to which the conquest of space and of the planets will become a reality.

It is the material need of man that has given rise to that section of culture that is composed by the impressive galaxy of the natural and the physical sciences.

## The Strata of the Arts

Furthermore, man is able to establish contact with the world by means of his senses, and, in turn, the impact of the world on these senses stirs up in him feelings of pleasure or pain, love or hate, desire or aversion, joy or sorrow, hope or despair, daring or fear, revolt or submission.

Thus, for instance, the cravings of touch and taste and smell impel man to look for ways and means of improving his food—he wants it tasty and fragrant; of improving his clothing and shelter—he wants them cosy, cool or warm. And thus, gradually, men have arrived at the exquisite refinements of the culinary, the textile and the architectural arts.

Similarly, the need to charm the ear with sound and rhythm, melody and harmony, the need to delight the eye with colour and shape, to enchant the imagination with imagery and association, and the need to rouse and soothe the emotions have enriched the world with music and sculpture and painting and literature.

## The Strata of Abstract Thought

But man, as we have seen, is not merely flesh to be fed and feeling to be thrilled. He is tormented by thirsts and voids, not only at the level of flesh and sense, but also at the level of his mind. He is tormented by a hundred whys and wherefores about himself and about the world: what is the nature of the universe? what is the ultimate composition of being? what is the final classification of things? what are the ultimate principles of becoming, of motion and change? what is quantity? what is space? what is time? what is mind? what is the nature of knowledge? what is the final end of life? what is the ultimate norm of morality?—these are the questions that have led to the elaboration of the various systems of philosophy, from the time of Thales to the present day.

## The Primacy of Morality

Yet, even when a man feeds on the daintiest dishes and is clothed in silk and purple and is satiated with the delights of sound and song, of colour and shape; even if he has dug to the bottom of the mysteries of the universe, he still finds, after all these achievements, that his mind is not yet satisfied.

For his reason sheds a light on things, shows some up as good and right, and shows some up as evil and wrong. Within him he feels that he is master of himself and can do as he pleases. But up against these two alternatives, good and evil, right and wrong, he hears a soft but inflexible voice within him commanding that what is good must be chosen, and what is evil avoided; that what is right must be done, what is wrong must be shunned.

*Two things fill my soul with awe,  
declared the celebrated German Philosopher, Immanuel Kant,  
two things fill my soul with awe  
and with a veneration that renews  
itself and increases as mind returns  
to them and ponders them over more  
and more: the starry skies above us,  
the moral law within us. I do not  
need to make them the object of  
search or surmise as if they were*

*shrouded in mist and held beyond my horizon, in a region inaccessible. I see them before me and I link them immediately with the consciousness of my existence.*

Choose the good and reject the evil, love the right and hate the wrong, this is the first principle of morality, the **Categorical Imperative**, as Kant was wont to call it, that each man sees as self-evident as soon as reason dawns. Difficulties and differences arise only when it comes to specify in the concrete and in detail what is evil, what is good; what is wrong, what is right.

It is from this simple origin that have evolved the multitudinous morals and manners of the human race.

From it as starting point, the more daring among men are led by their reason up the rugged heights of more heroic morality:

*To every man there openeth  
A way and ways and a way.  
And the High Soul climbs the High Way  
And the Low Soul gropes the Low,  
And, in between, on the misty flats,  
The rest drift to and fro.  
And to every man there openeth  
A high Way and a Low  
And every man decideth  
The Way his Soul shall go.*

It is the ability not only to reason but to distinguish right from wrong, to freely do the one and shun the other that makes man, as Lord Tennyson:

*"The roof and crown of things"<sup>2</sup>*

Furthermore, among men, it is heroic conduct that raises a given individual head and shoulders above the common run.

Of all the things that humans crave for, as the highest good—abundant wealth, physical prowess, fineness of feeling, pleasure

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2. Alfred Lord Tennyson: *The Lotus Eaters*.

mental and material, profound learning, political power—therefore, the highest place, in the natural order of things, must be given to those values which, because they are abstract, spiritual, have been termed by some as the **imponderables**, those values, which, when embodied in a human life, make an upright virtuous man.

Let men say what they please, the fact will remain, for ever, that things like truthfulness, justice, purity of life, conquest of self, heroism, fidelity to duty at all costs, count before everything, are the foundation, the safeguards, without which no society can escape disaster. In other words, morality holds the primacy in all the affairs of men. Witness the high esteem with which men of outstanding virtue have been held all through the ages. Great inventors to whom the modern world owes almost everything, great scholars, great law-makers, great heroes in war, are rightly venerated in all places and all times.

But men of exceptional moral doctrine and virtue have always been treated, by mankind, with especial awe.

Witness the tremendous influence that the world's great teachers of sublime moral principles have wielded and will continue to wield, as long as men exist and history is unbroken: Christ, Gautama the Buddha, Socrates, Mohammed.

In our own day, the veneration with which Mahatma Gandhi was held by millions the world over is still a living memory. And among the statesmen of the world of our times there was hardly one treated with greater worship, by so many millions, as the Pandit, Jawaharlal Nehru. For the Indians knew his record; they knew that Nehru would never let them down, would never deceive them; that Nehru lived only for them; they knew that, if it came to dying, Nehru would die for them.

If you admit this point of view, you will go on to admit as well that the essential greatness of a nation does not consist in the extent of its territory, in the abundance of its wealth, or in the vastness of its population. There is no contesting the importance of these, as far as they go. But they are external, material. The intrinsic greatness of a country, the genuine greatness of a nation, lies in the character of its people.

If this is true, then we must go on to conclude that a nation's highest cultural achievement can be no other thing but the degree of the excellence of the system of morals and manners that it has evolved to enable its children to acquire such a character, to enable them to live lives worthy of that which is highest and best in man.

We rightly admire and should duly salute the unspeakable achievements of the whiteman's culture in the field of science and technological know-how. And whatever be our zeal, whatever be our will, to vindicate and restore the culture of our ancestors, our determination and our effort to learn these skills and make them our own should not relent for once. We have before us only two choices: to master these skills and master them fast and master them thoroughly, and build upon them—or to remain for ever slaves.

And yet however over-awing the appearances, we must never forget that there is a hierarchy in human values which hierarchy is not determined by appearances. Technical skill and science, for all their overwhelming importance are but means to an end, servant to master, and therefore cannot be given the primacy. They are meant to help man to become more and more a man, that is, to acquire increasing moral excellence.

In fact, when we look back at some of the things that the whiteman has done with his superior knowledge, there is every reason to fear lest these skills may end by making man return into the beast—and a wilder and more vicious one at that. For Science and Technical skill in the hands of a thief and liar can only make him a finer and more efficient thief and liar.

The discovery or the possession of these tremendous powers, therefore, does not confer, ipso facto, genuine human greatness. They can make it, they can mar it. And whether they make or mar, depends upon their use or abuse—on the presence and the observance, or the absence, of sound moral principles.

In fact, to-day, it is a very naïve whiteman who still expects the under-privileged world to look at his race with wide-eyed admiration. For when these under-privileged, long the victims of exploitation, think of such things as the African Slave Trade, imperialist colonialism, the anti-Semitic atrocities of the Third Reich and twentieth century warfare, they cannot help but see that in the

hands of the whiteman superior knowledge and skill, alas, have been put, quite often in history, at the service of monstrous lying, phenomenal injustice and unspeakable wickedness. It is a record for which every thinking whiteman should hang his head in shame.

### **The Unerring Test of Civilization**

Furthermore there is in man, as we know only too well, the irrepressible impulse to perpetuate his kind; and this has given rise to marriage and to the diverse systems designed to give stability to this all-important instruction.

In like manner, the need for mutual help and protection has led to the rise of human communities—the family, the state, the nation. And once a community comes into being, be it ever so small, there is felt the need for authority—order must be maintained, respect of rights and fulfilment of obligations enforced, recalcitrant members disciplined, for the good of all. Thus arises, government with its threefold power—the power to make laws, the power to put them into effect, and the power to judge and punish. It is this threefold authority that finds embodiment in legislative, executive and judiciary institutions, things of primordial worth in any cultural set-up.

Indeed, in determining a nation's rank in cultural evolution no test is more decisive than the degree to which justice is actually realised in its judicial administration both as between one private citizen and another and as between private citizens and members of the government.

### **The Role of Religion**

Having the wherewithal to supply his body's needs, having tasted to his soul's desire of the pleasures of sense and mind, having unearthed the mysteries of the nature of the universe and of the nature of man, having laid down laws and manners to guide his individual and corporate conduct, man remains, notwithstanding, still unsatisfied.

He looks at this marvellous world, at his own unfathomable self and asks in bewilderment: whence? whither? why? For these must have an origin, a destiny and a purpose.

And thus begins the genesis and the growth of the numerous religious systems with their creeds, rules and rituals; thus arises the idea of a God, the origin and the end of the universe, maker of the moral law, rewarder of the good, punisher of the wicked, father of all men to whom they return after their sojourn through the world.

It is this universal belief that Schiller celebrated in his famous hymn, **An die Freude**, a poem which Beethoven rendered immortal by his Choral Symphony:

*Seid umschlungen, Millionen!  
Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt!  
Brüder—überm Sternenzelt  
Muss ein lieber Vater wohnen.*

"Embrace yourselves, ye Millions! This kiss of the entire world! Brothers, above the starry canopy, there must dwell a loved Father."

*Duldet mutig, Millionen!  
Duldet für die bessere Welt!  
Droben überm Sternenzelt  
Wird ein grosser Gott belohnen.*

"Suffer with courage, ye Millions! Suffer for a better world. There above the starry skies shall a greater God reward you."

Religion reinforces morality by instilling into men the love of a universal father and the fear of supernatural sanctions. Thus the importance of religion as a cultural element needs no belabouring. The number of men and women that have laid down their lives in its defence, right through the ages, is legion; for, often, in history, men have been ready to die not only *pro focis*—for their hearths and homes, but oftener still *pro aris*—for their altars and shrines.

I have said above that, in the natural order of things, morality, as a constituent part of culture, takes the primacy. But when we cease to think of man alone and consider the universe in its totality, when we consider together both the natural and the supernatural order, the material and the spiritual, we are bound

to yield supremacy to religion. For if God is the creator, the beginning and the end of the universe, then that which concerns knowledge and worship of him must be supreme. If it is true that man has a supernatural final destiny, which is union with God, and that he can attain unalloyed and endless happiness only in this union, then the means to attain this end must constitute the highest duty of man. As a matter of historical fact, the greatest civilizations that the world has seen—Bhuddhism, Christianity, Islam—have religion as their essence. Furthermore, not even the staunchest, the most obdurate atheist can contest the primordial role that religion has played not only as a cultural element in itself but also as a force for cultural advancement at all levels: architecture, sculpture, painting, music, literature, philosophy, the spread of learning—each of these fields can show realisations of the highest merit to attest the truth of this assertion.

African folk are deeply religious folk and much of African culture takes its birth from religious inspiration.

### Summing Up

To sum up therefore: wherever there is a human need to satisfy, a human craving to allay, wherever a skill or system has been evolved for that purpose, there you have a cultural element.

The natural and the physical sciences elaborated for the knowledge and the conquest of the concrete universe to supply the bodily needs of man constitute the material strata of culture.

Scaling higher rungs we come to the aesthetic realm of culture—architecture, sculpture, painting, music, literature—where feelings are roused and soothed through the perception and the contemplation, by sense and mind, of the harmony of shape, colour, sound and thought, and of heroic and sublime conduct and character. Higher still we attain the elevated strata of philosophy.

And finally we reach the realm where morals and law and virtue and religion strive to tame the refractory will in man, to make him live as he should, that is, a being governed by reason and faith. For man is a union of the sublime and the earthy, beast and angel both in one, or, as a writer put it (speaking of the poet Burns):

half dust, half deity<sup>3</sup>.

And what higher duty can he have than to curb the beast and give the angel victory, to raise the low, and make the dust divine?

These cultural divisions, which I have based on the faculties of man, are only meant to shed light on this question; for there are no water-tight compartments in human life; and although there is a hierarchy in human values, these values are all interdependent, are meant to serve one final end, namely, the up-lift and the cultivation of man and the attainment of happiness. Moreover, behind all cultural activity there is but one supreme, master architect—the human mind.

As I observed earlier, the fundamental needs of man are the same for all men; and, if men were all supremely perfect in mind and will there would be but only one culture the world over. But the intellect, man's instrument for the fashioning of culture, is imperfect, human inclinations are corrupt, there are differences of place and time, differences of means, inequalities in development; these are the factors responsible for the diversity and the imperfections of the cultures of the world.

There are, therefore, from various points of view, advanced cultures and backward cultures. Thus, to-day, while the African peasant has nothing to carry him around but his two weary limbs, the whiteman is soaring into the heavens and heading for the moon.

I say "from various points of view" because it does not follow that a culture which excels in one thing has a monopoly of excellence in everything, nor that, because a culture is backward, it is destitute of excellence in all respects.

### **The Principles of Cultural Growth**

With regard to cultural growth and development, I have already said that, where nature is generous, where the tooth of want is not so keen, where only the minimum of effort is required for

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3, *Pictures from English Literature*, p. 86.

needs to be supplied, where men are untroubled by doubt and deaf to the urgings of the spirit of inquiry, minds remain complacent and beclouded and cultural achievement cannot be impressive.

On the contrary, where nature subjects man to extremes of climate, where men have to think hard and exert their minds to the utmost to fend for themselves, cultural achievement has been great. Furthermore, in the fields of scientific invention, artistic creativeness, the advancement of social institutions, moral perfection, where individuals or communities are not satisfied with present achievements but are animated by ideals which they ceaselessly strive to attain, cultural progress has been continuous and rapid. In the scientific and philosophical fields, where men's minds are in doubt with regard to the certainty of their tenets, where the urge to inquire is for ever gnawing, there too cultural achievement and progress have been fast and impressive. In like manner, when a people is neighbour to another whose cultural achievement they can imitate or emulate, there too cultural progress has been great. Where there is a government tolerant of new or critical ideas, and eager to advance creative effort, science and social institutions, there culture is sure to make steady, impressive progress. Furthermore, where there is peace, where resources are abundant and where men are not completely absorbed in the struggle for the merest subsistence, there culture can advance with rapid strides. In brief, the sting of want, the changing inclemency of nature, the inspiration of lofty ideals, philosophical doubt, the spirit of inquiry, contact with more advanced cultures, freedom and peace, abundant wealth and leisure—these are the factors conducive to cultural growth.

## **Culture and Africa**

For a long time there was doubt and debate as to whether there existed such a thing as African Culture, African History? Whether the Negro people, like the white or the yellow, had a past worthy of pride?

To-day, no such debate can be entertained by serious scholarship; for, to-day, archaeology is revealing, to all who care to look, the stupendous glories of the Negro's past.

Let us forget about Egypt, although the black man can claim, and with rich justification, to have shared, in no small measure, in the creation of the civilization that has made the banks of the Nile unique in the history of the world. Let us concentrate our attention on authentic, undisputed Negro Africa. Taking a few random samples, as we move from west to east, we meet Ghana, Mali and Songhay in the Western Sudan, Nok in the Central, Meroe in the Eastern Sudan, and Zimbabwe, further to the south-east, in what they call Rhodesia.

About Ghana, Mali and Songhay, the fabulous Negro Empires that flourished in the Middle Ages, so much has been said and so much is known that there is no need to dwell on them unduly.

Ancient Ghana's wealth was so abundant that this country won for itself the title of the Land of Gold. In the middle of the eleventh century, its history was well documented by the North African writer Abdalla Ibn Abdel Aziz more familiarly known as El Bekri. Writing in 1067, El Bekri asserted that the king of Ghana could put 200,000 warriors on the field, more than 40,000 of whom were archers. The rest were most probably spearmen. Obviously, the cavalry formed a substantial portion of this army. 1067—that was just one year after William the Conqueror crossed the Channel with some 10,000 troops, knights and the footmen, and took Anglo-Saxon England. One is led to speculate what would have been the issue if William of Normandy had pitted his forces against the Ghana Emperor instead of against King Harold England. But there can be no debate on this that, for wealth and might and splendor, the two European antagonists were no match for the Negro Empire.

Mali which followed Ghana was certainly the richest realm in Africa, and perhaps in the world, in its time. A sign of this wealth was the dazzling Hajj that the Mansa or Emperor, Kongo Musa, made to Mecca in 1324. He took with him a caravan of 60,000 people and about 100 camel loads of gold each weighing about 300 pounds. It was the biggest moving crowd that Africa had ever seen. And the spectacular wealth that this hajj displayed so dazzled the people in his line of march that their descendants still talked about it a hundred years after.

During the Mali and the Songhay Empires, learning flourished in the Western Sudan. Timbuktu, for instance, was famous for its

**Sankore** or university which attracted students from far and wide in Africa. Jenne was another centre of learning which boasted of a university where not only lectures were given but research was carried on.

A revolutionary and far reaching influence in the rise and the spread of these civilizations was the use of iron. Iron ore was plentiful, and tools and weapons made from it were far more effective, in work and war, than those made from copper, bronze, stone or wood. Iron gave mastery over soil and forest, over stone and bone and wood-using neighbours; it gave ease to conquest, and, thus, to the establishment of centralised government, and, thereby, to the promotion of new forms of social organization.

To the eastward, archæologists have unearthed a culture that is estimated to date from 3,000 years before Christ. The world got the first hint of the existence of this culture from the discovery, in 1931, of a few human heads in pottery in the village of Nok<sup>4</sup> in Zaria Province in Northern Nigeria. Since then, many more specimens of this art have been found in the wide area extending for some 300 miles across the broad valey that runs from east to west above the confluence of the Niger and the Benué. Among these specimens there are many portrait heads, stylistically modelled. Furthermore, it is asserted that Nok culture was of revolutionary significance, because it was the earliest iron-using culture in these parts of Africa. It is also thought to have given rise to further developments in art, social organization and religion. The discovery of the Nok portrait heads proved that, contrary to what deep-seated European prejudice was wont to believe, Negro peoples possessed an ancient and authentic native tradition in anthropomorphic art, that is, the more or less naturalistic portrayal of humanity. For, indeed, when the first astonishing heads and busts were brought to Europe, at the dawn of this century, from Ife and Benin they were greeted by a chorus of disbelief: surely they were Portuguese, Egyptian or Greek but certainly not Negro. Utterly impossible! How could niggers be capable of such things!

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4. Basil Davidson—*Old Africa Rediscovered*, pages 65-66.

To-day, however, further discoveries in the Sahara have revealed that Negro peoples were painting men and women with sensitive realism 3,000 years before Christ, and, that they were, perhaps, among the originators of naturalistic portraiture.

Further to the eastward, in what is now the Republic of Sudan, and north of present-day Khartoum, lies the area where, some 2,000 years or so ago, lay the Empire of Kush.<sup>5</sup> Near the sixth cataract of the Nile, a hundred miles from what is now Khartoum, was situated, in those days, the Kushite capital of Meroe. As archæological investigation progresses, it is being established that its ruins are among the great monuments of the ancient world; indeed these Kushite ruins, of which only a tiny portion has been explored, are declared to constitute the richest archæological sight that still remains in Africa, and, perhaps, the richest that still remains in any part of the world. At Meroe, and at other parts of what was ancient Kush, stand solitary ruins of palaces and temples that must have been built for a civilization that flowered, as I have said above, more than 2,000 years ago.

Southward from the Sudan, we move down to Rhodesia, and, in the area below the town of Fort Victoria, are scattered the stone ruins known as the Great Zimbabwe<sup>6</sup>. They have their fame and reputation among many ruins in Rhodesia for their skilful putting together, their large conception, their tall girdling walls and towers, their rounded gateways, their evidence of power and unity and ordered settlement. The European explorers who first saw Zimbabwe could not believe that the forebears of the uncouth, hut-dwelling Africans whom they met had built these stone walls and massive palaces. But the more these ruins are investigated, the more evident it becomes that they must have sprung from the native craftsmanship and ingenuity of peoples who worked without any outside architectural influence to guide or help them. Everywhere these structures are marked by an originality which seems to owe nothing to the rest of the world.

Such was the grandeur of ancient Africa.

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5. Basil Davidson: *Old Africa Rediscovered*, pages 50-57.

6. Basil Davidson: *Old Africa Rediscovered*, pages 203-205.

And lest you accuse me of partiality or exaggeration, let me say that it is not I that am singing the praises of old Africa; it is the Egyptologist, Dr. Jean Vercoutter, it is William Fagg and Griffith; it is Basil Davidson from whom I have drawn a deal, it is Reisner and Garstang; it is the French, English, German archæologists and scholars who are bearing witness. For, for the most part, at least for the present, the Africans have neither the resources, nor the know-how, nor the leisure for vast and prolonged archæological investigations. It is the whiteman's mouth, lately foul and strident with insult, abuse and contempt against the black, that is to-day sweet and loud in the proclamation of the glory of our dusky forefathers.

I have said and stressed elsewhere that culture, essentially and before all else, is thought, scientific and philosophic thought, thought that grows from cause to effect. Consequently, where there are great or revolutionary realisations in science, in the arts, in advanced social institutions, there must be a great culture; for such realisations, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, must arise from great and organised ideas and principles, from systems of thought. That ancient Africa, therefore, possessed great cultures, at all levels, is a fact firmly established to-day and put, completely forever, outside the arena of scientific controversy.

### **The Decline and the Cause**

Yet not even the most rabid of African nationalists will dispute the fact that present-day Negro culture, in comparison with the pristine glories of Africa, is obviously poor.

What was it then that brought a blight on this splendour? The answer is not far to seek.

I said before that among the factors conducive towards cultural growth, either through internal evolution, independent invention and creation or through contact with external cultures richer by reason of greater achievement, are freedom, peace and leisure.

But from the beginning of the sixteenth century to our own day, without respite, there was to be no freedom, no peace and no leisure for Negro Africa. It was an unbroken period of unrelenting warfare, deluvial destruction and down-grinding slavery.

For the conquest of the New World, as everybody knows, took place before the scientific and industrial revolution. Then only

brown could exploit the new and limitless wealth; and the only brown that was found abundant and suitable was Negro brown. And so began the devastation, the unprecedented spoliation and the diaspora of the Negro race.

For four hundred years the blackman was hunted down like a beast throughout Africa; and the flower of Negro manhood was carried off to America; and everywhere the blackman went, he met with nothing but unrelieved tribulation. Four hundred years—just imagine that! Four hundred years of relentless butchery, rapine, wholesale destruction, terror, untold cruelty, commotion, chaos, disaster! Can you find anything to parallel this, for vastness and intensity, anywhere in the History of mankind?

How could culture survive and grow in such an atmosphere of protracted turbulence? How can society flourish where hell is let loose? Do you still wonder then at the blighted state of present-day African culture? Rather you should wonder that anything remained at all! Indeed there are serious writers, not Africans, who have argued to the Negro's superiority from the fact that he was able to survive such unspeakable catastrophes. For where is the Caribbean to-day? Where the American Indian?

The end of slavery, however, did not mean the end of the Negro's woes; for it yielded place almost immediately to imperialist colonialism and to racial discrimination. The whiteman strove, might and main, to despoil the black on his own continent, of his own continent, strove to keep him down lest he should rise and become a rival. And to make this new implacable thralldom more complete, they decided to enslave his soul, to inculcate into his mind, through raillery and contempt the idea that he was inherently despicable and inferior and that all excellence, all nobility, all that is beautiful and sublime was white. And thus they were able to make him detest himself and the works of his hands.

### **Restoring the Remnants**

But, fortunately, not everything was destroyed. In the arts, in the field of moral and social values, much remains that merits to be admired and preserved. African sculpture, as everybody knows, has been an inspiration to modern European art. There exists in Africa a wealth of unrecorded traditional literature. The

African tendency to give primacy to human, social, moral and spiritual considerations, as opposed to calculations of materiel gain or advantage, should be encouraged and reinforced. The straight-forward candour, the simplicity and the naturalness of the African's attitude towards his fellow men is to be preferred to the artificiality, the excessive cultivation, the sophistication and the over-fineness of European manners. The African conviction that the inculcation of manliness is a first principle of education should be restored and stressed in the face of the emasculating effects of pleasure-loving western materialism. The spirit of African solidarity as the foundation and the bond of society must be protected, preserved and consolidated against the blight and the disintegrating effects of European individualism.

There does exist, therefore, an African culture worthy of preservation. Furthermore, it is to be stressed that, in despite of intensive efforts at westernisation, this traditional culture remains the way of life of the vast majority of the African peoples, and that it constitutes the warp and woof of the thought of the said peoples.

It is not therefore possible, were it even desirable, to raze this culture to the ground and to begin afresh to build on a new and foreign basis. From the very nature of things, therefore, account must be taken of African culture in the erection of the new African cultural edifice.

In support of this thesis, Aimé Césaire, the renowned West Indian Negro poet, once said that the shortest and safest road to the future lies through the past. In other words, we would know cock-surely whither we should tend, if we knew as surely whence we have come. Furthermore, in teaching, it is laid down, as a first principle, that surest instruction goes from known to unknown, from within without, from home abroad.

The culture that we have inherited from the past, therefore, must be the foundation on which the modern African cultural structure should be raised; the soil into which the new seed should be sown; the stem into which the new scion should be grafted; the sap that should enliven the entire organism.

As I have said before, this culture was the object of imperialist mockery, it was despised and rejected; our first and primordial duty to-day, therefore, in its regard, is to rehabilitate it. This advo-

cation of the restoration of African culture must be accompanied, however, by a word of warning.

The rehabilitation of African culture cannot be a mere archaeological enterprise; it will not answer to dig up the past and live it as it was. For, for one thing, like any other work of the hands of man, African culture is not without its imperfections; for another, times change and African culture must adapt itself, at every turn, to the changing times.

In restoring African culture, therefore, we must steer clear of two extremes: on the one hand, the imperialist arrogance which declared everything African as only fit for the scrap-heap and the dust-bin, and, on the other hand, the overly enthusiastic and rather naïve tendency to laud every aspect of African culture as if it were the quintessence of human achievement.

There is, in the hymn to the Holy Spirit, in the Catholic Service for Pentecost Sunday, a passage which, to my mind, expresses very aptly what should be our policy on this important point of cultural rehabilitation:

*Lava quod est sordidum,  
riga quod est aridum,  
sana quod est sancium;  
flecte quod est frigidum,  
fove quod est frigidum,  
rege quod es devium.  
Cleanse the sordid,  
water the arid,  
heal the wounded;  
render the rigid pliant,  
make the frigid warm,  
and the crooked straight.*

For, if this rehabilitation is to be worth the while, it must result in a culture shorn and purged of all that is filthy; it must be rendered fertile in order to foster growth, invention, and creative activity; it must pulse with health and vigour in all its members. Furthermore, while remaining true and faithful to itself, it must be flexible, easily readjustable to the reasonable exigencies of time and place; it must be rich with the genuine warmth of generous humanity and must walk the straight and narrow road of truth and justice.

The work of cultural rehabilitation in Africa, therefore, must be, not a work of indiscriminate restoration, but one of critical and judicious selection.

Furthermore, rehabilitating African culture is not the same thing as building a museum where the best realisations of the past are preserved and exposed for admiration. Culture, as I have said before, is something organic, something living, something which grows and which sometimes undergoes changes that are tantamount to a very metamorphosis. What a world separates the ancient Roman cart from the supersonic airliner, the mediaeval knight's armour from the modern jet-fighter armed with nuclear war-heads! But European civilization claims them both.

It would be misleading therefore to maintain that the only authentic elements of African culture are those inherited from the past. On the contrary, any invention, any creation that is the genuine outcome of African genius, effort and initiative, however new-fangled it may look, is really and truly African.

Indeed, any African who saw the dawn of this century and whom age preserves to see its close, will have witnessed, in his time, a very metamorphosis in African culture; and, in the twilight of his days, even among his own people, he may feel himself:

...*"companionless, Among new men, strange faces, other minds."*<sup>7</sup>

Yet, both he the wizened relic of the century's dawn about whom the days and years darken and the strange youngmen of the rizing age with the new manners, other minds, will be both authentic, genuine Africans.

Therefore, to the imperious duty of promoting judicious cultural restoration and rehabilitation must be added the equally imperious one of fostering cultural growth. This growth, this development, can be achieved and kept up, as we have seen before, through internal and independent cultural evolution, invention, creation, according as circumstances change and new needs and challenges arise.

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7. Lord Tennyson : *Morte d'Arthur*.

On the other hand, it can also be realised, as I have said already, through fruitful contact with more advanced cultures. For just as a living organism can take in dead external matter—animal vegetable, mineral, gaseous—and digest it, and transform it, and absorb it into its own flesh and blood in such wise that both become one and indistinguishable, in the same manner, whenever a genuine need exists, the culture that feels this need can supply it by borrowing from wealthier neighbours and by so thoroughly digesting and absorbing the new cultural acquisitions that they become part and parcel of the substance of its being.

And here it is that an important question comes in, namely, that of Cultural Integration. To-day, this question, as I said at the start, has become the urgent problem, the rousing challenge, a burning need in Africa.

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