

## THE HIGH COST OF AMBIGUITY

IN a society almost molten with minority impulses for radical change, and at the same time rigid with other minority fears of "subversion," the absence of clear conceptions of a social ideal is a cause of deep guilt feelings and passionate over-simplifications. Putting this in other words, you could say that this is a time when some people feel constrained to challenge every aspect of the *status quo*, while others see mortal danger in any kind of questioning.

A comparison of the present with the stable forms of a traditional society will help to set the problem. For example, the stratification of the population into hereditary classes, as during the Middle Ages, provided a sort of security that has only a shadowy presence, today. Then the role of the individual and what he could hope for was almost completely defined by the accident of birth. The social arrangements were a part of the natural order of things—a reflection of the Great Chain of Being—and human responsibilities and duties varied with one's "place" in the scheme. The over-arching ethic concerned what a man did and how he behaved, *in his place*, not how he rose in the external scale. Fulfillment was, at least in theory, a matter of spiritual reward, and this made it possible for each man, however humble his calling, to achieve the dignity of a life well lived.

No one can say what would have happened in the eighteenth century—if anything at all—if the true ideals of the European hierarchical society had been lived up to by all concerned. We know, at any rate, that the institutionally far more logical caste system of India, so well defended by Ananda Coomaraswamy, has been unable to survive in the face of its own weaknesses and corruptions, and after the impact of the equalitarian vision of Western political thinking, which was soon followed by the angry, anti-traditional rationalism of the twentieth-century Communist revolution. In any event, the old individual solution for the imperfections and shortcomings of the "natural" hierarchical society—

namely, the withdrawal of enlightened and spiritually aspiring persons from temporal concerns—was no longer permissible for responsible people. Almost entirely alone among modern thinkers, Gandhi attempted a synthesis between traditional wisdom and the social ideals of the eighteenth- and twentieth-century revolutions, but it now appears that the Gandhian synthesis, if it will work at all, belongs to some future cycle of reform.

The dilemmas of the present, almost without exception, grow out of the conflict between what are quietly regarded as the "natural" facts of the differences among men and the conception of a society rationalized according to some dream of social ethics. *Power*, as the most pervasively real of the natural facts, is endlessly cast as the tough, indispensable tool of ethical purpose. Through power, the champions of Manifest Destiny in the United States claimed that they would bring the benefits of free American civilization to the far places of the world. Through power, the revolutionaries of the twentieth century planned to destroy the structure of the economic class society and replace it with the equalitarian beneficence of socialist planning. Through power, the United States now declares its defense of political self-determination and of its own historical resolution of the conflict between natural fact and ethical value, represented by the free enterprise system as modified by the controls and compromises of the Western, democratic Welfare State. Through power, the Chinese Communists affirm their intention of destroying, wherever they can, the old hierarchical forms of social relationships, as in Tibet, substituting the mechanisms of ideological control.

With the growth of power in its various forms—military power, technological power, the power of planned indoctrination and psychological manipulation—comes a corresponding magnification of the tasks that power is expected to accomplish. And with the increase in the reliance on power—

which is regarded as the only *sure* instrument that men of righteous purpose can depend upon—the moral contradictions arising from the use of power multiply. On the whole, people are reluctant to *see* these moral contradictions, which can only cause them deep embarrassment. So, instead of decreasing the use of power, they do everything they can to increase their justifying feeling of righteousness. The horrors of the use of power must now be matched by the horrors anticipated from failing to use it, and so the ideological inflation continues, until more and more people are sickened and unmanned by its practical requirements. Being pragmatists by instinct, and easily persuaded of the importance of doing what is "necessary" for the general good, they paid little attention to the metaphysical and psychological contradictions in the hope that power could resolve the conflict between fact and value, and they now have no intellectual basis for understanding the massive failures of their attempt at synthesis. In this condition of bewilderment, they may even feel a little grateful that the terrible problems of "command decision" are taken out of their hands by political leaders and the men in the Pentagon.

There are many social forms which manifest this kind of moral contradiction. And wherever there has been a proud neglect of "theory," shallow solutions are sought and often accepted for no better reason than that they have a cheap clarity which can be contrasted with the endless ambiguity of modern socio-political thought.

The moral emotions demand "action." In order to act, you have to take a stand and make some definitions of good and evil which give your action meaning. If you don't have serious, thought-out conceptions of the issues in deciding about good and evil, you go by your feelings, since the moral emotions won't wait. Take for example the present generation of students in the United States, and consider how they are reacting to the good and evil factors in their environment, and how people generally are reacting to the kinds of action by the students. For an approach to the question there is this opening paragraph in a *Peace News* (July 23 )

article by Richard Elman on radical student action in the United States:

America, or so we are told, is living through a student revolution, a sexual revolution, and a revolution on behalf of the Negro, all at the same time, and often with the same young people being participants in all three. It takes nothing away from these students to point out that their efforts are as much a consequence of American affluence as of student discontent. Students have always been a discontented population in this country, but until recently they were forced to put their claims for economic well-being before their generational quarrels with their elders. Now that the coveted status offered by a degree is no longer such a rarity, they are seeking other identities, other self-definitions. Very simply, it is now economically feasible for large numbers of Americans to aspire to being radical.

This is intended as an "objective" view of student unrest, but it is difficult to know what "objective" means, in the context of present-day thought. The intuitive factors which arouse the moral emotions of the students are clear enough. There is absolutely *no* excuse for the systematic injustice practiced against the Negro citizens of the United States. This, you could say, is a moral absolute, against which no argument can prevail. Add to this the history of white oppression of the Negroes, both before and after the Civil War, and you have the ground for immeasurable shame. Past wrongs against the Negroes are therefore immeasurably evil, in the sense that they can *never* be righted. Only present evils can be righted. So there are deep and compelling reasons for identifying with the Negroes as victims of injustice. And there are corresponding reasons for the student to regard his own, fairly comfortable, middle-class origins as symbols of time-stained moral indifference to the pain of other human beings.

This is, again, an expression of the kind of identification which radical students felt in the early 30's with the proletarian factory workers under Depression conditions, when wearing a clean white shirt became a badge of bourgeois insensibility. You have to live through one of these epochs of absolute moral judgment to grasp the feeling-tone of the situation. Over against these narrow currents of

class-determined righteousness may be set the various complacencies of traditional outlooks at the Rotary Club and local Chamber of Commerce level, so well characterized by Anatol Rapoport in *Etc.* for last September:

Coupled with class mobility, individual business success and its concomitant growth of productivity seemed the answer to the age-old question: How can man live in society and still be happy? The answer is found on every page of the *Reader's Digest*.

To be happy, find some gimmick which will enable you to amass wealth, or influence, or the admiration of others who aspire to do the same thing. You don't have to be rich to be happy—so much is admitted by the *Reader's Digest*. But you do have to be successful as an individual. You have to prove to yourself and others that there was something in you which was uniquely yours and that you have nurtured it until it paid off—preferably against odds, because then you reinforce the belief in God, and also the belief that anyone can do it.

This is the conventional extensional meaning of democracy in the United States. Everything else is superimposed upon it: social responsibility, civic virtue, philanthropy—yes, also mutual help—the barn-raising tradition.

The American is far from anti-social. He would like to think of others as his Brothers. But he does believe that he becomes a person to be reckoned with by his own efforts and that this is his primary duty. And then, after this duty is taken care of, *then* he may generously give of himself to others or to society at large. In the American conception, this giving is a virtue, not a duty.

The thing to be borne in mind, in considering these various viewpoints and conceptions of righteousness, is that they are all, at least in part, contingent upon some environmental situation which is subject to change, and that there is, on the other hand, no over-arching basis for criticism of them from an ideal point of view. People often move from one vague frame of reference to another, taking with them subconscious feelings which may never be brought out into the open and examined for what they imply. For example, a man may never quite get over his youthful identification with the "working classes," and for the rest of his life, no matter how he makes his way, or how the working classes

themselves change, be burdened with the assumption that entrepreneurs in business are cursed by original social sin and that *nothing* they can do has any moral merit. In the same way, a person who has absorbed from boyhood what Mr. Rapoport calls "the conventional extensional meaning of democracy in the United States" will by a kind of social instinct take a "lesser-breeds-without-the-law" view of people who have not acquired traditional "American" views by the same means as himself. It isn't that he means to be a selfish, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP), but simply that his culture has given him no other way of thinking about the social situation.

Three other factors of recent historical experience must now be applied to the general picture. First is the failure of the socialist revolution to produce an environment in which humanist values are seriously honored. Actually, no sooner does any revolutionary government come to power than there appear groups which declare that the revolution has been betrayed. It is slowly beginning to be understood that it is not power, but the decline and finally the absence of power that alone can serve humanist values.

Second is the continued renewal and elaboration of the critical doctrine of Alienation as it applies to the acquisitive society of the West. Finally, there is the conviction, seeping into the lives of an increasing number of thoughtful people, that the fundamental issues of existence are psychological-ethical, rather than political-ethical, and that modern man knows practically nothing about how to make political arrangements which take existential needs and potentialities into account. Even the various forms of radical action in behalf of the most obvious forms of justice are beginning to suffer from this realization. As Dorothy Samuel put it in her article in the Spring (1965) *Contemporary Issues*:

Even among the active, dedicated ones—SNCC workers and CORE demonstrators—there is little sense of hope. Obviously, not all of the students in civil rights work [have this feeling], which is fortunate for the morale of these movements. Over coffee, in the wee hours of the night, [exceptional students] on furlough from foreign service in Mississippi reveal how small they consider the area in which they can "overcome."

"I know I'm not really changing the world any out there," one said to me in emotionless tones. "But at least I'm doing *something*; I am working with living human beings whose needs are clear and obvious. But whatever I accomplish, it won't change the greed and cruelty and lying and exploitation that run through our whole bomb-happy civilization." And another pointed out, "It's easy to bleed for the Negroes now. But I have the horrible certainty that, once they get a square deal in our society, most of them are going to play the game just as the whites have been playing it for years."

The trouble—the *correctible* trouble, that is—lies in the fallibility of the norms on which we base our ideas of the good and which give direction to our intuitive impulses for justice. The norms are not universal ideas about human beings and their needs, but tracts for particular times, correctives for particular circumstances. As norms, they will survive neither the times nor the circumstances, bringing us, as times pass and circumstances change, extreme moral disorientation.

Norms based upon general ideas of the basic human situation would be seen to have varying application, depending on the particulars of the human condition. An illustration of this, in Gandhian terms, is the principle: "God dare not appear to the hungry man except in the form of bread." This is very different from a philosophy explicitly based upon hunger or other material needs.

An illustration of the distortion of social philosophy, through the adoption of short-term goals, is found in the claim that the first or sole purpose of the Negro "revolution" is to right the wrongs done by the whites against the Negroes. The Negroes, if they succumb to this view, become victims of this twisted definition of the good. As Irving Kristol wrote in *Harper's* for last February:

Too often the civil-rights movement seems to regard the American Negro as *nothing but* a negative sociological phenomenon, as *merely* the creature of white prejudice and discrimination—in short, as one who lives a life that can be defined *solely* in terms of deprivation, and whose message to America is a monotonous scream of outrage.

In this frame of reference, you get the kind of criticism which insists that the white liberals are

capable of *nothing but* blundering good-doing and sentimental, moral flattery of themselves; you get a generation of what Norman Mailer calls "white Negroes," and you get champions of the Negro cause like the young man who appeared before a class of California high school girls and began his address by saying: "I am looking at the next generation of white hypocrites."

There is some truth in each of these charges, but the truth is relative, not absolute. Trying to make it absolute renders it partisan and increasingly irrational, to the point of impossible and hopeless confrontations. The common ground of humanity in both black and white disappears, and the field of possible human relationships is razed of tender, beginning structures by nihilist emotions. The nihilism stretches out in all directions. You get a kind of conventionalized desperation in the young, which leads to the jazz-and-folk-music-and-marijuana school of alienation from the messes made by the preceding generation.

Actually, there is schism between very nearly every immediate intuition of basic human good that a person can feel and the short-run, historically determined doctrines of human good which our society affords. If a young man of the middle class reads Michael Harrington (*The Other America*) and is filled with a desire to help transform the United States into a land where there are no rubbish piles of human obsolescence, he is at once confronted by his own guilt for *being* a middle class American, and then by the angry defensiveness of all his contemporaries whose sense of virtue *because* they are middle class Americans is threatened by his new opinions. In short, the what-might-be of our social visions always begins with either an angry denunciation or a blind approval of what is—never with the simple question: "Well, this is the terrain we have; what good things can we grow on it?"

So we have, as a result, embattled *status-quo*-ism confronted by *Götterdämmerung* theories of total revolution. Since these two views can never meet in rational exchange, the result, in practice, is the kind of muddle-through, mechanical compromises and patch-up solutions of our problems typified in the present-day welfare state, which is

filled to the brim with situations in blatant contradiction to such actual knowledge as we possess about human good.

The lack of any over-all theory of human good provides endless opportunities for the "operators" in the field of social issues. Where there are no generalized norms, no basic criteria, but only fragmented doctrines inherited from the past, based upon limited, circumstantial claims of what is good for man, the irresponsibility of partisan arguments remains unexposed. Demagogues are free to practice their low-grade stimulus-and-response techniques on anxious populations, while the young, who often see and feel the phoneyess of it all, are given no basis for understanding what has happened to their parents.

Well, what is to be done? Actually, hope lies mainly with two kinds of people. First, there are the Silent Good, the people who keep on doing the best they know, regardless of intellectual contradictions and the shortcomings of theory. They could and doubtless would do a lot more, if they could live in a social framework that would enable their consistently good motives and basic regard for other people to meet with fewer obstacles and frustrations, but meanwhile they do what they can and it is the work of these people that gives our society what semblance it now has to a Human Community. You could compare the Silent Good to the conscientious peasants who once formed the endlessly surviving identity of a country torn by wars and political revolutions. They go on, pick up the pieces, after each social cataclysm, continuing their quiet love affair with life and their fellows. As long as they have land—or, in the analogy, a place to work—they will cultivate their gardens.

The other kind of people with whom hope lies might be called visionaries and dreamers—those who work unceasingly to raise the sights of their time to a view of man and society which is less vulnerable to changes in historical circumstances and the conditions of life. These people have against them the entire grain of Western civilization—not the grain of progress and longing for a better world, but the grain of complacency and conceit and self-righteousness, which makes men leap to condemn

and mock any proposal which cannot be made to work by the means which have brought us to where we are now. Is it not obvious that means we need to take us *elsewhere* are likely to seem impractical follies when compared to those we are presently using? And that a deep revolt against what we now are, and are now doing, is a prerequisite to any real change?

We have, for example, concentrated on improving the environment for ourselves, and for others, for some two hundred years. We have argued that getting the right environment will produce—or set free the goodness in men. And we have silently counseled ourselves that although it would be better to change the people, we don't know how to do this, so we will make the environment do it for us—by a kind of technological trick we will solve the mystery of human development and excellence. We continue to talk about the sacredness of the individual and the importance of freedom, but we don't really believe in these things. We insist on *being sure* the inviolable individuals will turn out the way, just now, we think they ought to turn out. So we accelerate the war in Viet Nam. We make, in absolute defiance of the equalitarian principle of the eighteenth century, a high caste decision to set right the power relationships of a wayward world. This is a way of saying that it is always permissible to compromise your principles if you happen to be right. The highest cost of the ambiguities in our cultural traditions and in our pretensions to social and personal morality lies right here.

## *REVIEW*

### "VALUES" AND THE ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY

PETER DRUCKER, in a February *Harper's* article, "American Directions: A Forecast," indicates that the once well-established American habit of regarding economic management as the key to the Good Life is now rapidly being displaced. During a discussion with graduate students and young instructors at a large Midwestern university, Mr. Drucker realized that "most of the men were political scientists or economists and had heard—if only vaguely—of yesterday's great private-versus-public-power controversy; but, in their own words, it seemed to them as irrelevant and as quaint as the debate over free silver." The significance of this observation is partially suggested by some twentieth-century social history recalled by Mr. Drucker:

For the last seventy years at least, economic issues have defined the political position of an individual or of a group in the American spectrum. Non-economic issues were largely treated as adjuncts, the position of a man on economic issues determined, by and large, where he stood on all others. Where a non-economic issue could not be folded into an economic framework—for example, a good many foreign-policy issues—we tried, on the whole with success, to treat it as "bipartisan." But non-economic issues may well become the core of political belief and action.

It appears to be coming clearer, indeed, that the linking of Democracy with Capitalism as a base for "values" is careless and inadequate—*i.e.*, capitalism as a system of private investment for pyramiding monetary returns has nothing to do with establishing a social ideal, whereas democracy, in the Jeffersonian sense, does. The "profit motive," certainly, and its matrix of an acquisitive society, can no longer be the guide to civilized progress.

In an introduction to discussions of "The Values of a Business Society" by contemporary writers (*Contemporary Moral Issues*) Harry Givretz substantiates Mr. Drucker's view:

The acquisitive impulse is as old as man and has manifested itself wherever men have lived, but the Acquisitive Society hardly antedates the third quarter of the eighteenth century.

The acquisitive society institutionalized the profit motive, gave it a central role, made it the driving force that transformed the static and stable economies of an earlier era. This was, as Tawney has said, its "whole tendency and interest and preoccupation." An acquisitive society is one in which the means of production are privately owned and in which the motives of the market, that is to say, the calculated interests of buyers and sellers, determine the allocation of productive resources and the distribution of incomes. Such a society, as Joseph Schumpeter has written, "has been cast in a purely economic mold: its foundations, beams and beacons are all made of economic material. The building faces toward the economic side of life. Prizes and penalties are measured in pecuniary terms. Going up and down means making and losing money."

For a long time such a society felt no need to examine its basic premises, including its economic bias and the central place it accorded economic man. In recent years, however, such a review has been going on. Not only did the acquisitive society develop unexpected weaknesses, it had to meet the challenge of competing systems and ideologies. The resulting reexamination has gone far beyond economic analysis to a reappraisal of the basic values of a good society. . . .

Have we, in our quest for consumer goods, starved our social services, neglected public amenities, ignored national goals? A major reason for our preoccupation with consumer goods is that the talents and energies of a great many able people are concentrated on promotion and salesmanship, which in effect bias the outlay we make as a people in favor of consumption to the neglect of such social needs as urban redevelopment, education, recreation, and conservation. Quite apart from the fact that supersalesmanship may—by persuading people to buy what they would not in ordinary circumstances want—lead to such neglect and to a misdirection of resources how are we morally to evaluate the main manifestation of such promotion in the form of advertising?

Examining "The Condition Called Prosperity" in *Human Nature and the Human Condition*, Joseph Wood Krutch wryly points out why the

goal of material acquisition so often subverts individual and societal growth:

Unless all moral truths really are relative to a material situation, if on the contrary there is anything permanent in either human nature or wisdom and virtue, then there is something which makes repugnant the injunction, "Love *things* above all else; learn to want more and more; waste rather than conserve; spend what you do not have." And it is repugnant in part, perhaps, because man realizes how prone one half of him is to do just that. . . .

If man has certain needs and desires which are not merely the creation of the condition in which he finds himself, if there is a good life and a good society to which he naturally aspires—then it may not be so easy as the cultural relativists suppose to adjust without resentment to a situation in which men are so much the slave of their Leviathan of production that its needs rather than their own determine their actions and their choices. . . .

A new paradox has intruded itself upon our already uneasy consciousness. Almost without realizing it we made, some years ago, the transition from that "economy of scarcity" which had been almost unbroken since the beginning of history to a new "economy of abundance." And no change in man's condition was ever more fundamental. Into our problem-ridden civilization came a new problem: superfluity. Is it possible that the pursuit of plenty, like the pursuit of power can become too successful?

In other words, it is precisely the "success" of the capitalist society in achieving abundance that exhibits the vacuum of meaning in the lives of its busy manipulators.

Writing elsewhere, Mr. Drucker looks closely at the acquisitive motive:

What about the popular indictment of the profit motive: that it is the cause of the lust for power and dominance and the sole or main obstacle to peace and equality? Certainly the "profit motive" is not necessarily inherent in human nature. But inherent in human nature there is a drive for power and distinction of which the profit motive is only one possible form. If we eliminate the profit motive, the result will not be the equal and peaceful society of the millennium but the emergence of some other outlet for men's basic lust for power.

We do not have to regard the drive for gain as noble or as the best man is capable of. But noble or

base, it directs the drive for power into the least dangerous channel. Of course the profit motive does not bring about a free society; the identification of capitalism with democracy, so current today, is utterly superficial and is the result of a truly shocking confusion. ("The Acquisitive Ideal": *Contemporary Moral Issues*.)

The leading minds who participated in the founding of the American Republic—and in formulating a workable philosophy of democracy—seem to have had little concern with "profit" or "acquisition." The vision of the Founding Fathers sought opportunity for each citizen to continually refine his ambitions and enlarge his sense of social responsibility. A passage in Arthur Bestor's *Backwoods Utopias* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950) conveys a measure of the utopian thinking which entered into the making of the original American Republic:

The American Republic, remarked Madison to an English visitor, is "useful in proving things before held impossible." Of all the freedoms for which America stood, none was more significant for history than the freedom to experiment with new practices and new institutions. What remained mere speculation in the Old World had a way of becoming reality in the New. In this process, moreover, the future seemed often to unveil itself. The evolving institutions of the United States, wrote Lord Bryce, "are something more than an experiment, for they are believed to disclose and display the type of institutions towards which, as by a law of fate, the rest of civilized mankind are forced to move some with swifter, others with slower, but all with unresting feet." A conviction of this gave motive and meaning to the journey of many a traveler in early nineteenth-century America. Here the social dreams of the Old World were dreams no longer but things of flesh and blood. Here the social problems of the nineteenth century were being confronted on the plane, not of theory, but of action.

This was to try to view the world as it *should* be, and ask, Why not? It is a far cry from this view to the idea that man is fundamentally acquisitive!

## *COMMENTARY*

### QUALIFICATION AND ADDITION

THIS week's "Children" article reports on a kind of parental activity which, were it to spread, would soon remove Moral Education from the list of "modern problems." In fact, it makes us wonder why Mrs. Samuel bothers to object to the "strictures which, in the name of freedom and objectivity are depriving school children of any religious observances and any attention to religion as 'real.'" *Her* children were not so "deprived." Are we sure that the State ought, or is really competent, to fill this vacuum?

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Some of the best passages, concerned with Africa's future, got crowded out of this week's Frontiers quotation from Smith Hempstone's book. Since they represent a social idealism that is complementary to the cultural promise of Africa, described in Ezekiel Mphahlele's report of two weeks ago (MANAS, Aug. 25), we add them here.

Nnarndi Azikiwe ("Zik"), president of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, who went to college and university in the United States, has a vision of Africa's future that makes Mr. Hempstone single him out as a leader of "truly national stature":

Zik believes that Africa is entering into a period of economic reconstruction and cultural rebirth. After that he hopes that the free nations of the continent will make a political union and use their power to obtain civil rights for cultural minorities in other parts of the world, particularly in South Africa. Although he has strong ties with the United States (he has a son at Harvard), Azikiwe maintains that Nigeria should follow a neutralist policy (no regional public funds have been spent on French goods and services since the second atomic explosion in the Sahara) which would allow her freedom of action.

As a closing quotation, we take the following from the author's discussion of African political forms:

A new synthesis is in the making and something new in political organization is about to emerge, an "Afrocratic" system which utilizes the form but not the substance of democracy and draws much of its inspiration from indigenous institutions. This implies limited freedom of speech, irregular and semi-free elections, a one-party system and rule of a popular dictator. Western democracy evolved from a given set of circumstances to fit the needs and aspirations of a small portion of the world's population at a given point of time. This is not the time in Africa and parallel circumstances, needs, and aspirations do not exist among the peoples and nations. . . . Africa wants not democracy but the right to rule or misrule herself, not an efficient civil service but a black one, not ballot boxes but the essential self-respect of political freedom, even at the cost of personal liberty. . . . what they want is to be recognized as *men*, not democrats.

. . . Great forces have been unleashed—within five years the Afro-Asian bloc will hold at least fifty of one hundred and four seats in the United Nations General Assembly—and Africa is a continent on the move. We may not understand her but we ignore the New Africa at our peril.



## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### LETTER FROM A READER

IN the May 5 MANAS, "Children . . . and Ourselves" mocked David Lawrence's idea of using Voice of America religious broadcasts to get around the strictures which, in the name of freedom and objectivity, are depriving school children of any religious observances and any attention to religion as "real." In so doing you moved me to write a comment which has long been germinating in my mind as I read your (to me) ambivalent attitudes toward religion.

Granted Mr. Lawrence's plan was not profound, and his justification hardly inspiring: we're doing it elsewhere, we can do it here. But it is at least on the track; it encourages diversity, not omission. Nothing in our history leads us to believe that the framers of the Constitution intended to free man *from* religious influences and religious concepts—quite the reverse. What did concern them was that man be free of denominational (and, by extension today, religious-system) domination. To deprive a child of any but textbook knowledge of religion is to prevent the very freedom of choice we cherish. It is also to remove the springs of that "religious" sense which MANAS is constantly reaffirming lately: a sense of reverence and awe for the universe and its harmonies, for the dignity of all men, for the puniness of man's knowledge, and for the arrogance of his insistence upon controlling and manipulating all that he touches.

No, the fault in Mr. Lawrence's proposal is only that it is too narrow. The Constitutional restrictions can be as well obeyed by giving equal approval and support to *all* religions as by giving them to none. To do this it is no more necessary to locate a believer in every known religious doctrine than it is to require an Arab on every history staff, or a monarchist on every political science faculty. Perhaps less so. Today, as Paul Tournier has pointed out, heresy remains the

prime crime; but religious heresy is irrelevant, and it is political heresy that is punishable by death.

It is logical to have predominantly Christian and Jewish observances and readings in the U.S. But what is so horrible about this? Had our family spent some years in a foreign land with a different religious tradition (as at one time in our children's youth we fully expected to do), we would have felt our children's lives enriched by the Moslem or Hindu or Buddhist fetes and programs of a school in such a country.

MANAS' editors' own belief seems to be: "It follows that anyone seeking to be truly nonsectarian will avoid the 'assumption that one religion is or is not superior to others:'" and "foster respect for the 'spiritual nature of man'—regardless of formal creed." (Same May 5 article). And I agree. How better do just this than to be indifferent to the form by which "respect for the 'spiritual nature of man' " is presented?

Our own experience may help to clarify these generalities. My husband and I are "Christians" in the sense that we believe the example of Jesus adds a dimension of reality and a touchstone of interpretation less readily found in other formulations of what Huxley distills out as the "perennial philosophy." Our greater familiarity with Christian literature and thought doubtless also played a large part in the decision to use the Gospels (not the Bible) as the primary text for spiritual growth. But we have learned much from the Eastern religions and feel no sense of moral or spiritual or intellectual superiority to the sincere seeker who is more constantly guided by the *Bhagavad-Gita*, for instance. One drinks from the nearest well. Frankly, if God is, we don't think He cares much about names and forms.

But how transmit to our children our belief that religion is important, personal, and inescapable while still preserving them from narrow loyalties to groups and denominations? How develop their awareness of the core of spiritual reality in *all* groups and denominations—

and of the cant and hypocrisy of practices in *all* religious groups and denominations?

We tried to do this by deliberately placing them under the influence of as many different religionists as we could conveniently locate in a, fortunately, mobile life. Far from "protecting" them from proselytizing, we sought these experiences for them. We took them to Jehovah's Witnesses' meetings, holy rollers', Christian Scientists', as well as to most of the more "respectable" churches and philosophical groups in the U.S. And we immersed them, briefly perhaps, but thoroughly. We did not go once to each service as tourists; we attended frequently all the different programs of the group at hand until the children came to know people as characters in their lives, and could observe both preaching and practice. Thus they began learning from about the age of five that all religious groups contain some wonderful people and some stinkers, some true and some false premises (for true read universal or "perennial"), some dedicated moral commitment and some self-seeking hypocrisy.

To supplement this, we were fortunate in having personal friends who were atheists, agnostics and humanists. The children were always allowed to listen and to question to the fullest. (And they did! Children are remarkably eager for abstract thought when it is neither denied nor forced upon them.) We provided books and magazine articles of and about Eastern religions and their "saints" as well as their sinners. And we always discussed religion ourselves as (1) man's most serious inquiry, and (2) man's most unfinished inquiry.

We started this program with only a narrow purpose: to preserve them from being bowled over and enlisted by the first dynamic true-believer who shocked them with unfamiliar ideas. As time progressed, and we grew wiser, our goal came to be exactly what MANAS' goal seems to be: recognition that spiritual values are universal and have been dimly seen throughout recorded history by all men everywhere. Though the trappings

reflected local *mores*, and the practices reflected local weaknesses, the visions of the world's spiritual sports have been one. No group of followers has ever failed to mediocritize and hypocritize, but the vision remains for "whosoever will" to glimpse again and revivify.

Today these four children are in college or beyond. Our first, narrow aim has been fully achieved. Our second seems not to have failed; it is not a goal which can be considered won or lost at any given age.

This, we believe, is a pattern by which a society with far greater resources than any single family, could successfully preserve for its children the spiritual richness of their heritage while avoiding any enforced submission to a single doctrinal form with all of its weaknesses.

Let the teachers be free human beings, let the observances reflect the local culture (*i.e.*, Christmas here), encourage diversity in the personnel of schools, bring in visiting teachers from other cultures each year, have those who are not of the local opinion lead services and appropriate celebrations typical of their own background, and welcome the earnest presentation of each individual's deepest convictions, including the atheist and the agnostic.

Only in this way can our children be truly free to value their spiritual heritage, and to contribute to it as independent, creative adults in their turn. Such, I believe, was the religious freedom of which the famed forefathers dreamed, and of which we dream today. We want the virtues of the religious life—the life illumined by love and genuine morality—without the parochialism and possessiveness of boxed-in doctrines and dogmas. The means cannot be boxed-in atheism or boxed-in secularism. The means must be as free and open and respectful of man's human dignity and intelligence as the ends we would achieve.

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## *FRONTIERS*

### The New History-Makers

ONE way of describing Smith Hempstone's *Africa—Angry Young Giant* (Praeger, 1961, \$7.95) would be to say that any attempt to summarize its contents is doomed to total defeat. While the scope of this 664-page volume is limited to "the emergent African states south of the Sahara and north of the Congo," where seventeen new flags went up the year the book was published, its enormous mass of detail in history and recent politics and in anecdote of personal experience soon exceeds the capacity of the reader to do anything but marvel at the author's conscientious industry and Africa's endless complexity. Reading it is a humbling experience, which is doubtless the best possible contribution to anyone who sets out to find out about Africa by the obvious course of turning to books. Mr. Hempstone is well aware of this problem. As he says in his last paragraph:

Elsbeth Huxley wrote to me in 1959 that "trying to write a book about Africa nowadays is like attempting to photograph a horse race with an ancient camera: the subject is moving so fast that you are lucky if your film shows more than a blurred shape." No truer words were ever written. But that is one of the fascinations of the New Africa.

During a period of thirty months the author traveled an area two thirds again as large as the United States, visiting twenty-six countries and interviewing "more than a thousand labour leaders, priests, agricultural officers, teachers, black nationalists, white settlers, merchants, miners, bums, physicians, housewives, chiefs and witch-doctors." He also talked to heads of states. The reader reaches the conclusion that although Africa's future remains completely unpredictable, the impact of that future will be felt by all the world, and sooner than we think. Further, it is likely to arrive with the momentum of a juggernaut but in the dizzying style of an elaborate cake walk. Meanwhile, a saddening note comes from the declaration of a tribal chief of Benin. Asked by Mr. Hempstone what independence would mean for Nigeria, he replied: "Power politics. We want to play power politics like Britain and America."

The author began his 70,000-mile trek in Sudan, then going to the much put-upon country of Ethiopia, whose recent history is an extraordinary story of the devotion of modern emperors to the practical needs of their people. In 1896 Menelik drove the Italians from his country—a "major victory, the first and last to be achieved by a native chief against a modern European power." This won the respect of Europe and in the following thirty-seven years of peace he established a civil administration, worked to suppress the slave trade, introduced the telephone and telegraph, and a postal system. He also built schools and hospitals. These forward steps were continued by Haile Selassie, the son of a general who usurped the throne by a *coup d'etat* when Menelik's grandson suddenly abandoned the ancient Christianity of Ethiopia, exchanged Solomon for Mohammed as his legendary ancestor, and announced that Turkey would take over the religious rule of the land. During the second Italian conquest of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie waited in exile until 1941, when he returned at the head of a liberating British army. Since then he has labored mightily to bring Ethiopia out of feudalism into the Atomic Age. He is personally responsible, Mr. Hempstone says, for all his country's progress:

Nowhere else in the world is there a rule so personal. The Emperor will scrutinize the contract of a palace cook with the same intensity with which he settles the fate of thousands. . . . His gnome-like shadow falls across every aspect of life and he rules 17 million wild mountaineers and fierce nomads with a gentle smile and an iron fist. No power is delegated, no responsibility is shunned. In comparison to him, the Adenauers, Chiangs and De Gaulles of the world look rather wishy-washy. This is no halfpenny dictator, no comic opera emperor. . . . But such democracy as there is exists because of Haile Selassie and despite the opposition of important segments of society. If the Emperor has not made the people of Ethiopia into Swiss democrats, he has at least made it possible for public sentiment to be expressed through constitutional channels. In this time and in this place, Haile Selassie has brought about as much democracy to Ethiopia as could be hoped for.

In Eritrea, a mountainous region now federated with Ethiopia, the author encountered an interesting

comment on Fundamentalist religion. It seems that an American Pentecostal church has a mission there and its comparative prosperity is drawing converts from more austere operated missions. The Africans call the Pentecostal folk "People-of-the-Deaf-God, since they shout so loudly when they call upon Him."

Another note on missionary zeal appears in the report of the trip to northern Kenya:

We threaded our way carefully through Wondo at 10 m.p.h. Ethiopian law makes little distinction between manslaughter and murder. Each is an offence against the clan of the victim and retribution must be paid either in blood or money. One's equanimity is not increased by the people's practice of waiting until a car is almost abreast of them and then dashing across the road. The priests have told them that the devil is always following them and the pious attempt in this fashion to give the devil a good jolt with the motorist's bumper.

Actually, the image the Africans have of Westerners is far easier to isolate than an image of African character. For example, each change in the colonial proprietors of the Cameroons brought a new contingent of missionaries. It was, as Mr. Hempstone remarks, quite a "spiritual merry-go-round" for the Africans to keep up with. He adds:

If the natives of the Cameroons found it difficult to follow the abrupt changes of nationality of their clergymen in the past, they must find it even more confusing today: 251 missionaries of eleven nationalities are busy peddling five denominations to a total congregation of 162,000 of whom almost half are Catholics. Numerically leading the field in this spiritual sweepstake are the Americans (61 missionaries), closely followed by the Dutch and the Swiss. Far back but leading the second pack are the British (26) and the Irish (22). Perhaps because they got tired of having to buy round-trip tickets, there are no Germans.

The story of Western influence in Africa is a mixed-up picture of the imperialistic sport of kings, strangely modified by the endless labors of hard-working administrators. Today it is a region filled with the vast enthusiasm of an awakening mass of human beings, but people who, alas, are not yet clear on the difference between political slogans and the practical needs of societies that aspire to

independence and self-sufficiency. Yet there are true heroes found here and there in the dramas of the African struggle for freedom. The economic possibilities of the new African nations vary enormously. The potentialities of hydroelectric power are immense, and Mr. Hempstone believes that some day Africa may reverse the relation of Europe and America with her, becoming the great center of world industry and importing much of her food. Meanwhile there are contemporary African leaders who understand the continent's immediate needs and are working to meet them. In his chapter on Gambia, the author says:

What Africa needs to achieve stability is a gradual rise in income and living standards of the entire population. Extensive and heavily mechanized schemes can, with proper planning, be made to work. But they can deal with only a minute section of the continent and touch the lives of only a small fraction of the people. What is needed in all fields—agriculture, health, education, housing, industry and commerce—is not so much the introduction of modern tools and methods as improvement of existing native implements and methods. An African emerging from the Stone Age cannot be expected to comprehend the intricacies of a combine. But he can and will recognize a better hoe when he sees one in use. Only by grafting simple technology to a frame of reference that can be understood can any appreciable and lasting gains be made.

By application of this principle in Gambia, the rice acreage has doubled since 1946, with increases in yield. The "hungry season" comes no more and the women who cultivate and harvest the rice now have time to help their husbands with the cash crop of ground nuts.

This essentially Gandhian way of improving the economic life of the people also preserves their independence.