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# **IDENTITY AND CHANGE**

**Nigerian Philosophical Studies, I**

Edited by  
*Theophilus Okere*

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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## PREFACE

George F. McLean

To enter into this book is truly to experience the turbulence of Africa today. Part I hides nothing; it attenuates nothing; instead it turns up the volume and marshals the spectrum of swirling concerns: conscious and subconscious, historical and contemporary, racial and cultural, internal and external, political, commercial and religious.

Justly or unjustly no one is spared. The eminent Leopold Sedar Senghor is berated for the extrinsic and superficial character of his designation of Africanity as "negritude", even as he is being quoted as saying that this refers not to the color of one's skin but to spiritual values. The primacy for the intuitive and affective he cites in the African character is condemned as demeaning, in contrast to the analytic and utilitarian rationalism from which other cultures now are attempting to escape. When Kant's third critique, that of aesthetic judgement, is at last being taken seriously Senghor's stress upon intuition, participation and spontaneity which were as central to the African spirit are regarded.

In this first part every shame is piled up and reinforced by examples, not merely from Africa in recent centuries, but even from preceding centuries in Latin America; every motivation is read at its blackest; every project from commerce, through education, to religion is scrutinized piteously for its unconscious (and often not so unconscious) demeaning biases.

At first the reader might begin to fear that he or she had encountered authors obstinately set against developments in education or religion, but these chapters are written by outstanding and committed leaders in both universities and church. Gradually, from within this very critique there begin to emerge brief indications for a positive project. It is to push aside, however forceably, simplistic reductionisms to either the traditional culture from the African past, on the one hand, or to the more recent cultural imports from other continents, on the other. This would make way for a project described by Theophilus Okere as growing out of the past tradition, but actively oriented toward the development of a future adequate for the African and particularly the Nigerian peoples.

There is therefore no need for African thinkers today selectively to regress into their "pure past" in a vain, quixotic quest for the "authentic" portion of the historic, but still ongoing, experience which is their culture. Neither is there any possibility of getting rid of their ancient, native africanity in order to fall into the embrace of an all-conquering but wholly imported culture that might pretend to the epithet "mainstream" or "universal". Culture today in Africa, as any time and anywhere, means total historical experience without denial or suppression of past or present, a dynamic unity of ancient and modern, a two-headed continuum with one head plunged into the immensity of the immemorial past, and the other as firmly and deeply immersed in the contemporary here and now. It is this total and holistic view of culture that has inspired the approach we have chosen in developing this first volume of the Nigerian Philosophy Series. For this a first step is to follow the opening exorcism by a fresh acceptance of self after the words of *Mokwogo Okoye*, "I had thus no need for complexes of contempt, rage or dissembling, and everywhere I moved, I saw myself as the equal or even superior of the people about me a pardonable sin after emerging, with my country, from a long period of repression and humiliation."

That this is truly the place to begin is not simply a psychological consideration, but reflects the absolutely central role of the self in Igbo thought as is developed intensively by T. Okere in

chapter IX. But this must mean accepting as well the reality not only of one's special competencies, but the limitations of one's culture and one's guilt for one's past. President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic has pointed out the importance of this for his own people after their 40 years of obvious oppression: only in finding the intersection with a people's history of their exercise of their own freedom even where this has been in self-betrayal can one assume the direction of this history and begin the rebuilding of one's future. When the overall project on "African Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Life" was being planned in Abidjan in 1982 T. Okere noted this with regard to the active participation of African Chiefs in supplying human chattel for the slave trade. It is a theme which reemerges here in the last two chapters by C. Nz and C.B. Ckolo in their references to the efforts by Christianity to overcome local slave trade.

T. Okere is undoubtedly right, and courageous, in preferring to proceed descriptively and thence to allow the outlines of a Nigerian philosophy to emerge. Hence, he does not undertake in chapter IX to look for an Igbo notion of "people", but rather gradually and richly unfolds the central notion of Onwe. His brief reflection on method warrants intensive development, particularly in the light of recent studies on hermeneutics.

It is not incidental that this philosophical work in hermeneutics has emerged as central in philosophy at the same time that culture has taken its place as a *locus philosophicus*, or source for philosophical insight, just as scripture is a *locus theologicus*. As with other fields under intensive development, this is not an area of philosophical concord, but that very fact is a richness. An appendix to this volume surveys the hermeneutics of H.G. Gadamer for its development of the nature of a cultural tradition and its application to changing circumstances. It reviews also the critical hermeneutics of Jurgen Habermas for its effort to provide a way of reading tradition that will protect against its becoming a means of perpetuating structures of injustice. Finally it considers their interrelation in searching out the meaning of a tradition and relating it to the task of building the future.

The parts of the present work contribute importantly to this constructive task. Part II locates the city as the place of dynamic tension where all the forces at play in Nigeria come to bear one upon the other, and hence where the future of the continent is under construction. J. Asike provides the history of the development of the city and the present result. C.B. Okolo's chapter is tempered, but hopeful that the new forces can yet prove to be also helpful and not only destructive of the African and, in particular, the Nigerian personality.

In Part III, I. Onyeocha describes the process of personal moral formation in the traditional African setting and the importance of the rites of initiation. The rich content of this teaching is sketched, as well as are its methods for vivid inculcation. T. Okere analyses the communitary dimension of the African moral vision. In chapter VI he mounts a vivid, systematic critique of Western Christian morality for its individualism, suggesting that this may derive from its strong enhancement of the notion of person.

Here, as usual, it is the very strength of a philosophy or theology that engenders its weakness. If so this may provide an important warning of the inherent danger in the spread of Western intensively individualist commercial structures in Nigeria. But it may suggest as well the importance of Africa's sharing its sense of community in cultural interchange with other continents. Indeed, as in setting out a fire line, in this period of increasing interrelation of cultures such sharing with others may prove essential to protecting Africa's own sense of community.

The two chapters of Part IV, on self as noted above and on names, bring out how intensively personal and personalized is the entire life of the Nigerian people. This is given its proper

autonomy as a human realization, but is traced to its religious foundations in African culture. By identifying the weaknesses of each culture and hence their need for being complemented from without these chapters sagely point out the need for bidirectional interchange between cultures. This is a hopeful section, for it appreciates the riches which the African cultures bear within themselves and can contribute in interchange with others. It notes both the basic community of human nature which makes it possible for all to share, and the uniqueness of each people from which their proper contribution can be drawn.

But Part V goes further to describe this interchange as not simply a mutuality between peoples, but also an openness of all African cultures to a divine source which transcends them all. For if mankind is fallible and does fail, then it is important that it remain open to the divine and its multiple manifestations, especially from within the spirit of their own cultures. It is this sense of the divine in the African culture which promises to correct what can be seen to have been misguided, to reinforce what has been deeply true, and to complement its expression in ways that relate to modern developments of the sense of the person and of urban life. On this faith the work concludes on a note of hope which echoes its vivid opening statement of the contemporary challenge of identity and change.

# INTRODUCTION

Theophilus Okere

Talking of Nigerian philosophy is not precisely like talking of Greek philosophy, a body of profound and often abstruse doctrine on reality and its meaning, laboriously, critically and systematically set out by a few theoretical geniuses tapping the heritage of Greek culture. Very few people in the world have done for their culture what those few Greek authors did and they seem in a way to have been world pioneers in their field. This is also to say that their work transcended the common, popular "philosophy" and culture of Greece even if this latter inspired and nourished it. Subsequent philosophers generally have tried only to imitate them. But basically what they did was critically to scrutinize and systematize, by some stroke of their personal genius, the data already available within their culture in facing the ultimate questions of the truth and of the meaning of life and reality. Using the elements of their particular culture, they spoke to problems and reached generalizations on reality in a way that transcended this culture to reach a level that was relevant and valid for the human condition as such.<sup>1</sup>

In this book we are not about to discuss the seminal works of some Nigerian Plato or Aristotle or a local equivalent of a philosophical school or movement such as the Stoic or Epicurean philosophy. Also we would like to presume as settled the long debated question of the difference between philosophy and "philosophy". Philosophy in the strict sense of the term is exemplified by, say, the works of Aristotle and Plato. These works are strictly personal, critical, reflective and ultimate, aiming at making comprehensive statements on the true nature of reality.

On the other hand, "philosophy" in the looser and popular meaning would mean, even in the Greece of Aristotle and Plato, the folk wisdom available or discernible in some privileged elements of the contemporary Greek culture. Such elements may take the form of sayings, epigrams, proverbs, witticisms, values, world views, ideas, ideals, ideologies or other pre-philosophical elements of culture. It might include insightful generalizations in explanation of natural and human phenomena or some teaching and pronouncements on human behavior.

Even though these latter are the very stuff of which the formal philosophy is made, the distinction between philosophy and "philosophy" is real and crucial. It is as real and crucial as the difference between Socrates and those who condemned him to drink the potion of hemlock, though they shared with him the same Greek culture and probably had as good a knowledge of every other element of that culture, but were not "lovers of wisdom" in the strict sense of philosophy as was Socrates.

Furthermore, we put every popular form of "philosophy" on a par, making no special case for any particular one, whether it is Greek or German, Indian or Igbo, and we regard it as strictly speaking pre-philosophical, comparable only to other folk "philosophies" native to each of all the cultures of the world.

Assuming therefore that popular culture and its underlying "philosophy" is the privileged pre-philosophical background that nurtures and inspires formal philosophy, it is quite logical to begin the study of Nigerian philosophy by an exploration of African or, more exactly, Nigerian culture. But as soon as one begins to reflect on it one is struck by the curious fact that this subject can hardly be treated on its own and in isolation. Nearly always it is linked and contrasted with other cultures in terms of old and new, primitive and modern, pure and mixed, authentic and alienated. Although it was already subtly at work in the fantastic narratives of explorers,



anthropologists and missionaries who caricatured savage natives in order to highlight the difference between "them and us",<sup>2</sup> the clash between old and new in Africa has been more forcefully and differently celebrated ever since Africans began to tell their own story.<sup>3</sup> Here it takes the form of the ideology of Negritude. There its tensions inspire great literature as in "Things Fall Apart" and "Arrow of God". Or it may dictate the canons of literary criticism, deciding what qualifies or not as authentically African in art, literature, philosophy or theology. Most of the time, however, the contrast and clash seems to be pictured in terms of two static opposites.

As a result, African culture especially has not been accurately characterized in the actual dynamic whirl in which it has found itself in the last five centuries. It has generally been pictured as fixed in the past which is conceived as a pretty well defined era of innocence, much as if one could treat English culture by an exclusive focus on the era of Beowulf. This obviously would be an impoverishing abstraction that is as good as a denial of the greater part of the reality of the culture.

The African thinker is a bearer of his past, that is, of the total experience of his culture. Every culture that exists at all today has, of course, its own past. This past, as past, can be more or less faithfully reconstructed as history, thanks to such resources as written documents, archaeological finds and oral literature. Falling back on such tools to reconstruct a culture already *passé*, to recoup what African ancestors thought or said, their ancient religious beliefs or cosmogony, moral law or worldview is legitimate, desirable, and even necessary. To a certain extent the past has its own intrinsic value and a historian or a cultural anthropologist could research it for its own sake, *le passé pour le passé*, the past as an object. This should be acceptable, provided the dynamic, open-ended and unfinished nature of such a past culture is kept always in view; provided it is understood that the present is not to be held hostage by such a past as the exclusive norm and paradigm of authenticity; provided the journey back-to-the-past is meant to seek some understanding for the present, or to enable the present to work out the future; provided it is not a nostalgia for the past that merely calls back yesterday.

An historian, an anthropologist, even a novelist can attempt to recapture, reconstruct or imaginatively isolate a section of his past. Even so, hardly could he pretend to himself that in his reconstruction he was making no contemporary and personal contribution in the form of imaginative guesses, as well as the intrusion of his own prejudices, personal experience or peculiar reading of history. An African contemporary philosopher *a fortiori* is only too much aware of the hermeneutical impossibility of such an objectifying treatment of his past. With no more success than Shylock could be cut off an isolated pound of flesh of his philosophy based on his African past, without spilling in the process an ounce of the Christian, Moslem or, at any rate, modern portion of his blood. Because philosophy is a totalizing labor of reflection where each stage of reflection carries the burden of the philosopher's total experience, the contemporary African philosopher, even while concentrating on the thought of the past, brings along with him his whole load of experience where culture and life meet in creative symbiosis. The tortoise, the wisest of the animals, always carries along his entire house as he moves.

Whereas every statement does not exhaust the philosopher's experience, each statement reflects this experience in its entirety and pretends to have its truth vindicated by this experience in its totality. Thus each reflection shares from the totality and continuity of this experience. Only by way of mere abstraction could this be expunged from reflection in order that this be valid for but a fraction thereof, be it the past or the present alone, be it the pure uncontaminated African culture or the modern, post colonial culture alone. At this stage the philosopher is

already contaminated by the culture which he has inherited and to the extent that that culture has been, and continues to be, itself contaminated and influenced by other cultures. All his past and present merge in the single experience which has been his from his first dawn of consciousness. It is too late therefore to treat the past as some object that is distinct, distant and apart. The past is always mine, and in its being mine it involves my present consciousness. One may recreate the past, but real philosophical creativity is perforce in the present, from the totality of the "as is."

It is an act of respect for the facts such as they are today that we have chosen the particular approach adopted for this first study of Nigerian philosophy. In exploring the roots of African philosophy, naturally and appropriately we go to African culture. But here, perhaps a little differently from usual, we have opted for an all-inclusive definition of African culture. Our concept of culture includes not only the way we lived yesterday, but the way we live today; not only the heritage of our ancestors, but also that of our contemporaries. Above all, it emphasizes the meeting of old and new, the impact made on the ancestral heritage by the colonial experience and its tributary forms of culture contact--religion, morality and values. It pays homage to the areas and degrees of assimilation, to continuities already forged or in the process of being forged between the ancient and modern, the native and the foreign.

The contemporary phenomenon of urban agglomerations, more visibly perhaps than anything else, symbolizes and epitomizes this historic meeting of old and new. Here institutions, structures and ideas, old and new, native and foreign, clash and impact each other, modifying, supplanting, eliminating each other. In one melting pot, despite our protests or our preferences and wishes, they continue inexorably to forge into a unity what we were, what we are and what we will be. In this melting pot are contained all the ingredients of any expression of what it means to be authentically, genuinely and realistically African.

The consequences of this meeting of old and new in the modern Nigerian city are discussed in this volume in the contributions of Joseph Asike in his "The City in Modern Nigeria, a Force in Rapid Social Change" and C. B. Okolo in "Urbanization and African Traditional Values". Asike regards the rise of the cities as a major factor in the transformation of contemporary Africa, an agency of change and instrument of modernization. The modern African city mediates and narrows the conflicts between old and new, prevents the dualism or polarization between the traditional and the modern, promotes ethnic and political integration, and thus maximizes the opportunities of interaction.

Okolo for his part, dwells on the deleterious effects of the new reality of urban life on the mores and values of the African. In the dynamics of its influence and that of other accompanying factors education, technology, Christianity many values disappear, others are disrupted, some are reversed, others are transformed and yet new ones are created. The accelerated urbanization is only one aspect of this modernity mostly resulting from the colonial experience.

This experience brought in also other conceptions of power and authority, of social organization, and of law and morality. I. M. Onyeocha's "Formation of Character in Traditional Nigerian Moral Education" and T. Okere's "Religion and Morality, Private or Public?" deal with morality in the tradition (Onyeocha) and in modernity, especially in Christianity (Okere). The latter studies the waning influence of the Christian religion upon public morality in the West and the impotence of a purely private or individualistic morality in the face of the most tragic crimes of modern history perpetrated with impunity and, apparently in good conscience, by anonymous collectivities. He contrasts this with the African concept of social and collective responsibility, corporate sin and guilt, contending that the latter is better suited to found a morality that can more credibly deal with today's mass crimes against humanity.

Nze in "The Influence of Christian Values on Culture" credits Christianity with injecting into African cultures a welcome dose of moral universalism. Nonetheless it is seen as remaining intolerant or even destructive of social values, and, by its overly rationalist approach and massive opposition to traditional religion, sowing the seeds of unbelief.

The question of the identity of the African is broached in I. M. Onyeocha's "Africa: The Question of Identity", where a search for a defining ideology or definitive image remains inconclusive. But the identity of African culture itself such as would give basis and background to African philosophy is discussed in T. Okere's "African Culture: The Past and the Present as an Indivisible Whole", which can be regarded as programmatic for this volume. For the African philosopher African culture is not to be limited to the distant past, but must take in the full diapason of Africa's experience, the totality of its past in the fullness of its present consciousness.

But this book does not only discuss and seek to extend the philosophically acceptable limits and the scope of the concept of culture, much as that corrective emphasis was necessary to help regain a nearly hopelessly abandoned territory. It dedicates a chapter to an inquiry into a privileged cultural source of philosophical activity--the connotation of names in one Nigerian culture. Okere's "What's in a Name? Names as Building Blocks of an African philosophy", explores the rich meaning of statements hidden in Igbo names as they relate to such concepts as God, man, destiny, life, death and values. This, of course, is only a sample of the rich mine of philosophoumena of which one of Africa's cultures is pregnant. Several other topics are equally suggestive philosophically and will no doubt be the subject of future reflection. It should be rewarding for instance to go into more explicit analysis and reflection of such subjects as: the self in society; *Chi*, the God in man; the concept of man and nature; the basis of authority in an acephalous society; reincarnation and destiny; the interaction between spirit and matter; causality; origins; the nature of spirit; the values implicit in the world of folktales; the notion of sin in and out of the community; the nature of corporate sin; the meaning of modernity; and the limits of cultural pluralism.

But to have mentioned them is to say how much our present effort is essentially a laying of foundations, and only a mere hint of the challenge ahead.

## NOTES

1. Greek philosophy in the strict sense used here would include the doctrines of those authors taught in the schools as such, starting from the so-called pre-Socratics through Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the Stoics and Epicureans and NeoPlatonists, until it merges into the Hellenism of the early Christian era. Excluded from this classification, despite close affinities, would be the works of Homer and Hesiod, the works of the Greek dramatists, historians, orators and scientists (mathematicians and astronomers), but especially the popular traditions of the generality of Greeks as expressed in their folklore, proverbs, cosmologies and religious conceptions.

2. As an example of the cultural superiority complex of the early missionaries and their typical demonization of African society, consider the following piece from missionary Fred W. Dodds, reporting in *The Primitive Methodist Leader* in 1917: "In February 1915 for the third time I arrived at Bende to attempt anew the dredging and purifying of that ugly jungle pool of heathenism, with its ooze-life of shocking cruelty, reptilian passions and sprouting evil, spreading itself broad in the shadows amidst the most fruitful land on earth. . . . Thus Christianity views her domain-to-be, lifting herself high above the secret springs of paganism's turgid streams

below."--Quoted by Ogbu U. Kalu in *African Theology En Route*, Kofi Appiah-Kubi & Sergio Torres eds. (New York: Orbis Books Maryknoll, 1979), p. 18.

3. African novelists took an early lead in depicting the culture clash that resulted from the Western incursion into Africa. Cf. C. Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and in *Arrow of God*; T. M. Aluko in *One Man One Wife*; Nkem Nwankwo in *Danda*. Culture clash was, of course, the motive force behind the Negritude movement. Obiechina regards culture change as "the all-pervasive theme in the West African novel." Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 263.

**CHAPTER I**  
**AFRICAN CULTURE:**  
**THE PAST AND THE PRESENT AS AN INDIVISIBLE WHOLE**  
THEOPHILUS OKERE

Contemporary African culture as yet is a melting pot of *nova et vetera*, with raw material of traditional and more recent elements. The traditional element itself, the *vetera*, was only relatively stable: relative, that is, to the faster growing snowball of modern culture, the *nova*. But even then it was an accretion of elements gradually sedimented over the ages, much like the annual rings that mark the age of an ancient Iroko or Sequoia tree. The tree remains dynamic and grows by adding and rejecting, by being modified by these new elements. Frequently, however, this traditional element is treated as if it were whole and intact, having a clear, distinct and exclusive identity of its own which supposedly either survived or remained unchanged up to such a date, namely, up to contact with the West.

One of the well-known and well-worn methods of treating the subject of African philosophy is to retreat into the authentic purity of the pre-colonial culture in order to reconstruct a folk philosophy based on its elements.<sup>1</sup> This is motivated as much by an urgent need to recapture a rapidly vanishing past as by the growing resistance to cultural invasion by a monolithic colossus that threatens all cultures with a totalitarian and impoverishing *reductio ad unum*. People are alarmed at the prospect that many individual cultures may die so that one monoculture might rule the world. But today's African culture is neither the romanticized, pre-colonial, Neanderthal museum piece arrested in its development and fossilized in its authentic purity; nor is it yet the much vaunted one-dimensional culture which the West relentlessly has continued to foist upon the rest of the world. Any African culture surviving today, as indeed any flesh and blood African, is a complex mix of old and new.

**THE CONTINUUM OF NOVA ET VETERA**

To have to choose between the modern and the traditional would translate into the agonizing choice of either:

- a) identifying with one or the other set of values, or
- b) living both of them as a continuity, since each individual life is in fact a continuum.

The first option is only theoretical, for it is not possible in actual life. To choose only the traditional, for instance, one would have to live in monastic isolation where only the circumstances of traditional life prevail. But there is no such oasis or cast iron laboratory, disinfected, deodorized, anaesthetized and insulated from outside influence. To be born at all, to survive and live in our world today is to be exposed to a wide range of extra-traditional conditions for living. The typical Nigerian child is born today in a maternity home or hospital and is inoculated against the six or so child killing diseases. He or she is fed and dressed in the modern way, including wearing diapers and feeding, at least part of the time, on cow's milk from baby's bottles. Soon enough one is baptized and labelled with the foreign name of a foreign saint, and in due time taken to the Church to be initiated and indoctrinated into the new religion. Sooner or later he or she goes, or is dragged however unwillingly, to school where for years one

is to be exposed to the untraditional world of books, foreign languages and modern science, not to mention the mysteries and marvels of modern technology.

By the end of this encounter with the institutions of church and school, and thanks to a mixed dose of indoctrination, instruction, brainwashing and the programmatic devaluation of his own culture, the cultural purity of the adolescent's native tradition has been substantially compromised, but not quite obliterated, because the resilience of the traditional culture is still evident in the very name(s) the child bears, the badge of circumcision, the facial scarification or other tribal mark with which he has been stamped and the relevance of the ancient institutions of family and village. Concurrently, the child learns to speak and think in his traditional language, is imbued with the values of the extended family, with respect for blood ties and for age and with an awareness of the implications of an abiding attachment to the native soil, community and ancestors. As the child grows through puberty, he or she is initiated into the adult world of male and female values and roles and into the deposit of the secrets of his or her people, thereby acquiring access to those values that pass from generation to generation and distinguish the perception of world and mankind unique to each people.

Thus the division into traditional and modern becomes essentially an academic abstraction since, in the continuity of the life of the individual and his society these various cultural forces and currents meet, sometimes in reconciliation, at others in conflict or at yet other levels in syncretic juxtaposition. But at whatever level of chemistry, all the elements are mixed within the one individual in whom they form but a single continuum. To a greater or lesser extent, the African today is a living confluence of cultural rivers, the major rivers being, on the one hand, the traditional culture with its various tributaries of religion, social structure, language, values and world view, and, on the other hand, the Christian-Western culture with its own tributaries. For many other Africans, Islam constitutes a third major river.

What is valid of the individual seems valid also of the larger Africa society. Institutions created in other places and at other times to meet the problems of those times and places have been imported into Africa by the colonial powers and missionary agencies. The values of the Judaeo-Graeco-Latin-Germanic-Christian-Secular West, as well as its dis-values, all passing for modernity, joust and clash in Africa like titans in mortal combat among themselves and together against the host culture. The contradictions of the West between, on the one hand, the philosophy of universal love and peace and the eschatological emphasis of Christianity, and, on the other hand, its perceived xenophobic and predatory self-centeredness and the hedonistic materialism of its secular arm contribute to create monumental ambiguities. Today African society bears not only the burden of its own native culture, but also the traces of continuities, harmonized assimilations, incipient dualisms and unresolved heterogeneities resulting from the impact of the West. All this should indicate the extremely dynamic fluidity of the cultural material with which the African philosopher has to work, as well as the all-embracing and ever-expanding inclusiveness of the experience which today we call African culture.

### **UNASSIMILATED IMPORTS EMPHASIZE LOSS OF PRISTINE PURITY**

An interesting example of unresolved heterogeneity is the introduction of the feudal hierarchical system into a community like the Igbo by both the colonial authority and the Christian church. Over the ages, the Igbo have lived in extremely democratic and acephalous village units, each one independent of its neighbor and, in its internal government, acknowledging no single, supreme ruler or reigning dynasty. Before the colonial era the facts

show and a popular proverb of the Igbo declares defiantly that "Igbo enwegh eze"--the Igbo know no king. British anthropologist C. K. Meek puts it bluntly and succinctly: kingship is not and never was a feature of the Ibo constitution. Where it occurs it is clearly of exotic origin.<sup>2</sup>

The British colonial authority was puzzled by this anomaly, which imperial puzzlement found expression in the words of Margery Perham: Southeast Nigeria presented administrative problems which, in their "difficulty, are unique in Nigeria if not in all British Africa."<sup>3</sup> "The British were . . . dealing with a suspicious people whose culture presented exceptional difficulties to the understanding of Europeans."<sup>4</sup> To Her Majesty's government it was not only unBritish and therefore barbarous, but it was all the more incomprehensible since the neighbors of the Igbo of comparable size and "intelligence" and "state of evolution," the Yoruba and Bini of the West and the Hausa-Fulani of the North had evolved intricate hierarchical systems of governance with "Obas" (kings) and "Emirs" (feudal Moslem rulers), at the apex of ruling houses and dynasties.

The colonial government found the existing social structure among these other peoples, which bore a close resemblance to their own, naturally usable and easy to integrate into their colonial policy of Indirect Rule. This was the policy of ruling the colonies, not directly from the Colonial Office in London, but indirectly through the use, or perhaps more appropriately the abuse, of these kings and emirs as native puppets and agents of a foreign rule over their own peoples. In Igboland, however, finding no kings or emirs, they went ahead nevertheless to invent and impose their equivalent, the so-called warrant chiefs. This foreign imposition of an alien idea and structure into the very fabric of Igbo political organization was resisted<sup>5</sup> and led eventually to the well-known revolt of the women of Igboland in 1929, a revolt known to the history books as the Women's or Aba Riots but remembered among the people themselves as "Ogu Nwanyi"the Women's War.

Subsequent intensive studies of Igbo social institutions taught the British to wonder if they had not overreached themselves in attempting with such undue zeal to mutilate the structure of a fiercely democratic culture by imposing upon it a feudal structure. The Warrant Chiefs were withdrawn and even modified forms of the same policy continued to be problematic; nothing worked well until elective local government was introduced on the eve of Nigeria's independence. It is therefore the most bizarre of ironies that nearly two score years into independence, indigenous military governments, desperate for legitimacy and hungry for allies easy to manoeuvre, reinvented the ruler and the dynasty, reimposing the alien feudal structure. Predictably, to date this has encouraged the proliferation of no fewer than three hundred "Royal Highnesses" in Imo State alone, heart of the Igbo heartland and originally the home of the purest specimen of Igbo democracy and republicanism.

The Christian church also, though without any such overt tampering with the people's social or religious organization, just by transporting the organizational structures it inherited from medieval Europe into the Igbo Christian church, has introduced a socio-religious *novum*. These structures, which divide clergy and laity along political power lines, whether horizontal as in the merging of separate but autonomous towns and village groups into parishes and dioceses or vertical as in the hierarchical ranks and orders of power religious, priests, monsignori, bishops, archbishops, cardinals and patriarchs and popes in ascending degrees of power not accountable to the people, do violence to the existing social and religious fact. They have engendered unhealthy rivalries and intrigue in the quest of the ambitious for the commanding heights of power in the church. They have been partly responsible also for the proliferation of mushroom churches, as ambitious and money-driven individuals stake out their own territory or jurisdiction

where they endow themselves with titles and power as "supreme prophet," "Arch-Apostle," "Most Holy Patriarch" or some such awesome, hierarchical superlative. These new intrusions have not obliterated either the autonomy of the village unit or the egalitarian concept of the individual in his society, despite a policy statement to that effect by one of the founding colonial officers, Sir Ralph Moor, when he wrote to the Colonial Office: "Practically all the systems of the natives have to be done away with."<sup>6</sup> But they have severely limited the impact of these principles, and, until they are absorbed, rejected or modified, will continue to create a situation of friction, confusion and even contradiction and chaos in the Igbo mind and in society.

## **THE CHRISTIAN ONSLAUGHT**

Perhaps there has been no more effective agent in the de-stabilization of the old culture than Christianity itself whose frontal and total war on the traditional religion has led to the collapse of a well-wrought and integrated system of belief that formed the support of the culture.<sup>7</sup> For if Christianity's monotheism and system of belief was alone true, as missionaries kept insisting a claim which seemed to be supported by the impressive wizardry of power, science, technology and material wealth associated with the new religion then the familiar gods of the traditional pantheon were forever discredited. They were even demonized as evil agents of the Devil, a monster till then yet unknown.

However it came about, like the triumph of Elias against the priests of Baal, the undermining of belief in the traditional gods was a devastating rout that shook more than confidence. It led to the collapse of a whole philosophico-theological, moral and social system. It would reduce to meaninglessness and absurdity the panoply of beings, agents and factors that gave sense and purpose to life. It would lead to the destruction of the protective mantle of the gods over society and the individual, and to the loss of validity in their sacred sanction in the moral sphere. The other guardians of morality, the sacred ancestors, *ipso facto* would be unmasked as false impostors and their mystique and powers would come to be looked upon as myths woven out of ignorance, magic and fear.

Furthermore, since the new education seemed to hold the key to the knowledge that gave real power and competence, the children and young rather than their illiterate parents, had access to this. In itself this too helped to upset the traditional order in which old age was synonymous with wisdom and youth with ignorance, and in which the old were superior to the young by virtue of the wisdom and prestige which age and experience had conferred on them. This role reversal and loss of authority and prestige by the older generation would corrupt or spell the destruction and end of the very idea of tradition. The British saw this early on. Perham observes:

Christianity, with the secular education which was the missionaries' second and most eagerly accepted gift, was bound to sap the fundamental beliefs upon which all important native institutions rested. . . . The aged and responsible were seldom open to its influence; the young provided the converts. Thus, what to Africans is a deep and unnatural rift has been introduced between old and young. The basis of authority is shaken.<sup>8</sup>

It is with such lethal weapons that Christianity dealt a mortal blow on traditional African culture.

## **A TRANSFORMED CULTURE**



Though wounded, however, this culture is far from dead. It continues its existence in a transformed yet still recognizable state, though indelibly marked and altered by its history. Or rather, it has taken on a new existence as a new culture. It is of this altered culture or mixed salad of old and new that we can legitimately speak when we talk of African culture today. This present culture is an amalgam of the sum total of all its parts: the pre-colonial, ancient past; the experience of the slave trade, colonization and Independence; the present multi-lingual, multi-ethnic form of political co-existence; the massive urbanization, industrialization and neo-colonial exploitation; the religious pluralism, exposure to modern education and growing capitalism; the growing mass poverty, consumerism and corruption; the mass urban unemployment and the deserted village syndrome. All the factors and elements labelled new, imported and foreign are part of the present culture.

Any honest discussion of African culture today must face again the question of its existence and identity. By the question of existence I do not mean the racist question of whether Africans have any worthwhile culture of which to boast; nor by the question of identity do I mean whether there is a unity of culture in Africa. Rather, here the question of the existence and identity of African culture is that of finding out what we mean when we use the phrase "African culture". What do we affirm or deny? Is it something that has identifiable boundaries in time and space; and does it have the same boundaries for the historian as for the philosopher, the cultural anthropologist, the scientist and the artist? In other words, what is its definition in the literal sense of its "*finis*" or limits? Though a search for what is distinctively African must naturally direct us towards the past, here "naturally" does not mean "exclusively" as has often been taken to be the case. In fact the "naturalness" of such an orientation to the past as a privileged part of culture is contestable and suspicious as it looks too much like a relic from the times when African peoples and cultures, apparently because they were generally poor, peasant and pre-industrial, were treated by curious foreign cultural anthropologists as retarded fossils from the past of humanity. But no living culture is so arrested. Some cultures are slow to change, but all cultures willy-nilly are in a state of permanent change, so that the only exact definition of any culture would seem to be the sum total of all it has been together with all it is up to and including the moment of that definition. Any prior fixing or closure imposed on a living culture, as if it was some abstract section like a period of history, is always premature; it always misses another vital section, namely, "the present," meaning more than time the abiding consciousness of the whole and the unique singularity of the synthesis of its accumulated experience.

## **FUTURE SHOCK**

No doubt African culture is now quite changed from what it was 500 years ago, but this only reflects the extraordinary experience through which it has passed. To appreciate the scale of change and what this change has done to this culture, one may consult the predictions of a renowned futurist on the evolution of Western technological culture. Alvin Toffler's book *Future Shock*<sup>9</sup> itself shocked the world in the 70s when he exposed with prophetic apodicticity the logical destination of the racing current of change gripping super-industrialized societies. Predicting the consequences of the ongoing technological revolution, he foresaw a future that would dislocate the social and psychological balance by Western society if this rate of change continued without a corresponding program of adaptation by Western society and its psyche. He surveyed the impressive array of industrial and technological change that has taken place in the last 300 years and spoke of it as a "fire storm of change," affecting institutions, values and even

roots. He laments this "racing rate of change that makes reality seem sometimes like a kaleidoscope run wild". It is not only the content of culture change from old to new that dazzles, but especially its scale, scope and pace. This accelerated pace of change whereby so many revolutionary changes occur within so short a time has brought about a culture of transience and flux, in which nothing is permanent except perhaps impermanence itself.

This has so revolutionized the environment of the super-industrialized man that it has affected and dislocated his consciousness, his responses and his relations to people and things, to time and space. It affects his universe of ideas, art and values, and taxes to the utmost his very ability to cope. He is in shock or almost. Future shock is the physico-psychological and social response to overstimulation by aggravated and uncontrolled change. It is a breakdown of the coping mechanism, a problem of adaptivity to change, and ultimately a question of human possibilities. Though the author sees its symptoms as already evident in society, he really projects future shock into the future and offers remedies, coping techniques and even preventive measures to forestall its full destructive impact.<sup>10</sup>

What Toffler projects so ominously into the future culture of the super-industrialized nations as future shock has, in a way, already been taking place for the cultures and peoples of Africa. However, the catalyst for change in this case has been not any dramatic, technological revolution peculiar to Africa, but rather the volume and rate at which the West itself has impacted upon Africa, in the past 500 years. In the beginning there was the "discovery" of Africa by European adventurers. This was followed by the rape, plunder and degradation of the transatlantic Slave Trade lasting some three centuries. After a brief spell of normal trading there came the scramble for Africa and ultimately its partitioning by European powers, leading to the colonial wars and to colonization itself.

The religious proselytism of the Christian churches and missions opened yet another and perhaps more lethal front against the indigenous culture. The post-independence era of new dependency, marked by control over political and economic forces by foreign powers and interests, as well as the imposition of foreign languages as *lingua franca*, have added to the forces of culture change and confusion. Between them, these forces have let loose a Pandora's box of effects immediate, mediate and delayed-action which have modified, mutilated and virtually overwhelmed the African host culture.

If one adds the impact of the present Western, media-driven cultural offensive whose own rate of change forms the reason for the emergency alert of *Future Shock*, then one can appreciate better the shock Africa has and is going through. One is bound to use the expression "African culture" with more than a thousand qualifications. In fact we are obliged to take the general view that owing to these enormous changes and influences, their volume, rate and protracted onslaught on African culture, the denotation of the term itself is no longer sufficiently stable to be unequivocal.

## **CULTURE CONFLICT: AFRICAN VERSUS WESTERN**

But the Western impact on traditional Africa and the ensuing conflict of cultures has not only profoundly influenced the present modes of material and spiritual life. It also has become the dominant theme of African literary discourse. E. N. Obiechina's careful study of the West African novel, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* shows how perversively the subject of culture contact and conflict captivates the imagination of the best African novelists. He explains the phenomenon as follows:

It is the overwhelming awareness that the old traditional culture with its attendant values is breaking up and is being replaced by a new culture with its emergent values which has made culture change the all-pervasive theme in the West African novel. Because novelists share the background of the generality of the people they write about, they feel with them that the culture change is the most important reality of modern West Africa.<sup>11</sup>

The treatment of this theme in literature emphasizes the following features: the various stages of cultural and social change, and the dichotomy between the traditional and modern, the rural and urban, and the pagan and Christian. It dramatizes the tensions and conflicts resulting from this change, portraying characters in a way that reflects these tensions and conflicts and the lack of integration and resolution between old and new.<sup>12</sup> Obiechiana's study covers a good cross section of the best known novels devoted to this theme, but the novels of Chinua Achebe, especially *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, are given special attention. From them we get an impressive delineation of the traditional culture, its values and its salient characteristics. Found there are: the dynamics of the individual and the community, and the dialectics between the freedom of the individual and the collective responsibility of the group; the pervasiveness of religion and the supernatural, where divinities and ancestors receive honor and worship, provide explanation for events and preside over morality and the law; and the ambiguous anthropology where man in his destiny is partly sport for the gods and partly a lord who works out his own destiny.

The major conflict area consists in the confrontation of two religious systems as Christianity fights to discredit and eliminate the traditional religion with the sugared pill of modern education as the Greeks have been fabled to give gifts. We see the loss of societal cohesion as Christians try to operate their own rival community within the community,<sup>13</sup> and the personal tensions and conflicts in the individual conscience as it mirrors the pull of conflicting beliefs and moral codes. We experience the effects of the usurpation of the administrative, judicial and coercive powers of the community by the colonial government as the traditional structure and center of authority became marginalized and eventually empty and void. We also notice the pollution and disintegration of traditional values due to influences and pressures from the new urban, commercial culture. It was this combination of the corrosive power of Christianity, the colonial regime and foreign commercial enterprise that, in the famous words of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, "put a knife on the things that held us together and (so) we have fallen apart."<sup>14</sup>

## **AFRICAN RESPONSES**

In the face of this threat to its cultural identity and to specific difference, African reactions have been varied. Leopold Sedar Senghor has recommended the conscious promotion of a cultural metissage, a hybridization or mullattoing to be realized by the marriage of African with Western culture. On this account he has been derided for what looks like a capitulation before an enemy advance and a lack of will to fight for the purity of African cultural authenticity. In Zaire we have seen a contrary trend where a policy of a return to the roots and to African authenticity has been promulgated and pursued as a political program.

Already in the days of the anti-colonial campaign for Nigeria's independence, one of the most popular support movements headed by Mbonu Ojike rallied around the slogan: "Boycott boycottables". It called on Nigerians to learn to live and do without the gadgets and goods imported into Nigeria which served only to increase the people's dependence on foreigners and undermined their reliance and pride in the traditional, homemade goods. Everything foreign and

nonessential (boycottable) was fair target of the campaign eating and modes of dressing, the spoken language and titles and names. When Mbonu Ojike applied the same principle to the higher cultural areas of values and beliefs and religion, especially through the medium of his regular "Week-end Catechism", the Christian churches branded him as an enemy and fought back.

It is clear that the tension between ancient and modern began as soon as the West started the first of its many incursions into the African world and that survives till today. There has been, and perhaps there always will be, varied reactions to this culture contact, from total rejection to suicidal embrace. What seems certain though is the irreversible fact of the culture contact itself and therefore of a *defacto* preexisting culture mix as the point of departure for any contemporary African reflection.

This amounts to the following:

- a. that the old culture as something separate, intact and retrievable is no longer alone valid for the individual African as constitutive of his universe; it has been forever affected;
- b. that any contemporary individual African inherits all the elements of his cultural history from past to present; no one ever chooses his own genesis or history;
- c. that the fusion, amalgamation or juxtaposition of these elements forms a new *tertium quid*, becoming the individual's necessary but adequate cultural datum;
- d. that this *tertium quid* is not necessarily identical in every individual since one must allow for individual creative freedom; and
- e. that this creative freedom is a freedom to modify, choose or to withhold commitment to any element, but at any rate involves some reaction to such elements.

### **CRITICISM OF THE NEW *TERTIUM QUID***

In effecting this fusion which alone would correspond adequately to the contemporary African's experience, one is bound to meet some criticism. On the one hand, purists would term it a betrayal of one's black African identity to root for anything less than its pristine cultural authenticity, simplicity and uniqueness: one is either black or white. Otherwise, one would find oneself in the position of the proverbial bat, neither fully a bird nor yet strictly a mammal, but dangling precariously between two identities. Into this category would fall many who, in reaction to the cultural ethnocentrism and imperialism of the West have proposed for Africa a radical and programmatic cultivation of difference. They have convinced themselves with V. Y. Mudimbe<sup>15</sup> that the humiliating strangle hold which the West holds on Africa is based, supported and propagated by an underlying ethnocentrism of knowledge serving an ethnocentrism of power. By definition and therefore by necessity, this ethnocentrism of a Same sees the Other, the Different only as its mock negative, its antipode, its anti-Christ. As the Other, Africa has thus always been defined by the Same to serve its own purposes, on its own terms, and to its own exclusive advantage. In reply and for its own good, Africa should reject the Africa invented by the West and go about cultivating its Otherness. What is needed is a salvage operation to extract from the confused mass of ideas and customs and other cultural ware currently on offer in the market place of African society today, the specific, pure, native African element and to insist on it as the only basis for future African thought.

On the other hand, the protagonists and crusaders for Western cultural imperialism also would be alarmed at the suggestion of fusion. Old Africa for them is dead and buried. A regress

to the old would be a march into cultural limbo and into the veritable *musée de l'homme*. For these people, therefore, it is either democracy *a l'occidentale* or nothing at all; every other alternative or nuance is a dictatorship or at best not democracy "as we know it." It is either capitalism and the free market economy *a l'americaine*, or it is only a sham economic reform which is doomed to fail: not a jot, not a tittle may be dropped. One is not permitted to borrow in pieces or with any discrimination, or to make any indigenous contribution. One may bring along only the unique contribution of a magnificent *tabula rasa* and thereafter sit quietly docilely sucking in and sponging every oracle delivered from the mouth of Western wisdom.

## THE CHURCH'S HISTORIC ROLE

The Christian church, especially in its Roman Catholic variety, presents perhaps one of the greatest obstacles to the culture of the *tertium quid*. The mother and inventor of such historic terms as heresy and orthodoxy, of anathema, schism and syncretism, of magisterium and *depositum fidei* long ago learned how to deal with dissensions from within and any rumors of heterodoxy from without. The taming of the barbarians and the homogeneization of their cultures under the Graeco-Roman monolith still counts today as one of the great highlights of the church's civilizing influence, though this was achieved at the expense of other living local cultures.

When, after one and one half millennia of Christianizing Europe and Europeanizing Christianity, it set out to go to teach all nations, its missionary enterprise came fatefully under the wings of the secular imperialist powers of Europe. In this regard, Mudimbe observes:

The more carefully one studies the history of missions in Africa, the more difficult it becomes not to identify it with cultural propaganda, patriotic motivations and commercial interests, since the mission program is indeed more complex than the simple transmission of the Christian faith. From the 16th century to the 18th, missionaries were, through all the "worlds," part of the political process of creating and extending the right of European sovereignty over "newly discovered" lands. . . . In doing so, they obeyed the "sacred instructions" of Pope Alexander VI in his bull *Inter Caetera* (1493): to overthrow paganism and establish the Christian faith in all barbarous nations. The bulls of Nicholas *VDum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455)--had indeed given to the kings of Portugal the right to dispossess and eternally enslave Mahometans, pagans, and black peoples in general. . . . *Dum Diversas* clearly stipulates this right to invade, conquer, expel and fight (*invadendi, conquirendi, expugnandi, debellandi*) Muslims, pagans and other enemies of Christ (*saracenos ac paganos, aliosque Christi inimicos*) wherever they may be. Christian kings, following the Pope's decisions, could occupy pagan kingdoms, principalities, lordships, possessions (*regna, principatus, dominia, possessiones*) and dispossess them of their personal property, land, and whatever they might have (*et mobilia et immobilia bona quaecumque per eos detenta ac possessa*). The king and his successors have the power and right to put these peoples into perpetual slavery (*subjugandi, illorumque personas in perpetuam servitute*).<sup>16</sup>

Even while allowing for the times and the *zeitgeist*, one is still shocked by the absolute and sweeping powers granted to the kings of Portugal and Spain by these bulls. Particularly repulsive is the total disdain by the Vicar of Christ for the lives and freedoms, the rights and cultures of these poor Mohammedans, pagans and black peoples over which he invites his Christian princes to ride roughshod. The Holy See was itself, on occasion, not beyond sharing in the loot and booty. "On the 4th of March 1488", writes Hubert Deschamps, "the Pope received 100 black

slaves sent to him by the king of Spain, wearing around their necks collars tied with chains; the successor of St. Peter distributed them liberally among his cardinals."<sup>17</sup> But there is no doubt that the empowerment by the papal bulls, stemming as it does from the seat of pre-reformation Christendom, must have served as moral justification, blessing and impetus for all subsequent colonial adventures and wars, and for the slave trade itself, for the longstanding racism and other inhumanities inflicted upon African peoples and cultures by Christian Europe.

This prepared the road for an embarrassing self-compromise which made the Church the foremost accomplice in Europe's imperialism in Africa and America. The church then put to use in these new territories the same old techniques it had used in Europe, but now with the additional advantage of a cultural imperialism enforced by force of European arms when necessary, but insidiously and more effectively through the sweet medicine of religious doctrine backed up by sanctions that obliged the religious conscience.

We may be treated to declarations of policy in innumerable encyclicals purporting to treat indigenous cultures with respect.<sup>18</sup> But, as in the question of the Chinese and Malabar rites then, as well as in that of South American liberation theology today, as in that of the integration of several indigenous African customs in a way that enables the people to recognize themselves in Worship, in theological articulation and in church structure and law, the church, beyond an accommodating appearance, offers nothing but the arrogant and massive integrity of "*alles oder nichts*":

Quicumque vult salvus esse, ante omnia opus est, ut teneat catholicam fidem: quam nisi quisque integram inviolatamque servaverit, absque dubio in eternum peribit. Whoever wishes to be saved must necessarily and before all else, profess the Catholic faith; and unless he preserves it integrally and inviolate, he will beyond any doubt, perish eternally.<sup>19</sup>

This preamble to the fourth century Athanasian Creed provides an insight into the spirit and mood of a church very early in history, infected by the Greek virus which demotes the Good and extols the True as the basic category of religion. Presuming already to know the truth and have it all, it thus paves the way for future ages of arrogance and intolerance *vis a vis* other cultures. This arrogant intolerance nurtured over the ages by the mania for orthodoxy and a phobia for heresy encouraged a veritable fanaticism for the true and right doctrine; a zeal that led people proudly to martyrdom on opposing sides and, indeed, to wars in the name of the truth. The two greatest schisms of Christianity, the Great Schism that separated the Eastern Orthodox and the Western, i.e. Roman Catholic Churches over the *Filioque* clause in the tenth century, and the 16th century Protestant reformation led by Luther essentially over the doctrine of justification, bear tragic evidence to the fact that not even the Church's own internal unity is untouchable or sacrosanct in the face of this rage for theological and doctrinal purity.<sup>20</sup>

## **INTOLERANCE IN AFRICA**

Such intransigence was well in place when the Christian Church was faced suddenly with peoples and cultures outside of the familiar European Christian world. In fact, it had been reinforced by a certain identification of Christianity with Europe by the advantage of military power which Europe had over Africa and, in the last century, by the convenient abuse of Darwinism to support racism. Africans were generally regarded and treated as savages whose

true humanity and spirituality was in question and whose culture had obviously nothing to offer. The Christian and ecclesiastical racism that initiated and encouraged both the slave trade and colonization was given more fillip by Darwin. The *mission civilizatrice* of Christian Europe's colonial imperialism and the *mission evangelizatrice* of Europe's Christian church become confounded. In such an atmosphere there could be little or no respect for the culture of the "primitives". Their indigenous religion was condemned as idolatry; their Gods were but demons or fetishes; their ancestors were lost souls, having lived and died outside the Church; their feasts and ceremonies were all idolatrous and pagan; their dances were immoral; their diviners were sorcerers; their medicine was magic and quackery; their languages were hopelessly tone-infested cacophonies, while their names were unpronounceable gibberish for which the canonized names of European canonized saints had to be substituted. All was one irredeemable *massa damnata*. With such a consistently intolerant and uncompromising attitude and, worse still, the imbibing of this attitude by its African faithful, Christianity continues to be an inhibitory factor in the process of retaining the Africanness of modern African culture and of developing a *via media* or a neo-African way of life.

## A CONFUSED ELITE

This sapping of African self-respect has gone so far that even among the African elite there exist ambivalent attitudes regarding the reconciling of ancient Africa with modernity. In the chapter titled "Schizophrenia in the Arts" of his seminal work *The West and the Rest of Us*,<sup>21</sup> Chinweizu gives the most pertinent account of the dilemma of modern Africans feeling their way towards a cultural identity. In the area of the arts he identifies and decries two tendencies: Those who cling only to modern Western values and those who identify only with antiquated African values and culture. The first group are busy aping Western modernity in anaemic and lifeless imitations that are little better than echoes of echoes of foreign originals, whether this in poetry, architecture or music. This assimilationist group has seemingly lost faith in Africa which it identifies with a past of backwardness and inferiority and has succumbed to a cringing Europhilia that identifies modernity and progress with the copying and mimicking of the latest fads of the Western *avant-garde*.

The other group, the traditionalists and purists, believe only in digging up the past, the whole past, and nothing but the past. They therefore are more interested in the archaeology of African culture: rehashing and serving up un-ancestral elements of ancient Africa is seen as the only road to authenticity. That this simply would blanket out the more recent section of the history of Africa and, by that denial, would truncate and falsify this experience is in no doubt. That this selective remembering would privilege precisely the more distant and harder-to-remember past, to the detriment of the recent past and especially the present, makes such an effort all the more artificial and abstract and puts it all the more out of touch with existential reality.

Chinweizu rightly contends that there is in both camps a certain unwillingness to admit the possibility of anything being both African and modern simultaneously: The category "modern African" has been missing from the conceptual grid of the African elite. Outlining an African modernity must be seen as an indispensable critical preparation for any serious attempt at an African renaissance.<sup>22</sup> Only some sort of a merger between the connotations of the two terms "Africa" and "modernity" can do justice to that symbiosis of old and new which alone makes up contemporary African culture and consciousness. Anything less will deny, ostrich-like,

that history ever happened and so will deny that the present culture conflict even exists. Needless to say, the chemistry of such a synthesis in any given creative work will vary from one individual to the other, depending on the art form, the individual's personal experience and perspective, his creativity and vision, and, indeed, his ambition. But Chinweizu insists on behalf of Africanity, that any genuine African modernity must somehow grow out of the African tradition and must be seen as a revitalizing of that tradition.

A modern African culture, whatever else it might be, must be a continuation of old African culture. Whatever else it includes, it must include seminal and controlling elements from the African tradition, elements which determine its tone, hold it together, and give it a stamp of distinctness.<sup>23</sup> In such a way, modernization of Africanity must really take into account also all that has happened to Africa and Africans from the very beginning, through the contact with the outside world, especially the West, right up to the present. African art and philosophy, in being African, must take its bearing from somewhere, must have some center, hard-core, or initial base. These necessarily are the traditional African, the original and primordial status or *terminus a quo*. But in being modern, it must also be the fruit of an all-inclusive contemporary consciousness.

Philosophy, like every other enterprise of the human spirit, will base itself on its enviroing culture: as it has been in Greece and Europe, in China and India, so also will it be in Africa. But an enviroing culture, though possibly distinguishable into component regions of time and space, in order to be in continuity with itself and identical with itself, must necessarily be a totum indivisibile. There is therefore no need for African thinkers today selectively to regress into their "pure past" in a vain, quixotic quest for the "authentic" portion of the historic, but still ongoing, experience which is their culture. Neither is there any possibility of getting rid of their ancient, native Africanity in order to fall into the embrace of an all-conquering but wholly imported culture that might pretend to the epithet "mainstream" or "universal". Culture today in Africa, as any time and anywhere, means total historical experience without denial or suppression of past or present, a dynamic unity of ancient and modern, a two-headed continuum with one head plunged into the immensity of the immemorial past, and the other as firmly and deeply immersed in the contemporary here and now. It is this total and holistic view of culture that has inspired the approach we have chosen in developing this first volume of the Nigerian Philosophy Series.

## NOTES

1. The debate, provoked by Placide Tempels' *La Philosophie Bantoue* (Elizabethville: Lovania, 1945) and Alexis Kagame's *La Philosophie bantou-ruandaise de l'etre* (Bruxelles, 1956) was continued in the works of a) Eboussi Boulaga, *Le Bantou problematique* (no. 66; Paris: Presence Africaine, 1968), pp. 4-40; b) Paulin Hountondji, "Remarques sur la Philosophie Africaine Contemporaine", *Diogene* (1970), no. 71; c) Theophilus Okere, *Can There Be an African Philosophy?* (Louvain, 1971; d) J.E. Wiredu, *How Not to Compare African Thought with Western Thought in African Philosophy: An Introduction*, R. Wright, ed. (Washington, University Press of America, 1977.)

2. C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 185.

3. Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937, repr. 1962), p 201.



4. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

5. Perham admits the absurdity of this mutilation of indigenous cultures: "In Africa," she writes, "we are setting heavy burdens upon native institutions which have been weakened by the abnormal strains of the last thirty or forty years. . . . (The Africans) have suddenly found themselves embraced by a world economy and an imperial order; . . . their members, yesterday active, independent and self-reliant have passed under the control of foreigners remote in culture from themselves, and suffer today a sense of bewilderment and inferiority that diminishes their full human stature." *Ibid.*, p. 354.

6. Colonial Office 5/20/15, Moor to Colonial Office of 8/8/1902, quoted by Elizabeth Isichei in *The Ibo People and the Europeans to 1906*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), p. 161.

7. Isichei correctly observes that the Christian missions, unlike the trading firms "were dedicated to the proposition of change. Indeed, their whole *raison d'être* was to change the lives, both of individuals and of the societies of which they were members." Elizabeth Isichei, *ibid.*, p. 99.

8. Margery Perham, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

9. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, (New York: Random House, 1970).

10. Alvin Toffler, *ibid.*, chapters 17-20. Another futurist, John McHale, armed with even more compelling and foreboding scientific and statistical data writes: "The last third of the twentieth century has become increasingly characterized as the age of critical transition, revolution and discontinuity. In this situation, two major aspects of change are now crucial. One is the explosive growth in man's actual and potential capacities to interfere on a large scale with the natural environmental processes through which we may manage change more effectively. . . . Our present waves of change differ from those of the recent past, not only in their quantitative interrelationships. . . . Global in scale, potentially affecting the physical balance of all life on the planet itself, and reaching into every aspect of individual human life and society, our ongoing change patterns now constitute a socio-ecological transition of evolutionary magnitude." J. McHale, *World Facts and Trends*, (New York: Collier Books 1972), pp. 3-4.

11. E. Obiechina, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

13. See also Ogbu Kalu, *African Theology En Route*, Kofi Appiah-Hubi & Sergio Torres, eds. (New York: Orbis Books Maryknoll, 1979), p. 20.

14. E. Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 224.

15. V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1988).

16. V. Y. Mudimbe, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

17. Hubert Deschamps, *Histoire de la traité des noirs de L'antiquité a nos jours* (Paris: Fayard, 1971), p. 146.

18. Cf. Pius XII, *Evangelii Praecones*, 1953.

19. Denzinger--Schoenmetzer, "Symbolum Quicumque Pseudo-Athanasianum" *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, (Editio XXXVI; Verlag Herder, 1965), nos. 75-76.

20. Adolf von Harnack in *What is Christianity?* laments that, "In the course of this controversy men put an end to brotherly fellowship for the sake of a nuance; and thousands were cast out, condemned, loaded with chains and done to death. It is a gruesome story. On the question of 'Christology' men beat their religious doctrines into terrible weapons, and spread fear

and intimidation everywhere." Quoted in *Readings in Christian Thought*, Hugh Kerr, ed. (Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 250.

21. Chinweizu, *The West and The Rest of Us* (New York: Random House, 1975).

22. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

**CHAPTER II**  
**CULTURAL IDENTITY AND MODERNITY IN AFRICA:**  
**A CASE FOR A NEW PHILOSOPHY**

JOSEPH I. ASIKE

**INTRODUCTION**

The introductory pages of Engels' short book, *Feuerbach and the End of German Philosophy*,<sup>1</sup> provides interesting testimony to the impact of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* upon his and Karl Marx's generation of German intellectuals. Engels' testimony not only throws light on a significant moment in the development of the ideological system to which he made such an important contribution, but also in broader terms illustrates the correlation between the political and social conditions of an historical period and of the movement of ideas of which it is a reflection. In the particular instance of mid-nineteenth century Germany and with specific reference to the development of Marxism as a system of thought, Engels' testimony points to the realization among young German intellectuals of the lack of a real correspondence between the idealism of established German philosophy--in particular its Hegelian brand--and the socio-economic transformations that then were taking place. Feuerbach was thus an important stage in the reaction against Hegel, of which Marx's dialectical materialism was to be, in one particular direction, a culmination.

The lesson one might derive from the above is best demonstrated in Chinua Achebe's two best novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Achebe believes that the task of a writer is to lead his people out of the mistakes of the past and onto new paths and in new directions for the future.

We would like to suggest in this chapter a comparable approach to the realm of thought in Africa. This would have implications for the way in which Africans perceive themselves and their position in the contemporary world, for the way in which they conceive not only their past historical reality, but their possibilities within the historical process as it unfolds in these times. The change we have in mind involves an overhaul of the assumptions and tenets that have gone into the formation of what is now the African *Weltanschauung*, and which have found an articulation in the prevailing intellectual reaction to the colonial experience. Gradually, a redefinition is beginning and the emergence of what one might call a new African worldview and problematic. This redefinition appears to be related to the changed realities of the contemporary African situation in the post-colonial era. This gradually unfolding new perception of African problems affects in consequence the mental processes implied in the emergence and evolution of the nationalist consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

**THE PROBLEM OF MODERNITY**

When one considers the broad movement and major preoccupation of contemporary African thought, it appears clear that the central problem is that of identity and that the central theme is the self-definition of Africans. According to Uchendu, the search for identity in Africa is comprised of four sometimes conflicting alternatives:

(1) A search for continental identity, in order to create a united Africa, became an instrument for decolonization and a weapon for post-independence international diplomacy.

(2) An integrating "black" racial identity, motivated by social pride, which makes it meaningful to speak of three Africas: Arab Africa, Black Africa and white minority Africa.

(3) A search for national identity.

(4) The demand for ethnic identity within the multi-ethnic state systems.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever its immediate purpose, the search for identity in Africa has always faced a dilemma in its choice of symbols to project continental, racial, national or ethnic identity.<sup>4</sup> The notion that modern European scholars have engaged in the search for the "self" is a critical common-place, but this offers no guarantee that it is true. In fact, it could be argued that sincerity was no longer the problem for the European because he had lost his obsession with accomodating what one appears to be to what one is, that is, to one's self. This raises the issue of authenticity, the concern to transcend what one seems to be or what society, state, culture and history have tried to make man, by what one really is, beyond sincerity and hypocrisy.

For Africa, this authenticity is a curiosity. Though trained in systems dominated by European culture, the African's concern is not with an inner voyage of discovery of a self. The African's problem is his public role, not his private self. Where the European intellectual, though comfortable inside his culture and tradition, has an image of himself as an outsider, the African intellectual is an uncomfortable outsider, seeking to develop his culture in the directions that will give him a role. The relation of the African to his history is a web of delicate ambiguities. If he has learned to despise it or tries to ignore it and there are many indications of the difficulty of such a decolonization of the mind he has still to learn how to assimilate and transcend it. Where the European may feel that the problem of who he is is his private problem, the African asks always not "who am I" but "who are we"--his problem is not his own, but his people's.

The fact that we are social beings raises the problem of authenticity, for in the end it is others who, according to Sartre, conceal ourselves from ourselves. The problem of who I am is raised by the fact of what I appear to be. It is essential to the mythology of authenticity that this fact should be obscured by its existential prophets. What I really appear to be is fundamentally how I appear to others, and only derivatively how I appear to myself.

Yet, and this is the crux of the matter, for the European these "others" who define the problem are his people, and he feels he knows who his people are and what is their worth. For the African, the answer is more complicated he is an ethnic: Ibo, Ashanti, Yoruba, Hausa, Bantu, Dogon, etc.; or he is a Marxist, feudalist or capitalist; or perhaps he is a Muslim or Christian. But does all this mean anything, for the African is a black man, and what then can be his worth? Regardless of how many skeptics and observers look at the situation, there is a growing consciousness that the African will one day overthrow his unlivable existence with the whole force of his oppressed personality. He will try either to become different or to reconquer all the dimensions which colonization tore away from him, and it is the latter which seems the more appealing for it could be a prelude to a positive movement of regaining self-control.

## **THE CREATION OF A NEW PHILOSOPHY**

The demolition of an existing social order and the establishment of a new one are in an important sense a matter of style in doing culture. Every style of culture is in turn related to the religious question of how people view the ultimate meaning of their life and society, which

question the religio-cultural impulses behind the evolution of western societies is easier to pose than to answer. It is Weber's famous thesis in this regard that the spirit of capitalism was shaped by Calvinism. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*<sup>5</sup> he argues that in terms of ideal types capitalism can be characterized as a societal system in which the accumulation of capital is central; therefore it is constantly imperative to save. This system presupposes a spirit of industry, which considers labor, production, and accumulation of capital to be meaningful even when they do not lead directly to a commensurate increase in possibilities of consumption. Thus, on the one hand, rational labor acquires an ethical significance apart from the possibilities of consumption which it creates, while, on the other hand, saving and investing become independent virtues in the view that every human being will later have to give an account of his possessions before God. Weber's argument, therefore, rests on the premise that men can achieve a heavenly blessing here on earth: human labor on earth is as much a "call" or vocation as any other spiritual call.

What spiritual barriers characteristic of medieval European society had to be removed before that society, through the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, could become the vanguard of western culture? Only by finding an answer to this question can one hope to expose more clearly the deepest spiritual impulses underlying the rise of modern European society. For it seems very likely that the forces which ultimately made possible the easing of these barriers also evoked the spirit and reality of modern society.

The first barrier which had to be removed was that of church and heaven: the vertical orientation of life had to be transformed into a horizontal one. This transformation was the accomplishment of both the Renaissance and the Reformation whose meaning inadvertently was fixed by Cartesianism. The culture that emerged is essentially one in which the legal order, the prevailing public morality and the organization of socio-economic life all grant unobstructed play to the forces of economic growth and technological development. In such a social structure, the vertical direction of life loses its significance. Instead a horizontal orientation dominates so that development and expansion are directed to earthly possibilities.

The clear analogy is that a comparable horizontal orientation of the African cosmological vision would engender a new image of man in Africa in which, to quote Peter Gay, "Man is free, the master of his fortune, not chained to his place in a universal hierarchy but capable of all things."<sup>6</sup> In other words, the earth becomes man's domain as the platform and instrument with which he can realize himself in the arts, in science, and in commerce as well as in his contacts with others, including people of other cultures. Man directs his attention to this world in order to gain a better understanding of it and consequently of himself.

This has not been the case in Africa, however, nor has there been any conscious sign of it. African society is structured cyclically. Everything is ordered and related in such a manner as to ascend, descend and disperse, from the realm of nature to that which alone ultimately can provide meaning to earthly existence--the spiritual realm. Tempel's *Bantu Philosophy* provides an excellent reading of this which he summarizes thus: "The world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network."<sup>7</sup> In such a worldview, the dialectical contradiction between the opposites: matter and mind, inside and outside, theory and practice, etc., is reduced by making the one pole continuous with the other. Thus, one finds a synthesis of the dialectical moments by making them continuous or abolishing them in a holistic ontology. This apparent Hegelianism is relatively logical and interrelates such purely intellectual categories as subject and object, quality and quantity, limitation and infinity, and so forth. The thinker comes to understand the way in which

his own determinate thought processes, and indeed the very forms of the problems from which he sets forth, limit the results of his thinking.

Dialectical thought is in its very structure self-consciousness; it may be described as an attempt to think about a given object on one level, and to observe our own thought processes as we do so. In other words, it reckons the position of the observer within the experiment itself.

In more recent times, this holistic view of African culture has been challenged by many radical Marxists. Their thesis is premised on the fact that the self-consciousness aimed at is the awareness of the individual's position in society and in history itself, and of the limits imposed on one's awareness by his or her class position. In short, it is awareness of the ideological and situational nature of all thought as of the initial delineation of the problems themselves.

To avoid entering into the polemics of Marxism and its prescriptions, it should be noted that insofar as Marxism is a critical rather than a systematic philosophy it is not in itself a coherent position, but rather a "correction" of other positions. It is a rectification in a dialectical fashion of some pre-existing phenomenon, rather than a positive doctrine in its own right. This is to say that the Marxist model cannot be applied in the African situation until we grasp that which it is directed against or which it is directed to correct. Marx came to critical self-consciousness through a critique of the varied intellectual traditions and attitudes of his time. His works therefore can be understood only within the ambit of the opposites to which Marx implicitly or explicitly makes reference. For instance, against the young Hegelians and their leader Bruno Bauer, Marx adduces the argument for materialism, defending the principles of activity and reciprocity which were central to Hegel's dialectic against the passive materialism of Feuerbach. Against absolute idealism and its fatalistic thesis, Marx asserts that man makes his own history.

It could be argued then that the dialectical strategy of Marx grows more profound whenever the ideology of the dominant classes takes on a religious or spiritualistic form, whenever religion becomes the principal weapon in the struggle against change and social revolution. This is the conviction of the so-called Marxists in Africa, who fail to understand the radical difference between the cultural settings of Marx's Europe and present-day Africa. In other words, a distinction has to be made between the idealism of Hegel in all its forms, on one hand, and, on the other hand, the unitary (holistic) world of the African.

For Hegel, through the dialectical process the absolute comes to realize itself as ultimate, but for the African this verticality is resolved by a cyclic view. Nothing realizes itself as ultimate because the synthesis of the dialectical moments is cyclically continuous. Thus, while Marxist materialism makes sense against the background of Hegel's pantheism, it is spurious to apply the same to the African context and hence our rejection of Marxism in Africa: a possible solution to the dilemma does not lie in Marxism.

Nor do we recommend straddling Western and African cultures because a society that does so is rarely well-seated. What is needed at this point is a re-examination of the question of the basic relationship of the African to other cultures.

## **DEFENSIBLE ALIENATION**

In considering the question of the basic relationship to the cultures and achievements of other peoples one might begin by insisting on the priority of some fundamental reciprocity between peoples preceding any later, historical form of antagonism and conflict. Though the structure of that fundamental reciprocity is difficult to determine, the intention behind the concept is somewhat clearer. For the idea of initial reciprocity is intended to undermine the

purely economic doctrine of the manner in which particular, historically determinate models of human relationships result from the modes of economic production at a particular period. Human relationships thus would seem to be merely instinctual or biological reactions and adjustments to different types of material surroundings. Thus human relationships are seen not only as thing-like, but actually as inert objects subject to geographical and external influences. Human relationship is a concept laced with alienation.

In his *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Sartre notes that "There cannot be alienation unless there was first something to alienate, some prior form of human relationship to serve as the object of distortion."<sup>8</sup> We are never simply alone with each other; every confrontation takes place against the background of what, a little hastily, is called human society, or at least against the background of many of other human relationships. In this light, Sartre's very pertinent aphorism of the couple and resistance to the idea of the "third" is a way of making room around ourselves, of trying as it were to persuade ourselves that our world is filled with empty spaces, and that there is no such thing as genuine solitude or privacy. Since the couple cannot really be a unity, unification must be mediated by a third party, an outside observer or witness. The crucial role played by this "third" confirms the priority of the triadic over the dyad relationship.

The historical heritage which Africa shares with the Western world is mediated through ancient Egypt as the third party. The primary objective of Cheikh Anta Diop's sociology, which we find highly important in this regard, is to demonstrate the Negro origin of ancient Egyptian civilization. As Immanuel Wallerstein in his work *Africa: The Politics of Independence* points out, "Other scholars, such as W. E. B. Dubois, had earlier presented the argument that ancient Egyptians were Negroes."<sup>9</sup> Diop's works demonstrate the continuity between ancient Egyptian civilization and the contemporary cultures of black Africa. It is not our intention to review the whole of Diop's thesis here, but it is not without interest to trace the main lines of his thought to gain some understanding of his position. His thesis is, in fact, the intervention of an African in a debate that long had been going on in the West about the racial origin of ancient Egyptians.

Diop's motivation stems from his dissatisfaction with the point of view of those scholars who, against all objective evidence, deliberately classified ancient Egyptians among the white race. Diop attributes this point of view to the effect of racial prejudice against the black race resulting, as Abiola Irele puts it, "in a falsification of African history."<sup>10</sup> Diop's examination of ancient Egyptian institutions and thought from a range of special fields provides him with a cultural argument for postulating an essential affinity between the forms of social organization and the cosmology of the ancient Egyptians and those that to him appear to characterize the traditional African world.

Two clear moments seem to evolve in Diop's thinking. First, there is an effort to establish a historical and cultural connection between ancient Egypt and black Africa in such a way as to place the African continent and the black race firmly within the movement of universal history. This provides a foundation for a second element, namely, that human life is in its very structure collective, rather than individualistic. This has the inherent value of encouraging avenues in which the isolated culture of Africa can overcome its weakness. Human beings can be united either in their search for cultural and intellectual evolution, by historical evolution or by the historical heritage they share. There is need to abandon the self-consciousness that goes with cultural particularism, and to transcend this position to an entirely new ground.

## CONCLUSION

The key problem for Africa now is not necessarily between the dominant ideologies of the contemporary world: idealism and materialism, neo-colonialization and pan-Africanism, nor even Christianity and Islamism, but the much more deeply philosophic issue of the consensus concerning the framework within which dialogue may take place. Despite the differences of ultimate outlooks, this must enable leaders and citizens to build a culture that increases the quality of life, a society where people's deepest intuitions about life and destiny are not only tolerated but respected and cultivated. There is need for a new cosmological vision in Africa, a new spirit of adventure fired by a modern imagination, a new way of thinking that will enable a transformation of the present state of alienation from a passive condition we confusedly endure into an active, collective existential project. We need to take control of our objective alienation by assuming it and endowing it with positive significance. This implies a conscious and willed dynamic movement out of the "self" to a purposive drive for new horizons of experience.

The strands of argument we have so far elaborated, when taken together, answer to a common objective: to lay to rest the issue of African identity and to chart a new direction for African thought more appropriate to the changed historical situation of the continent. This thesis finds an expression in Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre*, which argues that culture does not refer to a predetermined model offered by the past, but lies in the future as a perpetual creation, a continuing effect of a vast, ever unfolding existential project. In a word, culture is not a state but a becoming.<sup>11</sup>

The "Greek miracle" which marked the birth of a new cosmological vision in Europe was the result of human interrelationships. Given the contention that ancient Egypt, which was related thereto, was of black racial stock, it stands to reason that Africa may lay a claim to the evolution of Western civilization, as well as having in that civilization a considerable stake as the instrument for the necessary transformation of the African world. It is in our best interest to make good that claim and to adopt strategies that make our stake in that civilization pay handsome dividends. The black peril could one day (as the Japanese have proved in their own case) become the black paradigm. We cannot achieve this if we continue an illusory and endless search for identity, the unfortunate outcome of our colonial experience, which is only intensified by all forms of cultural nationalism.

## NOTES

1. Friedrich Engels, *Feuerbach and the End of German Philosophy*, (New York: International Publishers, 1941); (Marxist Library, Works of Marxism-Leninism, Vol. 15).

2. Cf. Abiola Irele, *African Cultural and Intellectual Leaders and the Development of the New African Nations* (Ibadan, Nigeria: University of Ibadan Press, 1982), p. 154.

3. Victor Uchendu, "The Dilemma of Ethnicity and Political Primacy in Black Africa," in *Ethnic Identity Cultural Continuities and Change*, edited by George de Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1975), p. 269.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 269.

5. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. by Talcott Parsons with a foreword by R. H. Tawney (London: Unwin Univ. Books, 1930, 1967).

6. P. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967-1969), vol. I: *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (1967), p. 266.

7. P. Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959), p. 61.

8. J. P. Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), vol. I, p. 241.



9. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Africa: The Politics of Independence* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp. 129-130; see also Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, ed. and trans. by Mercer Cook (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1974).

10. Abiola Irele, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

11. F. Fanon, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961).

**CHAPTER III**  
**AFRICA: THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY**  
IZU MARCEL ONYEOCHA

Africa has meant many things to many people: to some it is the land of the noble savage; to others it is a vast reservoir of cheap labor and raw materials for exploitation; to yet others it is a vast continent of jungles and cannibals, remote and exotic, a persistent enigma.<sup>1</sup>

**THE PROBLEM**

It is not easy for an African to talk about Africa without referring to the age-old issues associated with it: poverty, slavery, illiteracy, and the like. But there is also a danger of drifting into apologetics and rationalizations of the events as they stand, and of pointing fingers at some historical development or some common experience<sup>2</sup>. At the risk of sounding pedantic or overly cynical, I would dare to harp, albeit mildly, on the selfsame hackneyed areas of concern since their very pervasiveness can only be indicative of their importance as factors in the life and history of the African.

Abosieh Nicol graphically captures the enigma of Africa and concludes that in the final analysis only Africans could say what Africa is:

Africa, you were once just a name to me,  
but now you lie before me with somber  
challenge . . .  
You are not a country, Africa  
You are not a concept  
Fashioned in our minds, each to each,  
to hide our separate fears, to dream  
our separate dreams.  
Only those within you who know  
their circumscribed plot  
and till it well with steady plough . . .  
(can say), "This is my Africa" meaning  
"I am content and happy.  
I am fulfilled, within, without, and round  
about."<sup>3</sup>

Some have disparaged Africa for its lowly state in the field of science and technology. Some have revelled in the supposed past glories of Africa as though that were sufficient to cater for today's challenges. A recent *Daily Telegraph* report speaks about the excavations in Sudan of a lost city which dates back to between the eighth century B.C. and the Middle Ages:

The dig has so far uncovered a palace, houses, wall inscriptions, pottery and leather bags which show indigenous monumental architecture and writing systems as well as traces of outside influences such as those of Greece and Turkey.<sup>4</sup>

Revelling in this type of discovery is self-defeating since most industrialized societies have their own share of excavations and lost cities, and yet have kept new cities going. In this regard Fanon's *caveat* is very pertinent:

I am convinced that it would be of the greatest interest to be able to have contact with a Negro literature or architecture of the third century before Christ. I should be very happy to know that a correspondence had flourished between some Negro philosopher and Plato. But I can absolutely not see how this fact would change anything in the lives of the eight-year-old children who labor in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadalupe.<sup>5</sup>

The image of the African is of one desperately wanting to be heard. Trying to outdo himself to show that he actually belongs in the society of humankind, he would eagerly display his prowess in the fields of culture, of sport, of intellect and of civilization. All these efforts seem to meet with a rather listless audience who, it seems, will always require double evidence to doctor their credulity and would then give a complement more from courtesy than from solidarity. The African knows it. Even their own identity cultural, political, religious must await the verdict of skeptical, stern-faced critics before they could lay any claims to authenticity.

In the political sphere, it took the boundaries arbitrarily drawn at the coffee table for African nations to emerge, irrespective of natural boundaries or cultural differences, and without the slightest regard for the wishes of the people. Along with the political definition came the religious, with a brand new set of moral codes forcibly supplanting the traditional ones. Traditional piety suddenly became idolatrous and traditional marriage which was polygamous became adulterous. On the socio-cultural level, native languages were outlawed and with them went the folkways.

The African then became by definition an eternal student whose every facet of existence must first be vetted before it could validly be adopted. Thus severed from his roots, the African has not found any sure foothold, either in the received cultures or in his embattled one. Deprived of the use of his mother tongue, he has not quite learned the new ones; yet his destiny is made to hang on this. He is thus conditioned to learn by rote things which are of little significance to his normal life.

On the political scene he is either pro-West or pro-East. Democracy is defined in ways that are incomprehensible to him and he is forced to regard as democratic a system which he would consider as devoid of consensus.<sup>6</sup> Though the multi-party system may sound democratic, in reality it is the winning party whose determinations become law for all. It regards even a simple majority as a consensus and only rarely has recourse to referendums.

On the religious plane the story is no more comforting. As Ali Mazrui rightly points out, the African continent has produced no major world religion. Depending on the way one looks at it, this fact may be considered a lack on the part of Africa. The fact is that to universalize any religion some kind of conquest - military, political, ideological - some kind of imposition of values, seems to be the key. African religions have been in the business not of subjugating, but of coexisting with others. The result of this tolerance is that foreigners have been able to propagate their own religions unhindered for the most part, especially where confrontation has not been used as a means.

Africa thus became the great arena of frantic missionary activities from the great religions whose interest is served by universalism and the sense of supremacy. Mazrui sums up the situation:

Perhaps no other continent has faced such massive attention by those who have had religions of sacred wares to propagate. In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and much of the twentieth centuries

Christianity found its greatest area of voluntary dedication among private agents within the African continent. Europe exported not just administrators and businessmen, but also peddlers of religious beliefs. Even before the Christians came, the Muslims had disseminated their religious ideas in various parts of the continent.<sup>7</sup>

We may consider this an enrichment, but the worried piecing together of succeeding events in colonial and post-colonial Africa has led to the exasperated conclusion that this was all an imperialistic, opportunistic gimmick, designed in the first place, not to Christianize or morally uplift, but as a cover for "doing in" the African. It takes a brave and persistent act of faith to dismiss this, or an equally energetic new approach to generate a less pessimistic point of view.

Thus, in Africa there is the situation of a variety of indigenous religions, coexisting and interacting with Islam and Euro-Christianity. This is the tripartite soul of Africa for which Nkrumah tried to propose a synthesis in his consciencism: a concept which in the religious plane would amount to a federation or confederation:

With true independence regained, . . . a new harmony needs to be forged, a harmony that will allow the combined presence of traditional Africa, Islamic Africa and Euro-Christian Africa, so that this presence is in tune with the original humanist principles underlying African society.<sup>8</sup>

In the final analysis it is the African who must define himself. All external parties should spare themselves the effort of always wanting to oversee what the African is about. The attempts to oversee have given rise to all kinds of misconceptions and problematic stereotypes which distort rather than define the true image of the African. Most notorious among all these are race, color and ideology, each of which will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this paper.

The African fares no better from the elements. He is almost an endangered species as a result of drought, pests, floods or famine. Aimé Césaire captures the situation in his inimitable way with the picture of a peasant farmer hand-tilling an arid soil with his hoe or "dabat":

Strike peasant, strike (the soil with your "dabat")  
The first day the birds died  
the second day the fish ran aground  
the third day the animals emerged from the forest  
and girdled the towns in a great belt hot and very strong.<sup>9</sup>

Along the same line Leopold Senghor laments the predicament of the African whom he sees in the image of a woman despoiled and disgraced, the hapless victim of an impending cataclysm: "Naked woman, black woman! I sing your passing beauty from that I fix in the eternal before jealous destiny burns you to ashes."<sup>10</sup>

The Africa presented by the ethnologist is a legend in which his audience readily believed. The African tradition as it appears in the light of the neo-African culture may also be a legend, but it is one in which the African intelligence believes. It is their perfect right to declare authentic, correct and true those components of their past which they believe to be so. Thus, the conception of the tradition as it appears in the light of the neo-African culture must be considered the most valid, since it is the one which from now on will form the future of Africa. Neo-African culture appears in an unbroken extension as the legitimate heir of tradition.

## THE QUESTION OF AFRICANITY

The geographical entity known as Africa cannot be classified as a national community, nor defined in terms of a common language, culture or worldview.

Ideologically, the northern part of Africa, predominantly Muslim, identifies more with the Arab world more than with Africa. According to Southern Africa's policy of apartheid, until recently whites have not considered themselves as Africans; indeed, the whole idea of apartheid has been aimed at Africans on the basis of color. Whites have their affiliations with Western Europe and the United States as the home of their forebears. Thus, we are left with the sub-Saharan southwest and central Africa, often referred to as the "real" Africa or "Black Africa".<sup>11</sup>

There are the African Americans (courtesy of the Reverend Jesse Jackson) and the African Caribbeans (so-called "Black Souls in a white world") who by accident or design are black migrants or descendants of former slaves. There are the offspring of intermarriages between Africans and non-Africans.<sup>12</sup> Who then wears the African badge; is it possible to have in-between Africans or people more or less African than others?

Even the aspect of color does not seem to provide the ultimate answer to the question of African or any identity. There are many light-skinned people in Africa, just as there are so many dark-skinned people in other parts of the world. It is, however, noteworthy that most of the attempts at identifying the African, even by Africans themselves, have never quite succeeded in getting away from the question of color. One possible explanation is the fact that the human mind often tends to work within established categories such that opinions earlier held tend to influence subsequent views. Some of the theories proffered as to the content of Africanity lean heavily on the question of race and color. Negritude is one such theory.

### *The Question of Race*

The African does not pass simply, like any other person, but always is considered minutely with uncanny curiosity. Frantz Fanon shares his personal experience:

The schema of my normal body experience had dissolved, attacked at several points, gave way and was replaced by a schema that was racial and epidemic. In the train, I was responsible at one and the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I looked at myself objectively, discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics. And I understand all that was being held against me: cultural backwardness, fetishism, slavery, cannibalism. I wanted to be a human being, nothing more than a human being.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of this kind of situation, many African Americans wanted to become white to liberate themselves from the burdensome memory represented by a more highly pigmented skin; others wanted to seek their salvation in the acquisition of the African heritage in the new-fangled spirit of Pan-Africanism.

The grand division of humanity as Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid seems to be altogether arbitrary. For instance, the blacks in India or Sri Lanka do not look like those in Africa. Nor can one accurately point to differences in mental and intellectual endowments as criteria since geniuses as well as dunces exist in every camp. Another fallacy, based on an incomplete understanding of the theory of evolution, is the idea that some races have some of what have been termed "primitive" features such as hairiness, thinness or thickness of lips or heels, etc.<sup>14</sup> The point to be made here is that there is no justification to be drawn from history, geography, sociology, anthropology, or anatomy to support the idea of one race being innately

superior to another. The percentage of people who assume this state of affairs even among Africans themselves is surprising. One such person is Leopold Sedar Senghor of Ivory Coast.

### *Rationalizing with Color: Senghor's Negritude*

Senghor sees the common factor of Africinity as consisting in the state of being black or Negritude. This is clearly an extrinsic and superficial analysis. He describes Negritude as:

The whole complex of civilized values, cultural, economic, social and political which characterize the black peoples, or precisely the Negro-African world. All these values are essentially formed by *intuitive reason*, which expresses itself *emotionally through self-surrender . . . through myths . . . and above all, through primordial rhythms synchronized with those of the cosmos.*<sup>15</sup>

These values, according to Senghor, consist in the sense of communion, the gift of myth-making, and the gift of rhythm. Negritude is community-based: communal and not collectivistic. Though socialist in character, it is founded on spiritual and democratic values.

Senghor's analysis understandably met with criticism in that he, among other things, advocated a process of miscegenation which hopefully would get rid of the dark pigmentation over the generations. He also considers the African as emotional rather than rational: "Emotion is black, . . . reason is Greek."<sup>16</sup>

When confronted with these things he was not about to change his views: Young people have criticized me for reducing Negro-African knowledge to pure emotion, for denying that there is an African 'reason.' . . . I should like to explain myself once again . . . "*European reasoning is analytical, discursive by utilization; Negro-African reasoning is intuitive by participation.*"<sup>17</sup> As if to complete his coup de grace, Senghor ventures into the area of epistemology and claims that African epistemology starts from a different basic postulate: "He (the African) does not realize that he thinks; he feels that he feels, he feels his existence, he feels himself."<sup>18</sup> Hence his epistemology begins with the premise (following Descartes?), "I feel, therefore I am."

Senghor never said how he came about this outrageous conclusion and on what basis such stereotypes can claim validity. One would wonder if such conclusions were a result of some careful thought or an attempt to confirm his assertion that Africans feel rather than reason. He, an African of his own construction, lives up to the stereotype he has created. This approach is all too apologetic; it is like saying aloud that black is *also* good, beautiful, valid and genuine in a secondary or concessionary sense. Such a position arises out of a kind of inferiority complex, cleverly but not too successfully disguised. In the final analysis it hangs the African identity precariously upon color, while ignoring the ontology which is the root of personal identity.

Among the critics of Senghor is Paulin Hountondji, who describes Negritude as an alibi for evading the larger and more pressing political problems of national liberation.<sup>19</sup> Ghana's Kofi Busia dismisses Negritude as a convenient abstraction, a conceptual toll for researchers who are trying to find common cultural traits that will distinguish the Negro African from other races. According to Busia, heightened sensibility and strong emotional quality cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of Negro Africans. Besides, race and culture do not necessarily go together, and historical circumstances have put the Negro Africans into different cultures.<sup>20</sup> Ezekiel Mphahlele sees Negritude as the unrequited yearning in the heart of alienated or assimilated

Africans for the dream Africa of their ancestors. As far as he is concerned, Negritude is bound up with racialism and tends to accentuate Africa's "underdoggerly".<sup>21</sup>

A closer look at Senghor's theory would reveal its vagueness in the use of such terms as *civilized values, intuitive reason, emotion, self-surrender, myths, primordial rhythms*. Civilized, for Senghor, would be synonymous with Westernized, and with that meaning go the other concepts as corollaries: self-surrender to these (Western) values, etc. There is no question of trying to examine more closely for the purpose of understanding and if necessary changing the *status quo*. Intuitive reason is almost the opposite of deductive, reflective reason, and is more consistent with the emotional than with the rational. Thus in Senghor's theory, the African floats aimlessly with the current on the turbulent waters of the universe and reality; on the flimsy rafts of color, comfortably ensconced on the easy chair of emotions, bereft of the compass of intentionality, with no provisions against hunger, wind and storm; with no plans, no aim, no target; blissfully relying on random flashes of ideas in order to arrive nowhere but where the tides turn.

Aime Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Leon Damas and a few others had coined the term Negritude, and defined it to mean "the consciousness of being Black," the simple recognition of a fact that being Black the African refuses to lose himself in the non-Black. Returning from the 1963 African Summit Conference, one participant exclaimed: "We have discovered our common identity!" by which he meant, color. The naiveté of such euphoria is self-evident, since it would seem that the speaker was for the first time discovering his color. Surprisingly enough, philosopher President Julius Nyerere was caught in the fever of this kind of euphoria as can be seen from the following statement he made in a speech in 1960:

Africans all over the continent, without a word being spoken either from one individual to another or from one African country to another, looked at the European, looked at one another, and knew that in relation to the European, they were one.<sup>22</sup>

This cryptic observation based on "looking" would tend to suggest that Dr. Nyerere has fallen into the tendency to regard color as the important identification tag for the African, since it, more immediately than anything else, visibly distinguishes him from other people.

Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikiwe wisely warns against the danger of a too narrow definition of the African along racial lines. To do so would amount to parochialism, and chauvinism, by whatever name it is called, has always been a disintegrating factor in human society. It builds a wall between "Us" and "Them". In daily life, one who is conscious of being or having something peculiar is likely to be eternally recluse, unrelaxed, and always on his/her guard. Being black does not have to divide the African away from the rest of humanity. If anything, it should be a perspective or channel for joining the wider family of humankind.

Nigeria's late Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, promptly distances himself from any such activity:

I do not believe in what some people call the African personality. There is no such thing as African personality. Africans belong to the human race and . . . talk of African personality betrays an inferiority complex.<sup>23</sup>

*The Ideological Factor: Nkrumah's Consciencism*

Kwame Nkrumah believed that the present-day African society has lost its identity as it is buffeted by three rival ideologies: the traditional beliefs and practices, which, in turn, are engaged in a tug-of-war with Euro-Christian tenets, on the one hand, and Islamic tenets, on the other. This struggle has generated a crisis of conscience in the African since one ideology upholds what another spurns, and the African is expected to cope with all. The resolution of this conflict will be found in consciencism which Nkrumah describes as: "A philosophical standpoint which, taking its start from the present content of the African conscience, indicates the way in which progress is forged out of the conflict in that conscience."<sup>24</sup>

The main features of Nkrumah's consciencism include the principle of egalitarianism and the consideration of man as an end rather than a means. Philosophical consciencism therefore forms "the theoretical basis for an ideology whose aim shall be to contain the African experience of Islamic and Euro-Christian presence as well as the experience of traditional African society, and, by gestation, employ them for the harmonious growth and development of that society."<sup>25</sup>

Nkrumah sounds positive, but on a different note from Senghor. He at least recognizes that the African is, and that he does possess something of value that could be enriched by contact with the Euro-Christian and Islamic values. He is not merely adventitious. Unlike Senghor, Nkrumah is not about to deny arbitrarily the African the gift of analytical and discursive reason. At the inauguration of the University of Ghana, in November 1961, he said: "We have never had any doubt about the intellectual capacity of the African."<sup>26</sup>

Nkrumah's point of departure in the crisis of the African conscience makes his theory rather reactionary in approaching the African as trying very hard to contain the influence of these three elements. That approach led Nkrumah to assume without trying to explain the values proper to the African. He was reacting against colonialism, but forgot the *who* of the African in his pursuit of the *what* that is the conscience. No identity could be established on the basis of conscience alone.

The situation is rendered more complex by Nkrumah's espousal of materialism on which he bases his concept of egalitarianism. In furtherance of his belief in materialism Nkrumah would deny that matter owes its existence either to thought (Descartes' *Cogito*), or to feeling (Senghor). Weighing both reasonings: *I think, therefore I am* and *I feel, therefore I am* he rejects both. But inasmuch as feeling is a more physical experience than thought, and therefore a greater concession to the autonomy of matter, Nkrumah would choose Senghor over Descartes.<sup>27</sup> Thus, while asserting the African rational capacity, Nkrumah is willing to forsake it in order to uphold the primacy of matter. This shying away from the issue of rational capacity is almost tantamount to a denial. Nkrumah's African in the final analysis is no more than a one-dimensional man without spiritual values or telos. Not too many Africans will identify with such an image.

### *The Socio-political Factor: Nyerere's Ujamaa*

Both Senghor and Nkrumah advocated socialism for Africa, or rather as Africa's best bet. Nyerere advocates socialism as already operational in Africa and descriptive of Africa's social structure. Senghor points to color, Nkrumah to ideology, and Nyerere to society. The Ujamaa concept arises from the need to develop people, rather than things. The person is very important in Nyerere's formulation, which describes the Ujamaa villages as follows:

Ujamaa villages are intended to be socialist organizations created by the people, and governed by those who live and work in them. They cannot be created from outside, nor governed from outside. No one can be forced into an Ujamaa village, and no official at any level



can go tell the members of an Ujamaa what they should do together, and what they should continue to do as individual farmers.<sup>28</sup>

Nyerere describes the basis of this society as equality and respect for human dignity, the sharing of the resources which are produced by common efforts, work by everyone and exploitation by none. He makes clear that Ujamaa is not intended as a revival of the old settlement schemes under another name; it is a new conception. No doubt Nyerere is protesting against the injustices of capitalism.

He tried to uphold the primacy of the person over matter, a compromise Nkrumah would gladly make. Nyerere's theory would uphold the spiritual values of mankind without compromising the demands of justice and equality: his own African has a destiny beyond the material. He was Catholic by religious belief, as were Senghor and Nkrumah.<sup>29</sup> However, Nyerere's views are basically idealistic and never fully reckon with the concrete realities of life where ideals fail to be realized, people become disenchanted or disillusioned, and leaders falter or fail. The Ujamaa experiment experienced severe tests in Tanzania and in many instances did not quite stand up. Another important factor to consider is that what Nyerere envisaged in Ujamaa is the image of a well-run society, where all citizens are happy and contented; thus it fits any society and cannot be claimed for Africa alone.

Despite all that has been said above, the issue of African identity is not yet nearly resolved. One may begin to wonder if the whole business of African identity is not a mere intellectual conception with no footing in reality. In any case, since color, ideology and the social factors, each taken by itself, have failed to give any conclusive lead, this means that the Africanor for that matter any person gets lost in the rubble when a whole is reduced its to components and each part is studied in isolation. The entire enquiry must be taken up once again and from a different angle.

## **AFRICANITY: FACT OR FANCY**

To the question, who is the African, Jacques Maquet responds:

The African is the Yoruba craftsman and the Tutsi lord, the Nairobi mechanic and the Ibadan professor, the Fulani nomad and the Congolese villager, the hunter of the great forest and the warrior of the high plateau, the woman trader of Dakar and the factory girl of Bouake, the Benin sculptor and the Lumumbashi painter. This list of differences within the sub-Saharan Africa could be extended indefinitely.<sup>30</sup>

Maquet goes on to identify the constants of Africanity as becoming an African, finding one's place among kin, depending on lineage, going back to ancestors, being in harmony with reality, marrying several wives, making lineage continue, controlling without coercion, ruling alone, being identified with the people, existing for others, fixing inequalities.

As far as Maquet is concerned, his typical African manifests these characteristics. Put in other words, Maquet's African is always living in the past, a simpleton that never goes beyond the sensory level of existence, godfatherish in government, making sure that no one surpasses others, brutish, and incapable of reflection. So, according to Maquet's listing, wherever you look and find someone satisfying these characteristics, that person *is* an African! Consider the carefully sketched roles listed by Maquet: not one of them involves any intellectual activity!

There is this meaningless talk of "being in harmony with nature", which implies a chronic passivity arising from an innate incapacity to subdue nature and make it serve his needs.<sup>31</sup>

What we have had to contend with so far have been one abstract, generalized concept after another. No wonder none of them has succeeded in leading to a final resolution to our quest. Each talks about the African in the universal and therefore could not possibly lay claim to concreteness since the universal African, like the universal man, nowhere exists. Because of the great diversity found in Africa, it would be difficult even to talk realistically of a typical African, even though many traits and characteristics could be considered to be common among the peoples of Africa. When Nkrumah and other Pan-Africanists talk of the African personality, they probably took for granted the principles characteristic of the human personality self-consciousness, reflective thinking, abstract thought, power of choice, aesthetic appreciation, worship and faith in a higher power, and creativity<sup>32</sup> and situated them in Africa. This was an understandable reaction to the denial of these by some Western writers, particularly Levi-Bruhl and Robert Knox. But they failed to go far enough and were instead trapped in the reductionism that their theories inevitably entailed. The object of the enquiry is neither abstract thought nor a particular thought process, but a person, a self, a thinker, an African. This is where Nyerere has superseded all the others: in giving the pride of place to the person, the individual by himself and as a member of society. The concept "African" will be understood in this light henceforth. To get at this African, the contributions of the non-Africans are useful and helpful supplements, while the African self-affirmation leads the way.

### *African Personality/Identity*

Apart from identifying documents, from traits of color or culture, something remains and perdures, looming larger than life itself. Reflecting on the transcendental qualities of the human personality I have observed as follows:

The human personality is impenetrable, incommunicable and even indestructible. Perhaps it could be frustrated or hampered by circumstances or the sheer bad will of others. It could also be enhanced, helped up and enriched by others through love or education. Even if we explain a man's body or mind, we could never explain his personality that which makes him himself and absolutely no other. . . . I can lose everything . . . even life itself. But I can never lose my personality.<sup>33</sup>

In the light of this observation, it seems that it is the African personality that must manifest itself so that the African can take his place on the world scene. Crucial to the question of personality development is contentment with what one is or has, while not giving up on what one should be. The African has been barraged into lack of self-confidence and lack of contentment with himself and his potentials: unwittingly an inferiority complex is his lot. This lack of contentment brings with it envy, irritability and lack of inner peace.

The antidote for lack of contentment is its opposite self-confidence, that grows from courage and optimism. Mkwugo Okoye is quick to point out that the African has indeed a lot that he can be proud about:

I had thus no need for complexes of contempt, rage or dissembling, and everywhere I moved I saw myself as the equal or even superior of the people about me a pardonable sin after emerging, with my country, from a long period of repression and humiliation.<sup>34</sup>

As was pointed out at the beginning of this paper, the African is beset by an identity crisis that is rather difficult to overcome. This crisis haunts him on the socio-political and ideopsychological levels, in the clothes he wears, the food he eats, the language he speaks, the way he worships, the way he rules or is ruled, acts or reacts. The spectre of the slave trade hangs uncomfortably over him with wounds that do not seem to heal. C.L.R. James describes the horror of

Whipping, hot wood on the buttocks, salt, pepper, citron, cinders, aloes, and hot ashes poured on bleeding wounds, mutilation of limbs, ears and private parts, burning with wax, being burnt alive, roasted in slow fires, filled with gunpowder and blown up, buried neck-deep in the earth and head smeared with sugar to attract flies and insects to a living feast<sup>35</sup>

all in the pursuit of wealth.

The trauma can hardly be exaggerated. Just for the sake of comparison, decades after the Vietnam war some of its American veterans still suffered the after-shocks. In Japan the population still bears the after-effects of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The victims of Auschwitz are still deeply troubled over their terrible experiences, and international outrage did not let up on seeking out and dealing with all those who had anything to do with it. By the same token, a situation of trauma and intimidation that built up over several generations is likely to take a considerable while to remedy, given the good will of all parties. All this is on the psychological level.

Ideologically, the African long was torn between Western capitalism and Eastern bloc socialism: there was no word of any other possibility. His leanings were adjudged right or wrong according as he leaned right or left, conservative or liberal; he ruled well or badly according as he follows Westminster/Washington or Moscow/Beijing.

In belief, he is either Christian or Communist, perhaps Muslim or otherwise *Animist*. He is expected to be converted to one or several of the options and loyally to conform to their demands. Any wonder then that he never quite seems to attain complete "conversion", but rather seems habitually to "depart from orthodoxy" preferring on many occasions to follow the ways of his fathers. W.M. Ramsey describes this dislocation from his own roots:

You may in outward appearance convert people to a new . . . faith; but if they are not educated up to the level of intellectual and moral power which that higher faith requires, the old ideas will persist in the popular mind, all the stronger in proportion to the ignorance of each individual; and those ideals will seize and move the people, especially in cases of trouble and sickness, and in the presence of dread of death.<sup>36</sup>

Edwin Smith noted with some horror how some Africans, to mark their conversion, discarded their "handsome, flowing white robes and appeared in khaki shorts and a helmet of khaki."<sup>37</sup>

From his new mentors the African picked up a goodly amount of scandals, especially in the field of morals. Mokwugo Okoye criticized the Christian churches for making rogues of honest men, self-seekers out of unselfish men, liars and perverts and neurotics out of those free from these defects: "Those who ruled gave the African peasant a fine training in chicanery and petty-fogging so that, having rejected his jujus and taboos, he can now swear falsely on the Bible, cheat and steal without qualm."<sup>38</sup> Polygamous marriage, which to him was a normal, honorable form of marriage, was censured as illegitimate, yet he sees it practiced by rotation in the form of divorce and remarriage.

There is the exaltation of celibacy as a super virtue within some segments of the Christian (Catholic) religion, but the African now watches as it is being seriously attacked and in danger of being overthrown. Finally, killers who, according to African ethics, are supposed to be killed, walk free due to strange twists in the interpretation of the law and the administration of justice.

William Abraham describes the African as a man of two worlds: belonging to one world, but being fiercely exposed to another. The African has been exposed in no consistent or radical fashion to a milieu which is different from that to which he belongs, though the latter continues to surround him. He is indeed a displaced person. His mastery of the "new culture" is neither comprehensive nor definitive. So his state of confusion is not yet overcome, and this cultural ambiguity is accompanied by misgivings of wide ranging proportions.<sup>39</sup>

The period of loss of independence has entailed for Africa a certain measure of deculturization which fortunately was not total. The cleavage between town life and village life was sufficient to prevent the deculturization from sweeping through. Because the vast majority of the African population belongs to the village rather than to town life, Africans have a clear but decisive choice before them: whether to be as alien to their own people as had been the government, or whether to pose problems and formulate ideals and national objectives meaningfully in terms of the cultures of Africa. Africa is in crisis at various levels, but that is to be expected in a period of decision and transition such as Africa faces at the moment.

The time of transition, whether short or long, will confront the African with an important decision: whether to accept modern civilization at his own expense, or to do so on his own terms, or to reject everything completely and slip back into the limbo of the past.

## **THE WAY OUT**

The best way out of sleep is to wake up, especially if the sleep is wasting time. No one can be praised forever for failing to get out of sleep, no matter the circumstances that led to the inactivity. Africans have many avenues for "escape," but their embattled situation must be recognized as such by them if they are to make use of the opportunities which present themselves. Nigeria's Mbonu Ojike thinks the way out is to "boycott all boycottables," meaning a severance of all links and a renunciation of anything that is not "homemade" to Africa. That would be like winding the clock backwards. Nkrumah thought the way out of the political quandary was through an armed revolution. That would be suicidal. On the ideological level, he envisaged a kind of federated approach whereby the African can rescue for himself what is best in Christianity, Islam and the traditional values. Leopold Senghor would have an intermarriage between the African values and the "civilized values," physically through a process of miscegenation, and ideologically through a process of assimilation. Paulin Hountondji thinks it is not sufficient to study African cultures; they must be lived, practiced and, where necessary, transformed. As to how this could be achieved, Hountondji thinks the best way is to adopt

Western science.<sup>40</sup> Fair enough, but the question is how this adoption is to be achieved beyond what already obtains perhaps he means industrialization. Ngugi Wa'Thiogo hits the bottom line: the African must work to decolonize the mind.

Political independence has been attained, but not cultural, economic and ideological independence. When all these have been attained then, in the words of Frantz Fanon, there will be "not only the disappearance of colonialism, but also the disappearance of the colonized man."<sup>41</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Mokwugo Okoye, *African Responses* (Devon Ilfracombe: Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd., 1964), pp. 9-12.

2. An example of this is a famous poem by Mokwugo Okoye entitled "Ompigro" where he gives a catalogue of his grievances against the white man. (See cover page of the above work). Senghor also wrote another poem entitled "God Forgive White Europe" (See Martin Minogue & Judith Molloy, Ed., *African Aims and Attitudes* [London: Oxford University Press, 1974], p. 62). Nkrumah's invectives in his books, *Towards Colonial Freedom*, *Africa Must Unite*, etc., are all too well-known.

3. Jacob Drachin, *African Heritage* (New York: Collier Books, 1964), p. 119.

4. *The Daily Telegraph* (London and Manchester: January 4, 1988).

5. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 230.

6. A typical example is the idea that democracy consists necessarily in a multi-party arrangement and that anything else is contrary to democracy. The fact of the matter is that this ends up in an elected dictatorship whereby the winner constantly spites the loser. Mugabe's one-party arrangement in Zimbabwe drew a particularly bad press from the West, even though the people themselves made the choice and seem happy with it.

7. Ali A. Mazrui, *World Culture and the Black Experience* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1974), p. 32.

8. *Ibid.*

9. For a detailed discussion of this issue see Paul Bohannon, *Africa and Africans* (Garden City, NY: The Natural History Press, 1964), especially pp. 60-78. See also Hild Kuper's graphic description of actual events where the African is considered with great disdain. For this see Simon and Phoebe Ottenberg, ed., *Cultures and Societies of Africa*, pp. 539ff.

10. Jacques Maguet talks of physical differences between the races, along with profound mental differences both intellectual and emotional, so that individuals of certain races are not capable of achieving the same intellectual development as those of other races, but have a character which makes them unable to command and which predisposes them to obey (surely based on Aristotle). See his *Africanity, the Cultural Unity of Black Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 3.

11. See Jahnheinz Jahn, *Muntu: An Outline of Neo-African Culture*, trans. by Marjorie Greene (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1961), pp. 19-21.

12. A study conducted by James F. Downs reveals that 70 percent of American blacks have at least one white ancestor, and 30 percent of American whites at least one black ancestor. See his *Cultures in Crisis* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1972), p. 3.

13. Fanon, p. 114.
14. Downs, p. 13.
15. Leopold S. Senghor, "What is Negritude?" in *Ideologies of the Developing Nations*, ed. by Paul E. Sigmund (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 250.
16. Senghor, *Negritude et Humanisme* (Paris, Seuil, 1964), p. 24.
17. Senghor, *On African Socialism* (London, Pall Mall, 1964), p. 74.
18. Senghor, "The Spirit of Civilization, or the Laws of African Negro Culture," address given at The First International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists, Proceedings in *Presence africaine*, special issue (June-November 1956), p. 64.
19. Paulin J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (London: Hutchinson Univ. Library for Africa, 1983), pp. 159f.
20. Minogue, p. 239.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
22. Julius Nyerere, *Symposium on Africa* (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, 1960), p. 149.
23. Quoted in Allah-De, "Words, Words Galore," *Sunday Times* (Lagos, May 26, 1963), p. 9.
24. Keame Nkrumah, *Consciencism* (London: Panaf Books, 1974), p. 79.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-70.
26. See "Ghana's Cultural History," extracts from his speech at the inauguration of the University of Ghana, *Presence africaine* 13 (1962), pp. 7-14.
27. See Ali Maxrui's discussion on consciencism in his *World Culture and Black Experience* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), pp. 16-19.
28. Nyerere, p. 149.
29. Senghor himself is a devout Catholic and Nkrumah was brought up a Catholic but later on in his political career was no longer active.
30. Maquet, p. 3.
31. Maquet no doubt bases his position on what Aristotle said about some people born to rule and command while others are disposed only to obey.
32. See Minogue, p. 239.
33. Isu Marcel Onyeocha, "Who are You?" paper presented to Owerri Diocese, Nigeria, April 17, 1987.
34. Mokwugo Okoye, p. 19.
35. C.L.R. James, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, p. 27.
36. See Edwin W. Smith, *Knowing the African* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1946), p. 15.
37. Smith, *The Golden Stool* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1927), p. 264.
38. Okoye, p. 15.
39. W.F. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), p. 35.
40. Hountondji, p. 159.
41. Okoye, p. 250.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**THE CITY IN MODERN NIGERIA:**  
**A FORCE IN RAPID SOCIAL CHANGE**

*JOSEPH I. ASIKE*

**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES**

It is commonly considered that the history of human civilization is really the history of urban life. Archaeological records indicate the cradle of urban development was located in the lower Middle East the "Fertile Crescent". Its beginnings have been dated between 9,000 B.C. and 6,000 B.C. in the Neolithic Age. Whether or not it was from the Middle East alone that this important "revolution" spread to other parts of the world, or whether there were other independent centers of urban growth, is still a matter of controversy among historians and anthropologists. However, somewhat later in time very important centers of urban civilization appeared in Northern China, in the Indus Valley of Northern India and in the lower Nile Valley.

What was the thrust behind the slow development of these communities in which a large number of people lived in units much larger than a village of scattered homesteads? Is it appropriate to refer to these communities as towns? Were they perhaps no more than large-scale peasant settlements? After all, when does a village become a town? The last two questions in particular have relevance to the history of urban life in Africa.

Though the archaeological record still is not complete, urban development has its roots in inventions and discoveries of very great magnitude and in changes from food-gathering and hunting to food-producing, from being preyed upon by animals to their domestication, and from an uncertain existence based upon a subsistence economy to the production of food surpluses. In short, urban development was rooted in the agricultural revolution which, in turn, gave rise eventually to yet another transformation of perhaps even greater significance, namely, industrial society.

It might be desirable to supply some conceptual shorthand in order to identify and label the main characteristics of this great transformation because some scholars have suggested that the basis of urban life in Africa historically is so very recent that we still are able to detect some of these early characteristics in many of the new towns in Africa. Whether this is a really creative approach to understanding African urbanization is a matter to be discussed in the next section.

The change from a subsistence economy to one which rests progressively on the ability to create a surplus of food can also be described as a change from a nomadic-based society to a village-based society. For the sake of shorthand we can say that this is a change from hunters and food-gatherers to peasantry, from a high degree of mobility to settled village life. To identify a form of human settlement as a village is to suggest an important intermediate step in the movement from band societies to urban life. As the size of these settlements grew so did the sometimes positive, but more often negative, competition between them.

While we should keep our conceptual options open and accept the premise that industrial urban life has its historical roots, the view that we shall develop in this chapter is that the link between tradition and modernity has been all but severed in African urban life. It will also be argued that, unlike the experience of the Western countries of Europe and North America, in colonial Africa the process of urbanization was in no way associated with the process of industrialization. In fact, the towns were the sumps into which the needed cheap labor was

flowing. In an attempt to reverse this trend, for instance, the post-independence policymakers in Nigeria aimed at industrialization without urbanization and achieved urbanization without industrialization. Consequently, the rapid urban growth in the post-independence period had a 'dysfunctional' effect as it failed to take into account the specific conditions, traditional values, and the human and material resources of the people.

It is important to recognize that tradition, be it in the realm of material and non-material culture, must be nurtured and reinforced by a total complex, that is, by habits, ideas and behavior, and by social, economic and political institutions which reject any alternatives to tradition. Because this is not the case in Africa today, despite the subsistence economy which still prevails over most of the continent, it might be necessary to apply to the study of urban life in Africa a rather different set of premises. Failure to do this would gravely distort any reading of the historical development of towns in Africa, their contemporary structure and the problems they face.

We are not suggesting an irrevocable rejection of any link between the past and the present, or that some "traditional" ideas and practices of the more recent past do not play some part in the present. No observer could fail to be impressed by the startling differences between the medieval Islamic cities of Timbuktu and the city of Lagos (Nigeria) which was established about a century ago. Rather we might work with the premise that when and where we are able to detect traditional practices and ideas, it is because these are appropriate, or seem appropriate to some category of the urban population in some situations and on some occasions. But even then it must be recognized that if we make an effort to see these traditional practices in the total context in which they take place, we will find that this alleged tradition has been substantially transformed. If this be so, are we still talking about tradition?

Thus, we should not confuse tradition with history. Ancient city walls, an old mosque, a local shrine, the use of a hoe rather than a tractor, the use of a gourd rather than a glass or basin, the use of a "native" doctor (herbalist) rather than a modern medical practitioner, a house built of sun-dried mud rather than bricks or cement blocks, the use of spears rather than rifles, the importance of kinship rather than an emphasis on individuality, work on the land rather than in an office or a factory--all this and much more is no indication that custom is king and that modernity has not reached the furthest corners of a society.

Traditions are long established conventions as these determine or influence the behavior and shape the ideas of a people. Tradition is a point of reference, a measure and guide. A truly traditional society is impregnable; its members will fight to keep it traditional. The non-conformist or the heretic is put to death, expelled or shunned. When custom really is king, tradition will not compromise with alien influences and pressures. Any external pressures against its boundaries agitate traditional society.

Of course, these are generalizations and abstractions, but they also serve to highlight the implications of the use of the concept "tradition". In modern Africa, and in particular in urban Africa, we cannot get very far if we apply this concept too frequently. Social scientists, particularly anthropologists who are beginning to take an interest in urban studies in Africa, tend to concentrate their attention on what they consider to be traditional because they have been reared on the rural tradition of the tribe. But if the anthropologist were to give greater thought to what is really implied when he talks about tradition he would conclude that the institutional fabric of the African society was radically transformed when the continent fell under the impact and control of colonial domination.



We have said that tradition, culture and history are not the same. Traditions are conventions which change, while culture is the constant presence of the ideational, institutional and material roots of a society as a living people, sharing a recognition, and perhaps, a pride in their past. It is this past which is important to some people rather than, as we have been told over the years, the conventions or the traditional practices of a people. Whereas history, as a view of past events and ideas, is not compelled to adjust itself to the present conventions and concerns with behaviors: everyday behavior, everyday demands, hopes, failures and successes.

We have thus far offered some thoughts to guide our approach to the study of the urban phenomenon in Africa, whence it started, what it is, and how to conceptualize it. We must now take a closer look at the main features of urbanization and urbanism (traditional and modern) as a process of social change and a way of life in Africa.

### **PRE-COLONIAL URBAN CENTERS: TRADITIONAL AFRICAN CITIES**

Judging from the paucity of materials on traditional urban centers in Africa very little about the history of urbanization in Africa south of the Sahara is known. The main reason for this is that much archeological work remains to be done, particularly in "Middle Africa," the vast region south of the Sahara and north of the Limpopo. Thus far archaeologists have concentrated on the history of the Nile Valley and the important trading centers on the north coast of Africa, the "City States" on the East African coast, and the Zimbabwe complex in what was Southern Rhodesia.

Although Africa is the least urbanized of the continents and its urban history is less well documented than that of Asia, Europe, and America North and South, it has the fastest rate of urban growth in the world. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the "rise of the cities" is probably one of the most significant events behind the great transformation of contemporary Africa. Yet, despite this, it is important for us to recognize that today only a very small proportion of the population of Africa lives in cities.

While Africa remains the least urbanized of the continents, its urban history is not insignificant. Evidence for this can be taken from those areas which predate European colonization. These are the Nile Valley, the Savannah and forest regions of West Africa, and Southern Africa. The first urban centers in Africa emerged probably around 3500 B.C. in the floodplains of the lower Nile. They resulted from the efforts by the Pharaohs to exert their influence and centralize their administration over the population of the Nile Valley. Their attempts were successful and for 3000 years their control and hegemony prevailed. These political efforts created such towns as Memphis, Thebes and Th-el-Amarna--all of which grew and declined as the capital cities of successive dynasties. The lower Nile towns were complex structures containing a fairly wide range of people such as priests, traders, craftsmen, shopkeepers, administrators and members of the dynastic elite.

Similar centers were to be established in 1200 B.C. on a smaller scale as trading posts on the North African coast. The fathers of this urban development were the Phoenician and Carthaginian traders who dominated life in these centers for nearly 100 years. There is no need to dwell on the internal structure of these centers.

Suffice it to say that they were complex social, political, and economic systems with a considerable division of labor and a distinct "urban culture," inasmuch as virtually all the residents were engaged in non-agricultural activities. The most important aspect of their function, as far as West Africa is concerned, was the fact that these coastal towns had close and

vital ties with the inland centers which connected the North African coast with the areas to the south of the Sahara.

In the Western and Southern Sahara, and in the savannah belt, there emerged some important and large kingdom states, whose leaders centralized political and economic power in central capitals and regional towns. In the Western Sudan region, the cities were not merely important trade and communication centers which bridged the Islamic North and the rest of the southern regions. Such important towns as Timbuktu on the banks of the River Niger as it penetrated deeply into the heartland of the Southern Sahara were also centers of a flourishing intellectual life centered around a university. Further south were towns whose importance is still great today as they have become major centers in the new nationstates of Africa. These are the towns and capital cities of Kano, Zaria, Katsina (Nigeria), Bomako, Djenne, Segou and Ouagadougou. Thus far, the best documented instance of the rise of a West African kingdom is probably that of Yoruba on the West Coast of Nigeria and portions of Benin Republic.

The Yoruba, linked loosely by language and a certain homogeneity of customs, were really a set of independent kingdoms each of which attempted to exert influence and power over their neighbors.<sup>1</sup> The old Yoruba towns: Oyo, Ile-Ife (regarded as the cultural mainspring of Yoruba Society), Oshogbo, Owo and Ogbomosho, trace their origins to having been important centers of political power at one time or another. Many of these pre-colonial towns still exist and are now part of regional and national units, linked by means of modern communication, trade and political unions.<sup>2</sup>

The first semblances of Western-style urban towns and cities emerged in Africa with the Berlin Balkanization Conference (1885) and the establishment of colonial empires immediately thereafter. The traditional urban settlements inland, and/or the ivory and slave trade coastal towns, became the natural points of contact and concentration for Western type urbanization in colonial Africa.

To establish effective socio-economic and political control over the Balkanized territories, the first duty of the colonial powers was to open up the hinterlands by establishing easy and permanent river, road and railway networks. In Nigeria, the Lagos-Kano, Port Harcourt-Kano railroads were constructed. The East and Central African regions experienced similar developments: the Mombasa-Nairobi-Kampala, and the Tanga-Arusha-Moshi railways, for example, were constructed. The central purpose for this adventurism in Africa was the need to open up new sources of raw materials and to promote international trade. Along such systems of transport and communication, as in the case of Nigeria, there emerged such major urban centers as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Calabar--all were established along, or at the entrance and/or exit of, a major communication route. Among other factors that promoted the establishment of these centers was the unbalanced distribution of natural resources which had dictated the pattern of indigenous human settlements. This also influenced the colonial pattern of settlement and general development.

The new urban centers had a number of outstanding functions which, although conventional, differed in their order of priority from the pre-colonial towns. Effectively to promote commercial activities in the colonies, administrative functions were added to ensure law and order and to establish a conducive social climate. These centers also served as "cultural enclaves" where a Western life-style could be promoted, ostensibly to maintain the cultural and environmental climate to which the colonialists had been used at home. Johnston (1977) describes it as an organizing nexus where a concentration of merchants, soldiers, bureaucrats, and others could administer the colony for the homeland.<sup>3</sup>

Other functions of these cities, including education, health, entertainment and information were incidental. These services were targeted to serve the foreigners, that is, the non-indigenous settlers. In most cases the natives could not officially participate in these services, nor were they involved in their development. In short, since the culture and pattern of life of the natives were not taken into consideration in developing the cities, and given the fact that what remained of the traditional towns was completely marginalized, the new cities lacked any native taste. There was, therefore, a clear and deliberate demarcation between the new centers and the so-called "native reserves."

These two categories of human settlements could not mutually coexist except in one fundamental sense: often, where for pragmatic reasons they were allowed to coexist, they exhibit a dual internal structure--a kind of "two cities in one"--consisting of an indigenous, "tradition-oriented" sector and a modern (Westernized) sector.<sup>4</sup> A structural duality results from the mixture of two contrasting forms of social, political and economic organizations, and the dominance/dependence relationship in which colonial contact took place. Its persistence in recent times stems from the fact that in formulating the future growth plans of these cities, planners and policy makers have tended to concentrate upon creating new modern sectors quite distinct from the old settlements. Though often this has been done under the pretext of preserving tradition or minimizing encroachment on "native" authority,<sup>5</sup> more often than not it is a rationalization for convenience and for a least-effort development/planning approach.

## **UNITY AND COMMUNITY: NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF STRUCTURAL DUALITY**

Bearing in mind the general aims and the specific objectives of the British colonial administration in West Africa, the administration was not interested in developing the cities in a way that would realize and maximize their positive role in the overall development of the region. Perhaps one could argue that part of the reason was due to the hostile climate and geographic conditions which rendered difficult any hope of permanent settlement by the colonists. Urban planning in the region was merely to provide enclaves or escapes where temporary migrants from the homelands could be posted to organize increased productivity. With such a limited objective and a narrowly defined role for the region, the colonial planning approach was simple. Its strategy was basically to regulate and control the physical growth of the cities within a graded framework. Land use, zoning and building bylaws were designed to minimize costs and to separate the colonizers from the colonized. Therefore, the traditional (older) sections of the towns were simply ignored and contained, while serious planning efforts were concentrated on the establishment of new areas.<sup>6</sup>

The major cities in Nigeria: Lagos and Ibadan in the West, Kano, Kaduna and Zaria in the North, Enugu, Port Harcourt and Calabar in the East, provide excellent examples of such development strategies; the results are evident today in these cities which retain dual personalities. Although their pre-colonial foundation constitutes a significant proportion of these cities, they have been outstripped by the post-independence development in terms of area. The pre-colonial development still commands attention because of its almost unbelievable density of buildings, their spectacular deterioration and the virtual absence of adequate sanitation. Their inhabitants (native landowners and their descendants) live their lives apart from modern immigrants who now inhabit the gradually evolving suburban rings around the old sectors.

Urban studies done worldwide, particularly in the Western hemisphere, seem to reveal that the historical experiences of the West tended to demonstrate a correlation between economic

growth and urbanization.<sup>7</sup> Specialization of activities, functional division of labor, and economies of agglomeration necessary for efficient production are engendered in the city. Perhaps more important is the belief that cities are the main agents of change and hence instruments of modernization.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, cities are expected to act as centers for the refinement and preservation of highly held social values, to minimize the frictions inherent in the process of transition by mediating and narrowing conflicts between the old and the new, and to prevent the dualism or polarization between the traditional and the modern. They are expected also to act as places for the promotion of ethnic and political integration by maximizing the opportunities for interaction among the diverse populations and for their contact with the outside world.

While the convenience planning approach followed by the colonial rulers and perpetuated by post-independence political leaders may have been the most logical from their perspective, it is undoubtedly unfit for today's realities. First, instead of achieving the ideal in promoting generational homogeneity or at least social and inter-ethnic harmony, they have become centers for all forms of ethnic rivalry and nationalism.

Secondly, the transfer of values and ideas affecting the rate and direction of socio-economic change is by no means a one-way process limited to the flow of ideas from the modern to the traditional sectors. For transition to occur in a balanced and orderly manner, avoiding the creation and exacerbation of conflicts, it must accommodate and be subjected to the influence of highly valued traditional social norms. Increasing social interaction in the economic and administrative areas would most likely provide the necessary controlling mechanisms and guard against any excessive deviations or tendencies alien to the indigenous value system. In terms of locational and physical planning, this implies concepts which imaginatively integrate the traditional and the modern in a unified spatial framework without undermining the integrity or disturbing the balance of the traditional culture.<sup>9</sup>

## **URBAN ETHNICITY**

Identifying with one's ethnic group powerfully influences the perspectives and practices of the residents of Nigerian cities. "We Ibos and those Yorubas," "We Hausas and those Binis": such conceptualizations take place in many social, political, and economic situations. They help to maintain and structure the boundaries of culture and interaction. Despite the changes that have taken place since colonization, the boundaries between ethnic groups have been able to retain, or resume, great significance. Indeed, the perceived distinctions among ethnic groups are often as sharp as the distinction most Americans make between blacks and whites. Thus ethnicity may be considered Nigeria's equivalent of the "American dilemma."<sup>10</sup> It affects where one lives, with whom one associates, for whom one votes, at what occupation one works, and so forth. For these reasons a typical Nigerian city exists as a cluster of partly overlapping ethnic enclaves, each with a somewhat distinct set of perspectives and practices. Lagos, Kano and Port Harcourt show three categories of ethnic membership, while other cities, depending on their level of urbanization, demonstrate this to a lesser degree.

One category differentiates broad racial groups Europeans, Americans, Asians and all other foreigners from Africa. A second differentiates the "indigenes" of the area in which the city is located from the immigrant or "stranger elements" coming from all other parts of the nation. A third category distinguishes various ethnic, clan and/or locality groupings. Although the enclaves may be geographic, more importantly they are behavioral.

Ethnic ties and identities are reinforced because to some extent most city dwellers are "encapsulated" within their own ethnic network, which serves as a partial barrier between them and the wider social system. The sharp cultural differences among many groups further hamper the development of an inter-ethnic sense of community. "Like the choice between competing political institutions," that between the groups proves to be "a choice between incompatible modes of community life."<sup>11</sup>

It is also observed that ethnic identity and ethnic conflicts are often greater in the cities than in the rural areas. Rouch (1956) sees this as a product of the interaction among peoples of different cultures.<sup>12</sup> Rather than weakening ethnic pride and cohesion, the city or urban life tends to increase them. The greater the fear in one group of being dominated the greater the emphasis on their own culture. An ethnic group adjusts to the new realities by reorganizing its own traditional customs or by developing new customs under traditional symbols, often using traditional norms and ideologies to enhance its distinctiveness within the contemporary situation. Immigrants living in cities other than their own "native towns or villages" at times manipulate their own cultural tradition(s)--fostering retribalization--in order to develop informal political associations which can serve as organizational weapons in contemporary political struggles.

In analyzing the Nigerian urban system, a basic decision has to be made whether to concentrate on the cultural or the structural aspect of heterogeneity. While these two approaches are not mutually exclusive and their relevances to each other should be brought out, not only will different data come to light as we concentrate upon one or the other approach, but also our interpretation will be rather different. For instance, faced with an incomprehensible and multifaceted alternative, a group theoretically has the option of responding to the other in terms of identity or difference. If the group assumed that the other is essentially identical to it, there is a tendency to ignore the significant divergences and to judge the other according to the groups' own cultural values. If, on the other hand, the group assumes that the other is irremediably different, then it would have little incentive to adopt the viewpoint of that alternative: it would again tend to turn to the security of its own cultural perspective.

Genuine and thorough comprehension of otherness is possible only if the one somehow can negate ethnocentrism or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of one's culture. This entails in practice the virtually impossible task of negating one's very being, precisely because one's culture is what formed that being.

Smith (1969) lends credence to the above when he warns that social and cultural dimensions of heterogeneity and pluralism neither necessarily nor always correspond. This is so for two reasons. Besides ideational and procedural correlates of social relations, culture includes such systems as language, aesthetic styles, philosophies, and expressive forms which may be transferred across social boundaries easily and with little social effect. Conversely, systems of social relations may perdure despite substantial shifts in their cultural content or explicit orientations. Thus, despite their institutional basis and tendencies to congruence, "Culture and society may vary independently; indeed their divergent alignments have special importance in contexts of pluralism"<sup>13</sup>

Although culture and structure are related through institutions, basically certain distinctive processes of interaction regulate social relationships in heterogeneous societies. How these processes work and the nature of interaction between various groups are determined primarily by urban conditions rather than cultural differences. Thus, the analysis of heterogeneity under urban conditions is best treated in structural terms because this reveals how racial, ethnic, cultural, language, occupational and class differences are converted into particular types of personal and

group relations; how economic and political irregularities emerge; around what urban conditions conflict arises (and whether the element of heterogeneity is significant and if so why); how political relations are structured and what impedes or encourages the development of mechanisms of incorporation of various ethnic groups into the urban culture.

It is, therefore, important to note the structural elements responsible for heterogeneity in Nigerian cities. It is equally important to analyze the dimensions of pluralism in these centers-- that is, the number of mechanisms of incorporation or exclusion of diverse groups into the system. A close look at the above reveals that the two conditions can prevail: the polarization of pluralism, and depluralization. According to Kuper (1969, p. 479), polarization in African cities is marked by the heightened "salience of sectional identity" and the increasing perception of social relationships in terms of racial, ethnic or other sectional conflict. Political reactions get polarized by "antithetical interpretations of the same event . . . or by antithetical emotional responses."<sup>14</sup> Kuper further argues that, at the objective level of polarization in social interaction, there is contraction of the middle ground of optional relationships. Lines and issues of cleavage are superimposed, and this is expressed in the rapid escalation of the most varied, and sometimes most minor, local and specific disturbances to the level of general nationwide intersectional conflict. The Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970) and the religious riots from the wave of Moslem fundamentalism in the Northern States are clear cases that corroborate this view.

Contrasting this to depluralization, Kuper suggests that depluralization indicates subjectively the diminishing salience of racial, ethnic or other sectional ties. There may be explicit ideologies which assume the common interests of members of different sections, assert the efficacy of compromise and inter-sectional cooperation, and affirm the social ideal of assimilation (as in ideologies of the common society, or of the melting pot). Other bases of association, horizontal linkages arising from common interests and functional differentiations, cut across initial cleavages. Segregated, parallel, and intercalary structures dissolve, and there is increasing integration in institutional structures. Qualitative differences in intrasectional and intersectional relationships diminish. With the increasing significance of many diverse bonds between people of different sections, lines of cleavage and issues of conflict become dissociated, thus reducing the probability of escalation from minor disturbances. There is a commitment to compromise, and the cumulative experience of compromise and conflict resolution may be expected to encourage further depluralization.<sup>15</sup>

Whether the urban centers in Nigeria are in a process of increased ethnic polarization due to the heterogeneity of their population, or whether they are being depluralized (a process which definitely involves considerable violence) are issues which need a great deal of attention by leaders and policy-makers. Perhaps the first methodological approach, as Gutkind (1974) suggests, is to establish the range of heterogeneity both from the point of view of ethnic diversity and in terms of diversity in occupation, education, wealth and class. Secondly, we need to retrace our steps to find out how, in general terms, the population did become ethnically diverse, that is: when and what groups migrated to the town; how and what groups became established, where, under what conditions, and in what occupations.

Third, what is the relationship of particular colonial policies to the varied manifestations of urban heterogeneity (that is, why did the colonial administration treat some tribes as "more honest" or "harder workers" than others)? Fourthly, during the period of colonialism what is the relationship of economic changes to heterogeneity. That is, what groups responded to what opportunities, and with what results?<sup>16</sup> These and numerous other questions must be asked in an

effort to piece together the circumstances which brought about the heterogeneity of the Nigerian urban population.

The data obtained will lead to the recognition that the diversity of the urban population reflects a similar diversity in the population as a whole. This might be the baseline for the analysis of numerous problems linking urban structures and behavior to ethnic pluralism and other aspects of diversity.

## **SOCIAL CHANGE AND MODERNIZATION: URBAN LIFE IN NIGERIAN CITIES**

With the background provided in the preceding section, we can begin to understand the role of Nigerian cities and urban centers in social change and modernization. While specific urban and city conditions will vary according to particular historical legacies that led to the establishment of the centers, Nigerian towns are now clearly the "motors of development," the main agents of social change. Town life is identified with the idea of progress--a rejection of the "totalitarian rural and village tradition." To many migrants who flock to the cities from the rural centers--whether armed at times with high school or even college certification, or unskilled labor in search of almost non-existing jobs--city life is seen as an "escape from the traditional rural life" which simultaneously absorbs, clutches and emasculates. To this set of migrants, the urban superstructure has real value as a refuge.

What is less often discussed is that the cities have become bases for administrative and economic activities rather than centers of civilizing influence. Nowhere else is the economic, political, and social distance between the rich few and the masses of the poor greater than in the cities.

The decay of traditional society and its values, the pace and haphazard character of city growth and the conditions there of labor, exploitation, inadequate housing and the lack of other infra-structural facilities have created, to use Karl Marx's terminology, "a sizeable Lumpen-proletariat."<sup>17</sup> While the impact of the "high life" (a popular aphorism in Nigerian cities) in the urban centers sets an elevated model before the population at large, the expectations inherent in this model are far from being realized for any significant percentage of the population.

Tensions of an economic and political nature between rural and urban areas multiply as class lines become more sharply defined and as the rural populace begins to sharpen its political consciousness, which in turn leads to more concern for political and economic participation. The same situation is true of the urbanite who, being closer to the model of "the good life" ("high life"), often seeks a larger slice of the small "national cake." It is then understandable why the Nigerian urban centers have become the arena for major ethnic and class confrontations. The ever-increasing rate of violent street crimes, mounting by a dialectic of violence and counter-violence, prostitution and drug abuse--earlier thought typical of Western cities--demonstrate the degree of the miscarriage of the traditional values of the people.

While the classical Marxist theory would suggest that the urban proletariat, in cooperation with farmers and peasants, will be the spearhead of agitation against exploitation and major inequity, it seems that the cities are already in the grip of an exploitative indigenous class whose make-up and ideology put constraints on political activities. As long as a disproportionate percentage of the city dwellers live in utter misery and abject poverty (which might be more debilitating than rural poverty), a true restructuring of the Nigerian society, at least a change from misery to decent life for the city poor whose numbers swell each year, will be difficult to realize.

However, certain aspects of the city environment do hold out for the city poor some hope if not material, at least psychological. For this group city life promises a hope for modernization. It is this hope that enables the urban poor to endure their situation. In this regard, the will to achieve change through new ideas and actions, to select from a wide range of alternatives, to participate in new structures and new institutions, which have no antecedents for many of the city migrants are a totally new phenomenon. This is the sense in which the city represents modernization to the people. Thus, the link between social change, modernization and urban life is that the cities not only generate a new range of institutions, activities, structures and values particular to the local situation, but reflect the national transformation as a whole, an index of progress and prosperity.

But as G. McLean has pointed out, "The transition from traditional patterns to urban settings raises a series of important issues." Perhaps the most important to our discussion is: "How is it possible in the modern urban environment to sustain distinctive traditional values against the depersonalizing force of mass society?"<sup>18</sup> No answer to this question can be complete without examining the extent to which urbanization affects the family. Being in most traditional societies the core institution, the family is a sensitive barometer of whatever changes occur in a society.

## **URBAN FAMILY**

As elsewhere, the family is the most basic unit of social organization in Africa. However, unlike its counterpart in Western society, family membership is not restricted to husband, wife and children, for it is characteristic for this basic unit to be part of a larger extended family. It is within the family that the effects of urbanization and urban migration are most evident. Family members are separated and scattered throughout a country (and sometimes beyond its borders): as a result parental authority and established marital conventions are weakened.

The normative structure of marriage and family life spills over into many other organizational and institutional features. Thus marriage involves more directly the families of the bride and the groom than in the Western culture. While the two individuals are central to the marriage, a larger number of kin on either side become involved in the rearrangement of the social relationships which follow. The bonds which held members of the extended family together were their strictly allocated duties, reciprocity of mutual aid and support, responsibilities and rewards which gave each individual the satisfaction he sought and the knowledge that, should dependency overtake him, he would not be cast out.

This sense of "communalism" finds a further articulation in the view espoused by Holmes Rolston (1986) that a person's social capacity can be measured roughly by the span of the "we."<sup>19</sup> The "self" is stretched out to the "other"; social concern does not stop with the individual's skin but overflows to the kin. Social maturity comes with a widening of that sense of kinship; by a broad recognition of this togetherness the self is immersed in a communal life. However, this sense of "communalism" in Africa has been disrupted and the city, in Peachey's aphorism, has become "the atelier of the autonomous person."<sup>20</sup>

If indeed the family is the basic unit of social organization, then changes taking place in economic, political and religious institutions clearly will be reflected in family life. While this raises rather complex theoretical issues, the following should guide our discussion: changes in family and marriage must be studied against the background of who migrates and why, who stays in the city and who circulates back and forth between rural and urban areas, the ratio of



male-female migrants, the attitude of the newly educated elites (particularly women) towards some of the traditional roles in family, marriage, etc.

Despite the variations which exist, the impact of certain changes has produced some common characteristics. Perhaps one of the most fundamental changes is that the African family, as its Western counterpart, has lost some of its traditional functions while taking on new ones. The African urban family, as Gutkind (1974) puts it, has dropped some ritual and ceremonial functions and taken on new economic ones.<sup>19</sup>

Two aspects of familial change need to be elaborated. The ethnic and familial heterogeneity of most Nigerian cities, for instance, has meant that heterosexual relationships are determined more by the two immediate participants than was formerly the case. This individualization of the marital decisions stems not only from the geographic dispersion of families, but from fundamental changes in the operative values of urban residents.

For example, the role of women has been transformed by advanced education and entry into modern competitive professions. Studies on the relationship between polygamy and social change have shown that education, religion, ethnicity, economic position and urbanization affect the level of polygamy. Educated women can use their scarcity value to require of their husbands formal monogamy.<sup>20</sup>

A second aspect of familial change is that the early socialization process of some of the city children has been altered. As in the United States, the child of a broken home may in large part be socialized by peers, creating inter-generational cleavages and the possibility of being introduced to the delinquent world as a functional alternative to family satisfactions. In most of the major cities in Nigeria Lagos, Enugu, Ibadan, Kano it has been observed that because of the cultural lag which exists between the needs of some of these potential delinquents and the lack of adequate institutions to channel their needs, this discrepancy places these youths in a marginal position. This impels them to satisfy their needs through deviant conduct with their peers in the process of adapting to urban community. Just as the extended family traditionally had joint responsibility for bringing up children, the breakdown or contraction of this responsibility is one of the major primary causes of urban juvenile delinquency.

Third, in a context in which most of the traditional social supports (the extended family, kinsmen, age-group, and organizations of the migrants according to their rural origin) are no longer relevant or operative, the inability of urban centers to provide substitutes creates problems of mental stress, personal disorientation, and social disorganization for many people. This is regarded as partly responsible for the high incidence of all forms of psycho-pathological phenomena in urban centers. Concern with these problems is only gradually receiving attention, although some of the initial studies emphasize caution in ascribing these manifestations to the urban environment per se, rather than seeing them as reactions to the stress conditions involved in any process of socio-economic transformation.<sup>21</sup>

Even when the tradition of joint responsibility is maintained, its impact may be different in the cities than in the traditional milieu: a shift of responsibility from one relative to another within the village context usually does not mean a significant geographic change or interaction with new faces in new places, but in the cities the shift may be to a new neighborhood of strangers with different values.

## **CONCLUSION**

In general terms, many of the Nigerian elite subscribe to the view that the city is the mirror through which foreigners make their initial appraisal of the nation. To this group the city is an index of the progress and prosperity of any nation. Another important element in the fascination exerted by city culture is the material reward which accompanies the adoption of a Western life-style. One cannot deny that this way of life has enabled Western society, not only to raise its standard of living and general level of material welfare far above that of the rest of the world, but also to bring many other parts of the world under its influence. The enormous material power of the West, based on its advanced technology, is a fact. It stands to reason that the Nigerian urban elite who reflect on this often come to the conclusion that the only way the nation can share in this power is by adopting a Western life style.

Others, more intellectually honest or more introspective, will admit that modernization (in the Western sense) is the same as Westernization. To this second group, belong the traditionally oriented elite (traditional rural elite). It is therefore clear why two value systems and two elite groups coexist in Nigeria. In juxtaposition, they create a potential for inter-elite conflict and intra-personal stress. Elite conflict arises because those who value the traditional rural ways come into conflict with the group equivalently linked with modern urban values.

Intra-personal stress occurs because many migrants leave a situation dominated by traditional rural elites within a status system infused with traditional values, and go into an urban community influenced by new elites with modern urban and Western values. The consequent necessary adjustments are potentially stressful, not only because of changes in the bases of stratification, but also because status by achievement is less predictable and therefore less stabilizing than status by ascription.

## NOTES

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3. R. J. Johnston, "Urban Origins, Urbanization and Urban Patterns," *Geography*, 62 (1977).
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## **CHAPTER V**

# **URBANIZATION AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL VALUES**

### **CHUKWUDUM BARNABAS OKOLO**

One can easily characterize the struggle of the African\* since independence as a total commitment to urbanization and modernity. Rightly or wrongly, the African has considered his pre-independence or colonial existence as a period of serfdom, political and economic oppression, rural poverty and underdevelopment of natural resources. Consequently, on gaining independence, his overriding task appears to be nation-building and a serious effort to raise his standard of living. As a result growth, especially as development of cities, has been rampant in Africa. Hence, in his important study of the growth of urban populations in Africa, Professor Jacques Maquet remarks that in 1961 it was estimated that about ten percent of the population of Africa lived in cities. Even more significant are the rate and speed of its growth.<sup>1</sup>

What we are concerned about here, however, is not the phenomenon of city growth as such, but the possible deleterious effects of urban life on the traditional values of the African. For experience clearly teaches that urbanization, and industrialization for that matter, are mixed blessings for man as a political animal whose aim in forming a political community is the "good life," as Aristotle phrases it. What increasingly has become obvious to the African as he pursues national growth, development and urbanization as important values for a reasonably contented existence is the crisis of his traditional values and, of course, the creation of new ones. He is fast learning from experience that the development of his rural setting into urban and semi-urban centers entails certain hazards to his long cherished traditional values. This change of habitat, Professor Maquet puts it simply, "alters everyday life." Other great scholars of the many-sided problems of Africa also have made mention of the influences of the "European ways of life" and have noted strikingly that these influences "have had a devastating impact on the traditional way of life."<sup>2</sup> The African himself also is increasingly aware that his daily life in its traditional village setting, characterized by a stable and well articulated pattern of events, gradually is "falling apart," in Professor Chinua Achebe's well known phrase.<sup>3</sup>

In what characteristic ways has urbanization affected the traditional values of the modern African? This is the question to which we shall attempt to respond by research in contemporary African values as critically influenced by the process of urbanization and the many dynamic changes taking place on the African continent. The first task, however, is a brief critical examination of the major traditional values of the African.

### **THE AFRICAN AND HIS DOMINANT VALUES**

In this paper, we take "value" in its simple connotation of "a thing of worth." A thing has value if it has some worth, and in this sense man considers life worth living because he finds certain things intrinsically valuable.

In his traditional life the African holds certain things to be of great value. It is these values which give him a distinct cultural personality and enable him to make some contribution to world knowledge, history and civilization. It is not our task in this essay to articulate all the cultural values of the African, but only the dominant ones as we attempt to assess their status against the current tide of urbanization sweeping across the continent.

One of the foremost traditional values of the African is a large family. Children are of supreme value to the African. His primary purpose for marriage is children and to have as many of them as possible. This is the reason why polygamy or the union of one man with several women still holds great attraction for him, and also why the birth rate in Africa is among the highest in the world. The fact is that the African still counts his blessings by the number of children he has, whether they are educated or not, rich or poor, healthy or sick, well-fed or hungry.

Another important traditional value of the modern African is love for, and practice of, the extended family system. As a matter of fact the extended family characterizes the life of the African and somehow shapes his personality and outlook on life. Unlike Western man, for instance, the African sees his nuclear family as broadening out into a larger family unit. Professor Maquet describes this broader family life thus: The African child has only to take a few steps in his village to visit several who can substitute for his father, mother, brothers and sisters, and they will treat him accordingly. Thus the child has many homes in his village, and he is simultaneously giver and receiver of widespread attention.<sup>4</sup>

This extended family system is widely practiced in Africa. Indeed it is one "in which everybody is linked with all the other members, living or dead, through a complex network of spiritual relationship into a kind of mystical body."<sup>5</sup> Consequently, it is not just "being" that the African values; "being-with-others" or as Maquet says, "being rooted in kinship" is an equally important existential characteristic of the African. He is never isolated since several persons are assimilated into one parental role: his father's brothers are assimilated by extension into the role of father, his mother's sisters into the role of mother, his patri-lateral uncle's daughters into the role of sister.<sup>6</sup>

Against the background of this great African value, a person is an individual to the extent that he is a member of a family, a clan or community. Another great value in traditional Africa is respect for old people ("senior citizens"), particularly one's parents, grandparents and relatives. Together with this value, one must also consider "ancestor worship" as an important related value in African culture. In fact, the basis for the honor and respect accorded to old people in the traditional African culture is their closeness to the ancestors, for in his ontological conceptual scheme the African places his old relatives closest to his ancestors or dead relatives in his great hierarchy of beings.<sup>7</sup>

It must be noted that in the African universe the living and the dead interact with one another. Life goes on beyond the grave for the African and is a continuous action and interaction with dead relatives. These unseen ancestors called "the living dead" become part of one's living family and often are invited to partake (spiritually) in the family meals. As Parrinder observes: The ancestors are not just ghosts, nor are they simply dead heroes, but are felt to be still present watching over the household, directly concerned in all the affairs of the family and property, giving abundant harvests and fertility.<sup>8</sup>

According to the traditional belief, the African ancestors--the morally good ones, of course--are held in high esteem. People have great recourse to them as powerful intermediaries between God and the living members of their particular families. These good ancestors are expected also to reincarnate into their families in due time.

The respect and honor bestowed on the ancestors filter through the old people--one's parents, grandparents and other relatives--as living embodiments of wisdom and of the good moral life who are expected sooner or later to join other good ancestors in the land of the "living dead." Old age therefore is an important value to the African.

Another value to be examined in the light of the urbanizing influences in Africa today is religion. To the traditional African, religion is an indispensable value. "To be" for him is to be religious. Professor John Mbiti of Kenya and Tanzania speaks of him as "notoriously religious"; other scholars regard him as "incurably religious." As religion truly permeates his total life, there is for him no "secular" existence or naturalistic vision of world order. In this important way also, the African exhibits a cultural personality distinct from that of Western man, for instance, who easily makes a radical distinction between the secular and the religious, the natural and the supernatural, this world and the next. How does this religious value of the African stand the test of urbanization and technological advances evident in Africa today? This is a central question and, like other values considered above, will be the object of later reflection.

Also one cannot forget the fact that the African loves nature and feels one with it. We are clearly reminded by Professor Maquet of the basic fact that, unlike Westerners who, having succeeded in defying nature, proceed toward its complete subjugation, Africans seek harmony with nature and achieve this by sharing its life and strength.<sup>9</sup> The African values the whole of creation as sacred. To him nature is neither uncanny nor for subjugation and exploitation, but something sacred, participating in the essential sacred nature of God Himself and of all reality. Open spaces, fields, forests, trees, oceans and lakes are sacred to him and consequently important as places reminiscent of the ashes of his fathers and the sanctuaries of his gods.

Many other values distinguish the life of the African and in characteristic ways determine also his modes of being-in-the-world, such as music, dance, a sense of family togetherness, hospitality and love for community. We have made mention of the dominant ones, but our main objective is to discover the status of these values in the wake of such modern values as urbanization, industrialization, science and technology. Definitely, as the African passes from folk to urban society, from traditional to modern urban and semi-urban life with its complicated money economy and international trade, his traditional values are bound to be affected. In some cases, old values disappear only to reappear as higher ones in a transvaluation of values; in other cases some traditional values suffer disruption, at times to the point of extinction; in yet other cases the African suffers a reversal of his traditional values; lastly, he creates altogether new values with consequent tensions. In short, these are the main ways that urbanization and industrialization, as modern African values, seriously affect traditional values. We will discuss briefly each category.

Of course, in speaking about the cumulative effects of urbanization on the traditional life of the African, one must not lose sight of such other factors as education, technology, arts, science and Christianity, which are now part and parcel of modern civilization and which influence the values and destinies of peoples and nations alike in their continuous thrust toward progress and a better life.

## **THE TRANSVALUATION OF VALUES**

In speaking about the traditional African and his values, we bear in mind that since independence, that is to say, since after the Second World war, urbanization as a process of development is itself a value to him. His thinking has remained practical and existential in the sense that his priority value has been the concrete modes of self-realization. The growth and development of his cities have remained an integral part of his post-independence struggles for self-reliance and self-development.

Together with urbanization, since independence the African has steadfastly pursued industrialization and "transfer" in his effort to control and dominate the environment. In this ongoing struggle, the African is gradually realizing the price rather than the peril of progress, particularly with reference to his traditional values. In some cases, he experiences not a total loss, but a transvaluation. One such case is his traditional religion, with its own code of ethics. Scholars of African traditional religion have come up with different names in their effort to describe the nature of the religion of the African's forefathers: "animism," "paganism" "polytheism" and "diffused monotheism" have surfaced at one time or the other in their scholarly journals.

The point is that in Christianity, the revealed religion of Jesus Christ which the African is increasingly embracing as he comes under the dominating influences of the missionaries, his traditional religion does not cease to be practiced, but somehow reappears at a higher level. Christianity and the ethics of Christ become new and, at the same time, higher values for the African.

The African Christian now no longer believes in the many gods of his traditional religion, but in one God, as his ultimate Lord and Master. Rudolf Otto's sense of the numinous *fascinans et tremendum*, as he characterizes religious feeling for African Christians as for Christians the world over has reference to the One true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, belief in this God is no longer belief in the plural gods of his "pagan" world or the natural morality which characterized their worship.

In connection with the transvaluation of religious values, one must not forget the African's great value of ancestor worship. "Everywhere the African is first defined by reference to his ancestor," Maquet reminds us.<sup>10</sup> The ancestors or "living dead" are the great intermediaries between the African Great God (with different names in different African nations), the other gods and human beings. On becoming a Christian, the African easily sees Christ, the only mediator between God and man, as "a proto-ancestor." This interpretation is advanced by an African theologian in his effort to Africanize the church or incarnate Christianity in the local culture. It has its problems, of course, as a Zimbabwean Jesuit theologian notes,<sup>11</sup> but it is a potent mode of recovering and at the same time transforming an important African traditional value into a higher one.

Also, since urbanization as a modern African value is really inseparable from such other concomitant values as industrialization and Christianity, the African's great love for large families, extended familyhood and community what the late Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal calls "the sense of communion" is practiced on a much higher level in Christianity, since the African Christian sees the church as one large institution housing all members of the one family of God. All men become brothers under one God, as all strive for the same home and destiny, namely, heaven. Consequently, the African Christian sees not only the members of his natural family, but all human beings as brothers and sisters, for Christianity professes the same common Father and hence a common brotherhood for all men. This, too, is a transvaluation of traditional values.

In this consideration of the African's transvaluation of traditional values, note should be made also that with urbanization, the African exhibits his existential trait of being a lover of community or essentially a man-in-community by his development of new voluntary associations which increasingly have become distinctive features of his urban milieu. These associations willingly formed by the urban African, increase his chances for more economic security and social well-being; in general, they provide more opportunities for self-survival.

These ends specify and define the nature and activities of the associations<sup>12</sup> themselves. Indeed, Peter S.C. Gutkind rightly notes, the activities of the voluntary associations are manifold, ranging from burial services to recreation clubs and friendly societies, improvement, saving and contribution clubs, and occupational and religious associations. Consequently what the African loses in his tribal village life or experiences as highly precious is doubly assured in his urban life through these voluntary associations.

## **THE AFRICAN AND THE REVERSAL OF VALUES**

The growth of cities in this era of industrialization and push-button technology is not exactly a total blessing for the African or for anyone else. It brings about its own reversal of traditional values, perhaps most obviously that of his (novel) radical attitude toward nature or his environment. Mention has been made of the fact that to the premodern African nature was sacred, not an object to conquer and exploit; he felt in harmony with all reality.

But urbanization itself is a value, and such other concomitant values as education, technology and industrialization have brought about a completely different mental posture towards the African environment. Land and open spaces are no longer as sacred as in the days of old. They are increasingly scarce since more and more they are converted into urban and semi-urban industrial centers, as well as into areas for mechanized farming. Consequently, land or nature as a whole has acquired much economic value. The sacred groves of the ancestors trees, forests, and places consecrated to the gods are fast decreasing in number as the African, like the rest of the world, joins the industrial and technological age and adopts the scientific spirit which underlies its progress. Like the Westerner, the African has set out to conquer, subdue and exploit nature, no longer to venerate it; this is a far cry from his premodern mentality and outlook.

In addition, one must also mention the serious impact of urbanization upon African families as another instance of a reversal of values. One great attraction of urban life, the reason for city population growth, is the possibility of making a "decent living" which, in short, means more income for the family. In practice this means establishing new homes away from home mostly by young men, women and fathers of families.

The obvious consequence is a gradual, but inevitable breakup of families. For the African, that is a tragic reversal of values since African families are close-knit. Unity and togetherness in the family are the basic values. In these days the quest for more money and better living conditions has pushed him out into the city; gradually it is alienating him from his family; worse still, it is tearing the family apart. Gutkind rightly points out that among all the problems which are alleged to have their etiology in urbanization and urbanism, frequent reference is made to the breakdown of African kinship and family life in towns.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps in no place is this observation more true than in South Africa, especially among mine workers.

Although urbanization and industrialization have their advantages, yet they exact their full toll from the African as from anyone else. He, too, experiences all sorts of new problems and difficulties in his new way of life in the city, such as slums, poverty, loneliness or estrangement, poor sanitation, light failure, joblessness, organized and unorganized crime waves, traffic jams. The lover of space and nature in his rural setting has now to contend with overcrowded cities and rundown apartment buildings. He has begun seriously to complain about city dirt and pollution of the environment in an unexpected reversal of values.

But these unhappy consequences are light when compared to their effect on the family size of the urban African. He now speaks in terms of family planning and cutting down family size.



The younger urban generation is no longer prepared to make the same mistakes as their parents and grandparents, particularly in not limiting the number of births. The overall effects of urbanization, the increasing lack of habitable space and the high cost of education and living standards have brought about this reversal in the African traditional value, which the Zairean theologian, Otene, called simply "the African value of fecundity."<sup>14</sup>

In a way, monogamy for the African, particularly the Christian, is a reversal of value since polygyny or plurality of wives is the ideal and primal value for the traditional African. The new cultural determinants we mentioned above, such as urbanization, the high cost of living, education and Christianity, have meant a reversal of this value.

What of the depersonalizing force of mass society upon the African as a result of increasing urbanization and industrialization? The urban African rooted in his kinship, who usually maintains a very close family relationship, becomes suddenly all alone in the city, uprooted so to speak from his kith and kin in his village and forced to cultivate individualism as a new way of life. This is certainly another instance of a reversal of value. Of course, the urban African forms new associations in the city, but this is an altogether new way of life which does not really cure the city loneliness and estrangement which Viktor Frankl calls an "existential vacuum."

In addition, other traditional values suffer in the wake of urbanization, such as "respect for the aged" and high regard for their wisdom. This appears natural for, as the African, particularly the younger generation, faces up to the challenges of modern life dictated by education, modern economy, developments in art, science and technology and the new values they create, increasingly he finds the "senior citizens" and their wisdom irrelevant to his life. Time becomes important to him as increasingly he defines his existence in terms of work or business, rather than leisure. As in the Western world, this means for the African also less time and concern for the older generation and its views, and thereby a reversal of traditional values.

## **THE AFRICAN AND NEW VALUES**

In the process of urban growth and development, the African acquires new values as he forms units as component parts of his new urban settlement. His mental horizon and pattern of life change rapidly. He is no longer enclosed in his rather stable village environment with its close-knit families; he is no longer in the midst of members of his village. In the urban environment, he has to learn to live with, and respect, people of different ethnic backgrounds since urban life is a "melting pot" of people from various ethnic groups with different customs, traditions, mannerisms and languages, etc. This openness to new peoples is healthy for the African since he, too, can build a viable and progressive nation only through the cooperative endeavor of all.

In this context of "love-for-other-people," as opposed to "love-of-one's-own ethnic group" characteristic of village life, mention can be made of the virtue of patriotism as an additional value for the African. He now learns to appreciate and love his country with all its peoples and subcultures. The African learns to fight for common interests, for the common good, even at the risk of his own or ethnic good. In a continent such as Africa characterized by excessive outbursts of ethnic feelings or prejudices (tribalism), often to the point of war and national disorders, patriotism is indeed a new value.

With urbanization and the technological development which underlies its progress, the African learns to appreciate scientific knowledge and education. Scientific education has become a dominant value to the African, rather than the oral education, unwritten customs and traditions

of his forebears. This is one of the outstanding areas where he has profited from colonialism and the consequent Westernization of African values.

Formal education, a result of colonialism, radicalized the traditional values of the African and introduced some completely new ones. Professor Ali A. Mazrui put it thus, "The colonial impact, I have argued, transformed the natural basis of stratification in Africa." Instead of status based on, say, age, there emerged status based on literacy. Instead of classes emerging from the question, "Who owns what?" class formation now responds to the question, "Who knows what?"<sup>15</sup>

Education is indeed a priority value to the African; it is truly power. In Africa, it is a door to other values and carries with it affluence and social influence. Two forms of knowledge have been particularly critical in determining who rules Africa: literacy or academic knowledge among African intellectuals and military knowledge within the African armed forces. The knowledge of the intelligentsia has produced something approaching a meritocracy; the skills of the soldiers have produced what might be called a militocracy.<sup>16</sup>

Also as a result of urbanization and its economic imperatives on modern life, money has assumed a very important value in Africa, as in other continents. Like knowledge it too is power. "The pursuit of personal profit has escalated in African economic systems," Professor Mazrui noted. With the heavy influence of Western capitalism, the African clearly is developing and appreciating the values of capitalism as well, such as class distinction based on the haves and have-nots, competitive spirit, private enterprise and the profitmotive. These values are highly operative particularly in the economic life of the modern urban African. Indeed, money economy and what Mazrui paraphrases as "the culture of the clock"<sup>17</sup> or time consciousness have made material progress in the modern scientific and technological sense additional values for the African.

One cannot really speak about urbanization and its philosophy of material progress without mentioning labor or work, which in its modern scientific sense is a new value. Of course, for the premodern African, as Guy Hunter observed, work was necessary for subsistence, to fulfill tribal and family obligations, to amass bride price or perhaps gain status: it had no personal moral connotation.<sup>18</sup> But to the educated urban African work has increased its value and is seen as a condition for progress as well as for money. It does mean long hours at the office or on the farms, the emergence of working class mothers, of young working girls and boys particularly in cities, and less leisure. Hunter summarizes it all, "Probably the greatest shock to the newly educated African in paid employment is that he has to work all day and everyday."<sup>19</sup> Certainly, this new attitude to work is far removed from the older African way of life.

## **URBANIZATION AND AFRICAN SELF-REALIZATION**

From the above reflection, there is no doubt that urbanization as a sociological process alters the everyday life and culture of a people. In Africa as in practically all cultures, it has given rise partly to a transvaluation and partly to a reversal of traditional values. Certainly it has created additional values. Of course, urbanization need not go with industrialization and technological development, though these are prime factors and causes for city growth and development. Education too is one of the causes of the rural drift to cities, or urbanization, in Africa as elsewhere.

The point which must be stressed here is that it is through all these factors, namely, healthy development of cities, of science, arts, technology and education that the African hopes and

strives to achieve self-realization. This is the ideal he has pursued steadfastly since independence. His post-independence thrust has been for self-reliance and the mastery of his continent, for his experience of colonial subjugation and its concomitant humiliation was highly unpleasant. "We have for too long been the victims of foreign domination," Kwame Nkrumah, the late leader of Ghana once said. "For too long we have had no say in the management of our own affairs or in deciding our own destinies."<sup>20</sup>

The same realization of impotence and frustration on the part of the African after his colonial experience is concisely stated by Obi B. Egbuna:

We do not control our land, our lives or our direction. We do not command the means of distribution or production. We do not even earn a reasonable living wage, but we were born here and our forefathers claim ownership of the land.<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, what the present-day African wants is power, the scientific knowledge and technical skill to establish himself as the master and architect of his world and destiny. This is tantamount to a reestablishment of self in a self-determined, self-directed and self-controlled environment.

In this great task, he needs, among other things to industrialize, to buildup and develop his cities, and not least of all to enter into the race for technological, scientific and material progress as must the rest of the world in the quest for that "good life" which is the end of all political societies. In this ambition the African experiences definite tensions. As seen above, on the one hand, he wishes to retain many values of his traditional culture which, on the other, urbanization and the imperatives of modern life seriously threaten.

For Africans, as for the rest of the world, rural drift to cities has a purpose, namely, to seek employment, education, better living conditions or even negatively to escape from certain traditions which are found to be unpleasant. In other words, the escape of people to towns is to search for alternative forms of subsistence, generally for making life worth living. In the resulting urbanization certainly they experience additional problems.

Another outstanding value of the modern African is his desire to build up African culture. "We are doing everything to revive our culture," Nkrumah assured the National Assembly in Accra in 1965. Indeed since independence, culture-building has remained for the African a top practical pursuit. The various festivals of arts and culture held in many African countries bear this out, as well as the pursuit of indigenous technology and political systems as the "Ujamaa Experiment" in Tanzania initiated by Julius K. Nyerere,<sup>23</sup> and the promotion of indigenous music, painting, religion, fashion and education for self-reliance in many African nations. In short, the African wishes to retain his self-identity through retaining his traditional values, yet, he experiences that his drift to the cities and the values of its scientific and technological culture, which are vital concomitants of modern civilization, seriously endanger his traditional values, and consequently, his cultural identity. He wants to retain the past, from which he yet alienates himself. Is this possible, or as Professor Maquet put it, "Is such an undertaking viable?"<sup>23</sup>

Urbanization therefore poses serious problems for the African. Although industrial techniques and scientific development do not yet completely dominate his life, steadily they are influencing practically all aspects of his life today. Will the scientific and technological values of modern civilization, in time, eliminate the traditional ones and alienate the African from himself? This is the question; and it is a crucial problem for the African himself.

Professor W.E. Abraham gives his own view. "The future of Africa," he says, "rests on the present and the present is an outcome of the past. By the present, one wishes to indicate the resultant of the operation of the forces of traditional Africa and the forces which the contact with Europe has unleashed." Scientific knowledge and techniques--modern man's common inheritance--may well be regarded as one of the "forces unleashed" on the African by contact with America and Europe. Consequently, an important test of his maturity, of his quest for self-realization and self-identity, is his ability to domesticate or indigenize these adventitious values, that is to say, those values brought about by his contact with the white man's scientific and technological culture. "The progress of Africa will depend on Africa's ability both to appreciate problems and to solve them," Abraham reiterates.<sup>25</sup>

Africa's success in her struggle for self-realization and self-identity will depend then on her ability to subject foreign values to her traditional ones, to *master* and at the same time *domesticate* industrial techniques and scientific knowledge to serve her own ends, and not the other way round.

## NOTES

\*The African here referred to is the Black African unless the context indicates otherwise.

1. Jacques Maquet, *Africanity: The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*, tr. Joan R. Rayfield (New York: Oxford University Press 1972), pp. 124-125.

2. Guy Bonveniste and W.E. Moran, Jr., "African Economic Problems" in Peter J.M. McEwan and Robert B. Sutcliffe, *The Study of Africa* (London: The Camelot Press, 1967), p. 265.

3. Professor Chinua Achebe, a Nigerian, is among Africa's topmost novelists. His most known work, *Things Fall Apart* (Lagos: Heinemann: 1964) is about the continuity and discontinuity of change in the traditional life of modern Africa.

4. Jacques Maquet, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

5. Professor E.A. Ruch and Dr. K.C. Anyanwu, *African Philosophy: An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1981), p. 328.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

7. God or the highest spirit tops the list for the African in his ontological hierarchy or hierarchy of beings. This supreme Spirit is followed by the nature deities or spirits, then, the ancestors or the "living dead" (thus ends the invisible universe). Close to the "living dead" are the elders generally revered as wise, holy, and soon to join the ancestors, then ordinary human beings, lower animals and inorganic nature.

8. E.G. Parrinder, *West African Religion* (London: Epsworth Press, 1949), p. 125.

9. Jacques Maquet. *op. cit.*, p. 64.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

11. Ignatius M. Zvarevashe, "The Problem of Ancestors and Inculturation," *AFER* (African Ecclesiastical Review), 29 (No. 4, 1987), 242-251.

12. Peter S.C. Gutkind, "The African Urban Milieu: A Force in Rapid Change" in Peter J.M. McEwan and Robert B. Sutcliffe, eds., *The Study of Africa*, p. 343.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 341.

14. Mattingulu Otene, *Celibacy and the African Value of Fecundity*, tr. Louis C. Planomeon (El Doret, Kenya: GABA Publications, Spearhead, no. 65, 1981).

15. Ali A. Mazrui, *The African Condition* (The Reith Lectures; London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 63.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
18. Guy Hunter, "From the Old Culture to the New" in McEwan and Sutcliffe, p. 322.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Kwame Nkrumah, "I Speak of Freedom," in Gideon Cyrus M. Mutiso and S.W. Rohio, eds., *Readings in African Political Thought* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 61.
21. Obi B. Egbuna, *The ABC of Black Power* (Lagos: Third World First Publications, 1973), "Introduction."
22. Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).
23. Jacques Maquet, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
24. W.E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 161.
25. *Ibid.*

**CHAPTER VI**  
**FORMATION OF CHARACTER IN TRADITIONAL NIGERIAN**  
**MORAL EDUCATION**  
IZU MARCEL ONYEOCHA

"Personally I'm always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught." (*Winston Churchill*)

"Conduct will not be right unless the will to act is right; for this is the source of conduct. Nor, again, can the will be right without a right attitude of mind; for this is the source of the will. Furthermore, such an attitude of mind will not be found even in the best of men unless he has learned the laws of life as a whole and has worked out a proper judgment about everything, and unless he has reduced facts to a standard of truth." (*Seneca*)

In discussing the subject of moral education in traditional Nigeria I would like to apply the word imagination in the active sense of imaginative, creative, inventive, rather than the passive sense of imaginary, unreal, and illusionary. Though it is no formalized textbook codification as do the contemporary urbane Western and other versions, it contains within itself the operators needed in order to achieve the good life as understood and envisioned within society.

Philip Wheelwright posits from modes of imagination in his book, *The Burning Fountain*, namely, confrontational imagination which particularizes and intensifies its object; stylistic imagination which distances and stylizes its object; compositive imagination which fuses heterogeneous elements into some whole; and archetypal imagination which sees the particular object in the light of a larger conception or higher concern.<sup>1</sup>

It is my claim here that there is an element of each type of imagination involved in the operation of the imagination, rather than in the construction of the system. My central argument focuses, however, not on the imagination but on character formation. Later in the discussion I will try to show that no individual or group could claim to have established a system for this; that is why I stress the word operation. In this operation every element finds a place such that there is no separation of concerns. The moral, the political, the social, the religious, even the banal, finds a place within the scheme. The overall ground for justification has been a reference to *omenala* which has been didactically referred to as *omere-ala*.

When Theophilus Okere defines morality as *omere-ala*<sup>2</sup> that which enables society to function properly<sup>3</sup> he hits precisely at the definition of the various aspects of behavior and social activities that are acceptable as desirable. Also included in this concept are those actions and attitudes that are rejected as undesirable. While Christian and Islamic moral codes point to some form of revelation for their origins, the Nigerian traditional moral code is built up from the injunctions of the earth goddess Ala (for the Igbos), and through the ancestors Ndichie or Ndibunze.<sup>4</sup> These injunctions, made up of approved observances and prohibitions, constitute what the Igbos call *omenala* the ought of the land. Prohibitions are referred to as *Nso-ala* actions abhorred by Ala. This traditional code emphasizes group morality rather than individual cultivation of goodness itself; its most important element is the idea of Life as the highest good.<sup>5</sup>

One is accounted as *Onye aruru-ala* perpetrator of abominable things; or *onye uru-ala* one in the business of doing abominable deeds--when one does things disruptive of the socio-cosmic order. *Uru-ala* or *aruruala* therefore pertain to the realm of action that is already performed or

could possibly be performed. On the other hand, when one is reckoned as evil in one's general disposition, one is described as *Ajo mmaduan* evil person. The concept of good is expressed by the word *mma*. The same word expresses the idea of beauty, health, order. The antonym is *njo* (adjective *ajo*), which expresses the idea of something evil, bad, ugly, unseemly.

In a traditional moral code, prohibitions seem to outnumber positive injunctions. The few positive injunctions gravitate largely around religious duties, observances and rites. These must be properly observed for the enhancement of the Good Life, which is regarded as constituting the supreme good.

A communalistic outlook is very prominent too, and stems from the people's world view. Professor Ilogu suggests that because of the emphasis on the community, its well-being, and its ordered existence, the maintenance of the proper links of relationship in human kinship as well as in the relationship between humans, nature, and the ancestral spirit, most members of the traditional society do not readily see the value of goodness for the exercise of personal responsibility. Goodness is seen primarily as a means of realizing the social morality of the group, and this is capable of removing from moral life the joy of inner motivation which is of the essence of responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

A question which arises inevitably with any group-oriented morality is whether it is capable of bringing about a sense of personal responsibility that manifests itself in a feeling of guilt<sup>7</sup> or of exultation. There is every likelihood that it would be based on the sense of shame; whereas the sense of having done well would be based mostly on public opinion. According to Milton Singer there is no scientifically demonstrable reason why in group-oriented morality heavily influenced by the community's rigorous enforcement mechanism, including shame, taunting and improvised denigrating songs members of such groups could not develop inner remorse or guilt.<sup>7</sup> It is not a question of either/or, for both elements are present substantially in the system.

## **TRADITIONAL NIGERIAN MORAL "CODE"**

No written moral code existed in traditional Nigerian society for the obvious reason of lack of literacy. The moral laws were generally conventional, and specific laws were made to cater to specific needs. Professor Ilogu has been able to put together a set of 24 injunctions and prohibitions that could serve as a residue of the morality which regulated, and in many cases still regulates, both the conduct of the individual members of the community and the community as a whole:

1. Stealing of yams either from the barn or from the farm.
2. Homicide.
3. Incest.
4. A freeman diala having sexual relationships with an Osu (one dedicated as slave to a deity), or spending the night especially with the Osu in his or her house.<sup>8</sup>
5. Suicide, especially by hanging.
6. Poisoning someone with intent to take his or her life secretly.
7. Theft of domestic fowls especially a hen in her hatching pot where she can easily be taken along with her eggs.
8. A woman climbing a palm tree or kolanut tree, especially if she does so with a climbing belt called *ete*.
9. Theft of any kind committed by an Ozo titled man.

10. Adultery by a wife(though not by a husband).
- II. A wife throwing her husband down on the ground in the course of a domestic row.
12. Deliberately killing or eating any totem animal; if accidentally the liability is more benignly regarded but the act is abominable all the same. Totem animals include the sacred or royal python, sacred cows, goats or rams associated in one form or another with the community's origins or destiny.
13. Deliberately cutting the tendrils of young, growing yams in another's farm.
14. Secretly altering land boundaries, especially during the night.
15. Wilful arson.
16. Divulging the identity of the masquerade--especially if the offender is a woman.
17. A woman breaking confinement by cooking and serving meals during her menstrual period, especially if the husband is an Ozo titled man.
18. A widow having sexual relationships while still in the period of mourning her dead husband.<sup>9</sup>
19. Dying a "bad death"--that is, death resulting from an infectious disease like leprosy or smallpox, or dying within one year after having sworn an oath. Perjury in traditional society is akin to the Biblical unforgivable sin and anyone guilty of it was denied the normal courtesies of mourning or a decent burial.
20. A husband deliberately breaking or throwing away his wife's utensils.
21. A cock crowing at an awkward time in the night. That is, between the hours of 8 P.M. and 5 A.M. which was supposed to be the business times of the spirits and the ancestors. It is the height of impudence to disturb them.
22. A woman giving birth to twins. (The practice of tabooing twins has long ceased.)
23. A baby delivered "feet-first" rather than "head-first."
24. An infant cutting the upper teeth first.<sup>10</sup>

Many important features could be noted by looking at these rules of conduct. First of all, they cannot be called societal laws in the sense of regulations established by the people for the smooth running of the community. The reason for this is that no one could claim authorship or even knowledge of the precise origins of these rules of conduct. A typical member of the community, say an elder, will explain their validity by saying: "That is what our forebears and their own forebears practised since the beginning of time. Anyone who goes against them does so at his or her own risk."<sup>11</sup> The sanctions apart, whatever they are, one would like to know the reason for them and authority behind them wherever they apply. Conformity for its own sake is in itself clearly not a sufficient vindication of the agent's status as a rational and autonomous agent. Its moral import could only be at best marginal.

Secondly, in general no one took any personal offence at the breach of any of these laws. Rather it was the community that took action against offenders. The more serious breaches were said to be offenses against Ala, the earth goddess, on whose behalf maximum stiff penalties were inflicted on offenders. The land has always been there since the beginning of time and is technically considered eternal and inviolable.

Thirdly, there is a cyclic interplay in the universe of beings among the superhuman, the human and the subhuman, in which the human is always at the center. Even though human concerns are at the center the principle behind these ethical generalizations is at base cosmological in as much as it covers the entire spectrum of beings, rather than anthropological in



the sense of limiting itself to rules that are meant to guide human conduct. In this connection the rules affect even domestic animals (see number 21) as well as crops in the field.

Fourthly, a sequel to this is the lack of direct reference to the divine element which might lead to suspicions of the lack of a teleological explanation. The masquerades are the only reference to the superhuman element, since masquerades were considered to be the revered spirit of the ancestors come back to earth. However, in most traditional explanations there is constant reference to Ala. Besides providing some justification, this reference also introduces the teleological explanation often sought in ethical determinations.

Fifthly, religion does not show up directly, but seems only presupposed. This presupposition is demonstrated by the fact that a breach of any of these injunctions would attract sanctions of a religious nature by way of expiatory or purificatory rites. The conclusion one may draw from this is the fact that morality and the religious sense are bound inextricably together.

Sixthly, these laws or rules appeal to the heart rather than to the intellect. This is not to suggest that they are irrational. Rather, their validity depends not so much on their ability to persuade the mind as in their functionality in maintaining order in the community. In this respect one may be justified in regarding them as intuitionist in character. With regard to the traditional moral code the general attitude is to challenge one not just to take-it-or-leave-it, but simply to accept it.

A closer look at the 24 injunctions would reveal a great deal of emphasis on justice and equity. Hence the many prohibitions against stealing (numbers 1, 7, 9, 14), and vandalism (13, 15, 20). While the stealing of a fowl was considered a disgrace of the most debasing kind, the stealing of yams was a very serious offence because the yam stands as a mark of masculine achievement. It could be compared with stealing another's hard won Olympic medal. By far the most demeaning was for a titled man to steal, since the conferral of an Ozo title amounted to a universal acknowledgment of one's integrity of life. The lesser the worth of the object stolen the greater will be the attendant opprobrium.

Prohibitions against murder emerge strongly (2, 5, 6, 15) and include both suicide and attempted murder such as poisoning and arson. Also emerging strongly are prohibitions against sexual impropriety (3, 4, 10, 18). Sexual activity, which by its nature procures some bodily pleasure, was rightly considered inappropriate during the period of mourning, since it showed lack of respect for the memory of the deceased. When it is said that the rule of abstinence applied to women it does not mean that it did not apply to men. Because of the polygynous, rather than polyandrous, nature of marriage in traditional Nigerian society, a woman had only one husband to lose, but a man had other wives to whom he could turn. Where the man had only one wife, he would be obliged to observe the period of mourning and the abstinence from sexual activity that went with it.

Allied to these are prohibitions against a woman climbing trees or serving meals when she should be confined. The former was considered to be in bad taste and offensive to the beholder because the anatomical structure of the female body was considered ill-suited to the hazardous activity of tree-climbing. The latter was purely due to hygienic considerations.

Divulging the identity of a masquerade was considered abominable. It amounted to blasphemy--saying that the masquerade was a human being when it was actually taken to be the spirit of the ancestors. In the Bible Jesus considered blasphemy one of the sins against the Holy Spirit "which can be forgiven neither in this world nor in the next."<sup>12</sup> A woman guilty of this was doubly liable of overreaching and impropriety. Since women were not supposed to approach the

masquerade in the first place, she could not have ordinarily known. Therefore she could only have known illegitimately by going out of her way to find out. There lies the impropriety.

A Western reader of 22, 23, 24, is sure to find them rather surprising. What may seem excessively brutal can be better appreciated if one considered the logic behind them. In 22, humans are supposed to be unique and single. Only animals come in multiples. To get into the human race in multiples was considered as demeaning to the human nature and as unacceptably introducing a bestial element into the human forum.

It was a bad omen for a child to come feetfirst. That was considered the exit rather than the entrance posture. One exited the human community feet-first when his or her body was being carried out of the house for the last time. A child coming feetfirst was an omen of death and disaster. The head touching the ground first was taken as a sign of humility and loyalty, while the feet hitting the ground first was a sign of rebellion and intractability.

To cut the upper teeth first was considered bestial, for it reminded one of the fangs of deadly serpents, tigers and lions, and such domestic animals as cats and dogs. It was also considered to be an omen of avarice and wrangling. In the name of peace and harmony and in deference to the perceived order of the universe, these phenomena were viewed with foreboding and "normal" people had the duty to forswear them. There is an Igbo proverb that clearly shows this resolute disposition: *Nwata puo eze-elu ma a-kpopeghi ya, o ga epukwa ozof* If a child cuts the upper teeth first and you do not knock them out, he is likely to do even more unseemly things.

Professor Ilogu's was a brave attempt to put together on paper what previously existed in people's collective memory. Hopefully, he will have the occasion to refine his collection by showing more clearly the fine tuning in various aspects of the "code," and to make it more comprehensive in order to cover the details of daily living. It will then be easy to translate it into basic material for formal education, reflection and criticism. As the code stands, it is based on the natural law and makes categorical demands on the individual.<sup>13</sup>

In other parts of Nigeria, there are different points of emphasis, but the principle is the same. S. F. Nadel studied the situation among the Nupes of Northern Nigeria. According to him, law in the Nupe kingdom is a concern of political organization and forms part of the elaborate coercive machinery of the state. Forms of redress and sanctions exist and are applied outside the political framework. This restricted form of redress covers two types of offenses: religious offenses and kinship offenses. The former includes such acts as the desecration of sacred objects or places, whether Islamic or traditional, while the latter includes litigation over inheritance and offenses against traditional marriage rules. Among the most common of such offenses are marriage in the forbidden degrees of consanguinity and incest.<sup>14</sup>

Traditional Nupe law operated with legal distinction which, corresponding in certain respects to the modern distinction between civil and criminal law, defined two classes of delicts: simpler delicts or *Gyara* which were settled by "repairing" the damage that had been done, and graver delicts which called for formal judgment and punishment *Sheri'a*. The following table summarizes the various crimes and offenses according to this twofold classification:

Offenses involving *Gyara*:

1. Small debts.
2. Minor thefts carried out during the day.
3. Theft of fowls, sheep, and goats.
4. Adultery: seduction of a girl by a man who is willing to marry her.

Offenses involving *Sheri'a*:

1. Large debts
2. Theft on a small scale and during the night.
3. Theft of cattle or horses, and all theft committed during the night.
4. Adultery leading to fights and bloodshed.
5. Seduction by a married man who refuses to marry the girl.
6. Murder and manslaughter.
7. Highway robbery.
8. Arson.
9. High treason, i.e., rebellion of feudal lords against the king--Lese-Majeste, *Gi Toko Nya Tsu*, literally abuse the king.<sup>15</sup>

The first set of offenses was a matter for the local authority, while the graver crimes were referred to the central authority--the court of the king and Alkali in Bida. Punishment of ordinary criminals was performed in the capital, in the open market and might range from flogging or *shela* to capital punishment.

## **SEXUAL MORALITY IN TRADITIONAL NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

An important point that requires some discussion is the question of sexual morality. In traditional Nigerian societies sex was not a subject to be glibly discussed. It was, in fact, considered remiss for adults to discuss matters regarding sexuality either with or in the presence of the young. By the same token it was unthinkable for young persons to make references to sexual things in the hearing of their elders. Whatever they needed to know about sexuality was casually told them as warranted by the unfolding of their own physical and sexual development. At the onset of puberty, for example, the adolescent would probably complain of some ache or pain or physical distress. The parent would understand the connection and instruct him or her on how to cope.

It was not uncommon in the past that young maidens went about their daily business without clothes on until the time of marriage. Boys also went about their daily activities without clothes on until they were officially "clothed" in a special ceremony initiating them into adulthood.<sup>16</sup> It was at the initiation stage that anything a young initiate ever wondered about was frankly and directly explained, since he or she would in a short time need to apply them in the course of his or her adult and marital life that would soon follow the initiation. The Efiks, Yorubas, Igallas, Igbos, Fulanis, Igallas, practically all the peoples of Nigeria had their own versions of the initiation process.

Contrary to the impressions created by the earliest European and other foreign nationals, there was no pornographic intent involved in the scantiness of clothing. On the contrary, the humid climatic conditions rendered elaborateness of clothing unnecessary as a protection against the weather, and even less so as an ornament. Thus even in Europe and the rest of the industrialized world, hot summers have led to various degrees of scantiness in clothing and even at times to a state of complete un-clothedness.

In traditional Nigerian society, the moral standards were absolute and parents had absolute control over their children--male and female alike. The boys played and interacted among boys while the girls did so among girls. That removed unnecessary occasions for temptation. Where a

boy or girl was in a state of sexual restlessness, this became embarrassingly manifest to any casual onlooker. In traditional society, sex was not to be indulged in for pleasure, even though it might be craved. The element of pleasure was considered as incidental rather than central to the course of human mating. As a result sexual promiscuity rarely, if at all, occurred. Society was very strict, and anyone indulging in promiscuous activities earned the scorn of the neighbors.

It was probably this strictness about sexual matters that led S. M. E. Bengu to assert that all sexual perversities were alien to Africa.<sup>17</sup> "These perversities," he insists, "have been imported into Africa through the cities with the whites as their carriers, since they were the creators of the cities themselves."<sup>18</sup> This assertion, though somewhat of an overstatement, is likely to be endorsed by most African purists. One need only consider the degree of tolerance accorded in industrialized societies to certain sexual practices, which are almost unmentionable in more traditional societies. On the other hand, however, Bengu fails to define just what constitutes a sexual perversion, especially as there is no unanimity in the issue, just as there is no strict homogeneity in African cultures. Besides, he never tried to show how he came about his conclusion.

Flora Nwapa, a leading Nigerian woman novelist, discusses the issue of prostitution and rejects it as bad for the African woman. In her novel *Idu*, the heroin of the novel by the same name denounces prostitution outright: "Our Woman of the Lake, (i.e., the Sea Goddess) frowns at it, and that's why prostitutes of our town never profit by it."<sup>19</sup> The Woman of the Lake is also the goddess of virginity and is said to punish prostitutes. *Idu* drives her point further: "If prostitution is to be practised let it not be native women, but women of other lands to practise it."<sup>20</sup>

Professor Wole Soyinka, Nigeria's Nobel Laureate for Literature, depicts a scene where the traditional sexual morality is given expression. A grandmother brings pressure to bear on her granddaughter Dehinwa not to abort a child whether conceived in or out of wedlock, and whether for cosmetic or any other reason: "You were plump when you first came back from "ilu oyinbo." (She looked up sharply, boring into her eyes, then shook her head in relief and mischief). No, she chortled, I don't think so. But listen girl, I know this new habit of you modern girls, don't join them in the foolishness. If you are expecting a baby, have it. A child is a beautiful thing; have it. The important thing is to know the father."<sup>21</sup>

Dehinwa is here not being encouraged to be promiscuous, but rather to face up to her conduct. If by accident or design she had conceived a child, she should not seek to escape by the backdoor. Here was an emphatic objection to any contemplation of abortion. Progeny was to be preferred in all circumstances above personal convenience or cosmetic considerations. A woman's womanhood was assessed by her actual ability to bear children.<sup>22</sup> Where she was unable to bear children, her esteem waned.

Another Nigerian writer, John Munonye, touches on the predicament of a woman that failed to bear children. In his novel *Obi*, a friend, Warrior, congratulates Obi, the hero of the story, on his marriage to a well-bred and beautiful wife. Nevertheless, Warrior wastes no time in declaring his stand on any woman who fails to bear children: "We could never call her wife until she has produced children for the family; for what use is a kolanut tree if it fails to bear fruit."<sup>23</sup>

A similar attitude finds expression in the case of Flora Nwapa's *Idu*, who was so unhappy over her inability to be a mother after three years of marriage. Of her it was said: "She was not pregnant, she had not even had a miscarriage. She was, like any woman in traditional society, meant to be a mother and not a mere sex object."<sup>24</sup>

Within marriage itself, adultery, especially on the woman's part, was highly condemned. Men were not thereby given licence; as has already been noted, they could meet their sexual needs from their several wives; if they had only one wife, they were expected to remain faithful to her. Concubinage is the only exception to the rule.<sup>25</sup>

## **TRADITIONAL MORAL EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG**

James Hake points out that the factors that affect the moral training of children in Northern Nigeria (and other parts as well), were the customs, practices, and religious beliefs of parents.<sup>26</sup> Children were required to show their parents and elders prompt obedience and respect, and an unquestioning submission to their will. The belief is that if one were to be too lenient in training the child, he or she would bring misfortune to him or herself and to his or her family. According to traditional and religious beliefs, a child is born imperfect and if given his or her own way, will do foolish and harmful things not only to himself or herself, but to other people as well. Parents therefore felt it was their bounden duty to try to curb the incipient evil tendencies in their children, and to use corporal and other punishment as they saw fit.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the small but recurring misdeeds of children which would irritate parents, stealing and lying were considered serious negative character traits. Quarrelling, fighting, tardiness, rudeness, disrespect for elders and breakage of family utensils are other types of misbehavior which would cause parents to use disciplinary measures.

The most common form of punishment was thrashing, and in many cases it was often preceded by a good scolding. In some extreme cases of breach of discipline or persistence in obstinacy the child could be locked up in a dark room and temporarily denied access to his most cherished belongings and playthings. Sometimes he or she would be denied a meal. The idea was to let the child see the full impact of his or her conduct. Most children would break down and cry, which was considered an act of contrition that would earn them reprieve. It was left to the parents to determine just the right measure of strictness that would not border on cruelty, but they would prefer to be "cruel in order to be kind."

These traditional methods were thought to have been quite successful in maintaining discipline. In the light of present-day sensitivities, they are likely to be criticized as trial by fire. It is arguable whether it was not, after all, a case of parental sadism and child abuse which did no more than impose compliance rather than authentic spontaneous obedience. Could acts of compliance be reckoned in terms of virtue as acts resulting from a developed and autonomous judgment or are they mere conditioned responses to stimuli? If the former, it is all well and good, but if the latter, the children's autonomy or capacity for virtuous action becomes at best severely impaired and at worst permanently distorted.

John Kambalame and his companions put together a clear-cut code that gave precise directives to specific groups in the community--children, adults, parents, married couples. They were meant to provide relevant instruction for various stages of development--initiation, marriage, family, and society in general. Though designed for Kenya, Uganda, Malawi and other East African countries, the contents are very relevant to Nigeria: though the details may vary, the substance is basically applicable.<sup>28</sup> It has all the makings of a social catechesis.

## **MALE INITIATION**

When the time of initiation came the children were gathered together, taken into the remote forest and away from their parents and exposed for the first time to life in its most rugged and most challenging state. The boys would experience for the first time what it meant to be their own men beyond the protective shadows of parents, and under the strict supervision of one skilled in the job and designated to guide them. Their food would be simple and their shelter would be the barest possible. There was no question of the boys feeling "crushed" or "punished" by the experience. On the contrary, their punishing experiences were meant to "prove" to proud parents, peers, and prospective female admirers, that they could hold their own in tough conditions and difficult circumstances. The "tutor" or mentor would proceed to explain the significance of every object and action so that the boys would understand perfectly what they were doing and why. Then they would be issued specific instructions which they were supposed to carry out.

#### *Explanations for 12-14 Year-Olds at Initiation*

Twelve to fourteen-year-olds are taught as follows during the course of initiation:

1. The porridge they are bringing here for you has this meaning: that you belong now to your own group; that you have set out on a journey.
2. These ceremonies mean that when you were small you played about as you felt inclined and held off from the disagreeable things.
3. The cruel leader of *vinyau* symbolizes those trials in life that you will meet with in the world; if you go on childishly such things will come to you from this side or from that.
4. That blindfolding of you means that there will come to you troubles that the eye does not see, such as illness, trials, and death; things that can take you unawares.
5. Making you part company with your mother means putting modesty between you and her, because you and she are not alike in your physical parts.
6. The little temporary shelter here signifies the grave where you will lie without seeing any one of the people of your village.
7. Your sponsor signifies the spirits who will stay with you among the dead, and who, when the time comes, will present you to Mulungu (God the Just, Upright, and Immutable), accompanying you as witnesses to your good character.

#### *Injunctions to the 12-14 Year-Olds During Initiation*

1. Be obedient and do gladly all that you are ordered to do.
2. Honor all who are older than yourself.
3. You always must help particularly those in need and especially such as are aged, the lame ones, and children: never deride: never revile, never strike them.
4. Be ready to fetch and carry wherever you go.
5. Honor your father and your mother for all the good things they do for you in looking after you here on earth.
6. You must love Mulungu, who looks after the spirits of the dead, and make offerings of worship to Him.
7. You must always speak what is true.
8. Take nothing belonging to another without asking for it.

9. Never entice another man's wife.
10. Have care of your body day by day.
11. Eat nothing that is stolen.
12. Be amiable to everyone.
13. Always be busy at your work.
14. Be kind to all created things such as dogs, cats, frogs, lizards.

## **FEMALE INITIATION: THE OFOSI GUILD**

There is also a special initiation for females. It is the initiation into the female priesthood--the Ofosi Guild among the Owe people of Kwara State of Nigeria.<sup>29</sup> As a rule, the traditional religion of the Owe is an affair completely controlled by the adult male section of the community. Women and children are of practically no importance, just as they have no direct say in the other decisions concerning the well-being of the tribe. A significant exception to this general rule is in the religious sphere, the phenomenon of Ofosi. They are women who are initiated into an esoteric and deeply religious society, involving periodic and authentic spirit possession.<sup>30</sup> They are considered the "wives of the Eborá," and unlike other women who have no active role in the Eborá cult, they have some specific, though limited, part to play in the worship of Eborá. Their part consists mainly in singing and dancing in honor of the Eborá on the appropriate occasions such as the major religious festivals, Eye, Oka, and Ekiho; for the promotion of a man to the *Orotá* grade; the funeral of a member of the *Orotá* grade or his mother, or that of one of their own number.

The rite of initiation into this cult occurs only when there is a suitable spiritual atmosphere in the town, generally on the occasion of the promotion of a great chief, or the burial of an important priest-elder. As soon as the atmosphere is declared propitious, parents who have daughters and husbands with wives they intend to dedicate in this way to the Eborá take the necessary steps with the directors of the guild to have the prospective candidate enrolled. A woman, too, may decide on her own to get initiated, but she has to obtain the permission of her husband who then puts forward her name.

On a given day, the head of the Ofosi calls down the spirit. She performs secret rituals involving palm oil on the sacred pot of the Ofosi, and calls out the names of the candidates. As the names are being called into the sacred pot of "medicine," the Ofosi spirit gets into the candidates wherever they may be. They suddenly begin to experience serious pains in the head, fall into a trance and rush into the bush--generally up into the Eborá hill--for days.<sup>31</sup> After some time, the Ofosi women go in search of them and bring them to a sort of novitiate.<sup>32</sup> Here as the blood of a sacrificed goat is poured into the sacred pot, they regain consciousness and begin right away the long period of elaborate initiation, divided into three stages.

The first stage consists of three months of complete isolation. In Olle, this used to be spent in the depth of the forest. Then comes a further three months of communal life on the premises of the Oba Ofosi, the chief of the Ofosi, during which time they learn the language of the Ofosi, songs and ritual dances under very rigid discipline and seclusion. At the last stage, again a period of three months, they leave the seclusion, go around in small groups performing the ritual dances they have learnt from house to house, and beg for food and money.

The candidates at this stage came often into the town, "very scantily dressed, with a small piece of cloth that just about went round the waist, and stopping far up above the knees."<sup>33</sup> Their bodies were smeared with red osun or ochre; the upper part of the body was completely bare,

except for beads swung around the neck, and many others not inelegantly piled on the waist. Since they had, so to speak, just been born to a new life, "they behaved like children in speech and mannerism, and were even called Akiyeye or Akitata which means 'mad' or 'moronic'."<sup>34</sup>

Though strictly cultic, the Ofosi has a lot of features in common with the initiation rites already described. There is a common interest in the esoteric, in the need to retire "away from the crowd," rigid discipline, reference to a leader or guide. The end result of cultic "regeneration" is also noteworthy. The initiates emerge as "new creatures" untrammelled by the banal habits of the world around them. Henceforth they are no longer ordinary people, but must be referred to in quite special circumstances.

The scantiness of dress makes them no one's object, but relates them more to the spirit world than to the world of sense, since at the very beginning of the ceremony they were taken possession of by the spirit. They had learnt to make do with whatever they could; to endure isolation and terror; to survive in tough circumstances; to keep secrets and the discipline required for learning and using an esoteric language, esoteric songs and dances. As with Saint Paul's expression, "It is no longer (they) who live" (and act) but the spirit who lives in them,"<sup>35</sup> their actions and attitudes in that state are completely adapted to the promptings of their possessing spirits.

The fact that a new name is imposed on initiates is very important. Names in traditional Nigerian culture express the very personality of the bearer, and the taking of a new name is a significant expression for the fact that by initiation, the Ofosi has become a new person. Similarly, in the Bible's Old Testament, God changed Abram's name to Abraham; Jacob's name was changed to Israel; and in the New Testament Simon became Cephas or Peter, and Saul became Paul.

It was a great honor to be made an Ofosi. The Ofosi women were held in respect by the local people, and a husband (who had to pay the expenses) considered it an honor to have an Ofosi as a wife. The hands of girls who became Ofosi prior to marriage were highly sought in marriage, for it was generally conceded that an Ofosi woman was more trustworthy, obedient and moral than other women, and it was rare for an Ofosi to try to leave her husband.

## **SPECIAL POST-INITIATION INSTRUCTIONS**

After initiation, the boys as well as the girls among the initiates were basically ready for the marital stage of life. Special instructions and hints were offered them about successful family-craft and mother-craft as they were gradually eased into the family life of their own. The parents, too, had their own sets of instructions about the most helpful attitudes to adopt towards their maturing son or daughter and the spouses they might have chosen for themselves.

### *To the Parents of the Young Man*

1. Never tempt or try your child needlessly.
2. Care for your child most watchfully as he comes to full maturity.
3. Your child has left your hut and sleeps now in the young man's hut with his peers, but never say that he has left you.<sup>36</sup>Care for him as usual.
4. If you see that he is late in coming home to his hut, ask him about it: he has sense and will tell you.



5. Be patient and forgiving with your boy. As he goes out with his equals (i.e., peers), he will get into trouble and you should rescue him and forgive as well as console him.

6. Remember to watch over his health. Give him medicine when he is not well.

7. Do not forget that as he grows up, he will do what you did. Desire will come upon him to seek a wife so that he may build a household for his very own.

8. Now that your son is one who eschews such-and-such things, never knowingly give him what he should not have, lest he sin.

### *To A Newly-Wed Husband*

As the boy develops into adulthood and takes a wife in order to start his own family, there was a set of instructions for him, for his wife, and for their various parents:

Listen, oh husband: you have lived with your father and mother. They brought you to birth, they nourished and fed you, they clothed you and looked after you well until you matured, right up to the point when you desired and sought a wife. Today here is the wife that Mulungu has given you. Just as yourself. she has lived with her old folk who brought her to birth, fed and cared for her, as was the case with you. Today, you note her beauty and, desiring her, have caused her to separate from those people of hers so that she may be truly yours. You ought to pay heed to my words, to hear them and to act by them:

1. You must bear affection to her with the whole heart.

2. You must care for her, even as did her own people.

3. Let her want for nothing.

4. You must seek the medicines for her, should she be ill.

5. If you want that people should hold you and your wife in esteem you yourself should esteem her.

6. Do not forsake her for another.

7. Honor her parents and her friends.

8. Love your wife's relatives as your own, and be obedient to them.

9. Never despise your family and fellow villagers.

10. Continue as you have been, that you bring no cause of separation between your father's people and those of your in-laws: so that both may be made one large community through you.

### *To a Newly-Wed Wife*

1. You must love your husband.

2. You must listen to what he says, and do it.

3. You must have that care for him that his parents had.

4. You must be friendly to your husband's guests as with your own and those of your own people.

5. You must not leave your husband and love others.

6. Honor the parents of your husband and all his kin.

7. Let your kindly feelings for your husband's circle be as if to one large community with your own people.

8. Defend your husband from any frightening things which are within your knowledge.

9. Never despise parents or kin.

10. Continue as you have been, that you bring no cause of separation between your father's people and your in-laws, that together they may be one, single, large community.

### *To the Parents of Newly-Weds*

1. Love your children and guide them rightly in this their home.
2. Honor their household, that others too may honor them.
3. Listen to their troubles and help them with their difficulties.
4. Do not be the cause of unhappiness in your children's home life.
5. Unite your own home with that of these your children, so that you will make one large community together.
6. Hasten to their aid whenever they complain in any sort of trouble.

There are some important features that manifest themselves in this code. More than anything else, it concentrates on the family unit and could easily pass as a set of instructions for successful family living. There is great premium on forming a large community (See #10 for the newly wed young man and woman; #5 for their parents) so that the individual gets little or no consideration. The ideals of unity and reciprocity in rendering honor and respect run very strongly throughout. The ideal of solidarity in times of trouble is another important feature. Lacking, however, are injunctions of a religious character, a sexual ethic, and some guideline for social interaction. The deity is only sparsely, if not indirectly, introduced. All these are important elements that could not safely be ignored in any serious attempt at moral education.

### **METHODS OF TRADITIONAL MORAL EDUCATION**

Even though there were no systematized, formalized, school-type methods of moral education, educators in traditional Nigerian society had at their disposal a variety of tools for effective moral education. By far the most pervasive was emulation, by which the educand learned to do things by actually doing them. The educator accomplished his or her task by a repeat-after-me approach. This was the way of apprenticeship. It was applied in practically every field of endeavor--professional, recreational, educational. Thus, one learned to be a herbalist or fortune teller by actually being an apprentice to an already accomplished herbalist or fortune-teller, and doing as the master craftsman would direct. The same applied in learning a new dance or song or game. Besides apprenticeship other approaches included stories with fictitious characters, proverbs, riddles, aphorisms and other words of wisdom, and the so-called "negative way" of caution and prohibition. Though generally arranged to cater for various stages of development, they are by no means isolated from each other; their effect is intended to be cumulative rather than occasional.

#### *Learning by Doing: Apprenticeship and Emulation*

The quick Nigerian child learned not only from his or her parents, but even more by using eyes and ears and all faculties. Children were not isolated from the activities of their elders. There was no baby-talk in the home; parents talked to their children as though they expected them to understand normal adult speech. They also expected them to behave in the normal manner within their level of development. There were things which were supposed to be avoided: there were words, gestures and demeanours which were considered to be in bad taste for any young person. The child saw how his or her parents, elder brothers and sisters behaved towards each other, towards strangers, or seniors or those of the opposite sex and was expected to imitate

them. In instances not previously clearly defined, it was through their manifest approval or disapproval of certain things he or she did that the child was able to know if they were right or wrong, permissible or impermissible. In general, the great facts of human life and the origin of things were introduced into the child's mind by means of his or her incorporation into the daily activities. It was the manner rather than the amount of instruction that was of prime importance.

The initiation ceremonies described above were peak learning experiences. Nigerians showed themselves to be good practical psychologists. They knew that the child was very impressionable and therefore took every measure to ensure that the impressions children received at initiation were so strong and positive as to serve as a beacon in their later life. At the appropriate time, the boys were taken away into a camp by themselves and isolated from the villagers. No woman was permitted to enter the camp.<sup>37</sup> The same was true of the girls, too, whose camp males were not allowed to enter. It was important to maintain an atmosphere of seriousness and mystery as a safeguard against levity of mind. Special costumes might be worn, and men representing terrifying monsters (i.e., masquerades) would confront the boys at the most unexpected instances. The aim was to teach them courage and resilience in the face of the fearsome, the unusual and the unexpected. The initiates were subjected to the severest disciplines and would emerge as "new" beings--strong, brave, confident and courageous--having overcome fear, infantile dependency and timidity.

### *Use of Stories*

It was common practice in traditional Nigerian society for the family to gather to tell tales which illustrate human activity and the consequences for good behavior as well as the penalties for misconduct. Moral lessons often were drawn at the end of each story. Sociological facts were illuminated in the same way to explain the origins and consequences of divorce, murder, incest, friendship, courage, treachery, etc. Edwin Smith, reflecting on the content of African stories, credits them with moral and religious content that go a long way to forming the young people's attitudes towards their environment.<sup>38</sup>

Stories are molders of ideals, since they inculcate a high code of social ethics and are excellent in combining entertainment with moral lessons. Another important feature of the stories was the high degree of participation they engendered. Since the tale was combined with song and the teller acted as soloist, the participants had the opportunity to take the refrains. Often the audience was questioned by the story-teller when a character had to justify the behavior he manifested, and interpolations of assent from the audience as the tale unfolded were regularly heard. Edwin Smith gives his assessment of the instructive value of African tales: "African tales not only amuse and express feelings; they are educative." Through parents have always realized its value in practice, in recent years the educative value of storytelling has come to be more recognized. Tales are seen to be the natural forms for revealing life, the natural carrier of a culture's tradition or information and ideals. They have two functions: to mold ideals and to illuminate of facts.<sup>39</sup>

The following two stories illustrate the use of tales to draw moral lessons as well as achieve other educational goals:

#### *Story 1: The Bride with Stained Teeth*

A certain father found a bride for his eldest son and sent him off with the bride-wealth to bring her home. As they were returning, the girl began to sing: "I am a beautiful girl, but I have no teeth." He looked into her mouth and was horrified to find a black ridge where the teeth should have been. And he took her back to her father and claimed the return of the cattle he had handed over.

On hearing what had happened, the second son went to get the girl, for he thought that his brother must have made a mistake. But once again on the road the girl sang her song, the black ridge was revealed and she was rejected with scorn. Then amidst the jeers of his friends, the youngest son of the family set out to try his luck. He handed over the cattle, and on the road the girl sang her song again.

When he looked into her mouth, lo! the black ridge, and he knew his brothers had not been mistaken. But he acted differently. "Never mind," said this magnanimous or less fastidious young man, "Let us go on." They came to a river, and as they were crossing he seized her, told her to open her mouth, and he scrubbed her mouth vigorously with sand. To his joy the black came away and beneath there shone a set of beautiful, white teeth. The father reproached his son for wasting good cattle. But to his delight and to the utter chagrin of the brothers, the girl smiled and showed that her teeth were as beautiful as the rest of her comely person.

At the end of a story like this, participants were invited to give their reactions and share any lessons they could draw from the story. A broad variety of lessons could be drawn from the story as a few samples will illustrate: heaven helps those who help themselves; do not cry with horror over a bad situation, do something about it; better light one candle than curse the darkness. On the negative side: a girl's beauty is severely tainted by carelessness over the rules of hygiene; a little diligence enhances almost anything. Since everyone was expected to come up with his or her own lesson deriving from the story, passive listening would be completely out of the question, as no one would like to be exposed to the ridicule of others for inability to draw a simple lesson from a story.

Another important feature which adds to the merit of this method was that each participant was able to view the story in accordance with his or her own experience and situation and everyone benefitted in the end from the sharing. A final point here is that each person's appraisal subtly revealed his or her own kind of psychology and would help those around better to understand and appreciate him or her more.

The foregoing story has been a contrast between the good, the better, and the best; between judgment and prudishness; between practical resourcefulness and lethargy. We shall consider another type of moral lessons--not the contrasts of opposites this time, but the awareness that through cooperation, virtues can and do complement and enhance each other. On the other hand they could hardly stand in isolation from one another.

### *Story II: Who is the Hero?*

A certain man had five children, four sons and a daughter. Sometime after his death, the daughter disappeared. The mother called the sons together and set them to finding their sister. They were remarkably gifted men. The eldest was able to see things at a very great distance. On casting his eyes around he discovered his sister 50 miles off in the clutches of a lion. The second brother had the power of transporting himself through space unseen, and he rescued his sister from the lion's claws.

On missing his prey, the lion went rampaging about, but the third son killed him. The girl was brought home dead; and the fourth son, by virtue of his powerful medicines, restored her to life. The mother was overjoyed, and taking a large piece of meat she gave it to her sons, saying: "Eat, my sons. I give it to you in gratitude for your cleverness and faithfulness." But the brothers said: "No, give it to only one of us the one who did most in restoring our sister to you, safe and sound."

The brothers in the story pass all tests and have shown themselves to be optimally formed, well-disciplined characters. They cooperate in solving the problem using the best of brain and brawn. None tries to claim the credit to himself alone. When their shrewd mother tests them for vanity they come out with flying colors by throwing their mother's challenge back to her. They are not about to accept rewards for doing what they consider to be their bounden duty towards their sister. Their preoccupation is to save their sister, and having successfully accomplished that there was no point in getting lost in such trivialities as fighting over a piece of meat.

The two stories make use of fictional characters and fictional circumstances that are in some respects true to life and in other respects unreal. The important issue is not the verifiability of the facts of the story, but the applicability of the principles behind the actions and attitudes of the characters depicted. In many stories of this instructive nature animal characters often are used and given human roles and words. In that way the message is graphically delivered without the risk of anyone taking it as a personal affront.

At the end of each storytelling session each child had homework to do, namely to pester a parent or uncle or any senior person to teach him or her a new story for the next day including the moral lessons and the responsorial songs that usually accompanied and punctuated each story. Apart from the formalized customary introductory greetings, the story-teller built up self confidence and at the same time drew the attention of the listeners by posing a series of rhetorical, aphoristic questions to which the audience were expected to respond *Mba!* (i.e., an emphatic *No!*)<sup>40</sup> Such questions involved truisms of daily experience like whether the most skillful climber ever attempts climbing an *opete*,<sup>41</sup> whether fish ever drown in the river or a frog ever trips in the mud, whether one could crack a nut with an egg, whether the weight lifter ever lifts the ground, or the child in the womb ever speaks, etc. These aphoristic one-liners were an important tool used in highlighting moral impossibilities, or rather, moral improbabilities. They were designed to sharpen the moral sense of the little ones by drawing attention to the folly of one who would attempt the impossible or the inadvisable. The simple principle being demonstrated by them is, in a word, that one should know oneself, one's limitations and possibilities, and act within the realms of possibilities rather than exposing oneself to the folly of attempting the ridiculously impossible.

From time to time in the course of play and interaction children would intone a whole range of such aphorisms with their friends chorusing the second half of each. In traditional society it was a mark of erudition to be able to invoke strings of apt aphorisms to match any point of discussion. More importantly people seize the opportunity of even seemingly inconsequential occurrences like sneezing, to reaffirm their rule of life or what might be called a secular creed. Upon sneezing, those around will say the equivalent of "bless you!", but the one who sneezed will proceed with a barrage of "spontaneous" affirmations of a rule of life called *iju-ogu*.<sup>42</sup>

In many ways the casual but effective process of internalizing and applying the content of these aphorisms without the stress associated with formal schoolwork, has something to say to Western formalized methods of inculcating ideas. By effortlessly invoking the appropriate "principle" to match a given situation, a child manifests a thorough grasp of the

principles, their implications and their connections with one another with respect to daily moral determinations.

### *Use of Proverbs and Riddles*

Intimately related to folktales are proverbs and riddles. The moralizing aspect of the tales is expressed in the terse statements of proper behavior appended to them, often as the culmination of the action, but sometimes only as an admonition that seems to have but little to do with the sequence of events leading up to it. Riddles, for their part, while not a part of the tales, form the prelude to storytelling sessions, where some of them are usually "pulled up" as a brain-teaser to sharpen wits for intelligent and participatory listening. A few examples will illustrate:

Question: What is it that tortures you in the presence of your parents?

Answer: Hunger.

Question: What happens to the fly that could never be advised?

Answer: He is buried with the carcass.

Question: What happens to the despot to whom no one dares to speak?

Answer: He could never be informed when his ceremonial clothes are soiled.

The use of proverbs involves an interesting methodological point for, while it is not difficult to record a long series of these short, pithy statements, it is quite different when one attempts to discover their significance. This can be achieved only by employing the technique of question-and-answer, where a hypothetical situation that seems to be in accord with the meaning of a given saying is presented to the informant, and then varied until the addressee is able to identify the understanding that most accurately reflects the meaning of the saying in the particular instance.<sup>43</sup> Proverbs are used to warn, to admonish, to reprove, to guide, to praise, to encourage. Facility in their use is a mark of erudition and elegance in speech. They reflect more clearly than other forms of folklore the deepest-set values of the people, showing the drives that motivate behavior and the controls that regularize the relations of an individual to his or her fellows. Here are a few samples:

1. Just one soiled finger and the entire hand will be rendered soiled. (Warning about the social implications of misconduct).
2. If the ear persistently refuses to hear, when the head is cut off, the ear goes with it. (Admonition against obstinacy).
3. When one resembles what he is caricatured with, laughter becomes irrepressible. (Reproof against foolishness of conduct).
4. A child is never scalded by a piece of yam given him by his mother. (Exhortation to trust and confidence).
5. When one is told to "keep it up," this means that his or her work is being appreciated. (Compliments for actions performed).

These proverbs flow freely in the course of daily speech and conversation. One is expected to understand them by applying them in the context. Some, however, are highly charged with meaning--sometimes ironical, sometimes cynical, and sometimes humorous. The addressee must

do the homework him or herself and apply the message accordingly. The wise person will draw the lesson, the foolish will fail to see the point. Here are some examples:

1. "The lazy man eats little" is used to chide one who is eating heartily, but who had earlier refused to work.
2. "When an oil-palm nut is eaten in a hurry, ants get the lion's share" is used to bring back to reason one who is given to precipitous actions.
3. "Taking out with one hand and replacing with the other keeps the store stocked for tomorrow" is a thoughtful reminder for injudicious spending or use of things.

An important feature that renders such proverbs effective in driving home the moral message is, as has already been shown, that they could be attributed to an animal or even an inanimate object such as tortoise, or lizard, or python--anything whose characteristics could demonstrate the point being made. If the addressee chooses to take offence, let him or her refer to the animal quoted.

In style, Igbo proverbs employ terse and archaic terms for maximum effect. Such archaic words as *ogori*, *ogodo*, *nnekolochie*, *umu-nnadi*, are preferred to the more modern equivalents of *nwanyi*, *akwa*, *oke-ibiri nwanyi ndi-mmadu*, and mean respectively woman, clothing, old woman, and people. Thus the truant child is often warned: "*Nwata a naghi agbalaha mbembe ya n'oso*" no matter how fast or far a child tries to flee, he could never outrun his buttocks. That means that one's task, though unpleasant could never be escaped by flight. (In contemporary language *mbembe* or buttocks are expressed by "*ike*").

When one manages to pull through some personal difficulty in spite of a neighbor's refusal to help, the former is likely to declare as follows: "*ihe a woro nwanyi a gbaala n'ahia*" literally, what tantalized a woman has glutted the market, i.e., what was vaunted as being beyond anyone's reach has turned out to be something commonplace. The preference for archaic terms is dictated by the need to strike the chord of antiquity with the attendant authority it lends the principle being invoked, and to show that it was there before the speaker referred to it.

### *The Negative Way of Caution*

Victor Uchendu points out an important method of instilling traditional morality through deterrence from laxity. He observes that Nigerians "tend to wash their dirty linen in public." Thus the fact that all eyes are watching and all tongues are ready to wag places a strong check on people's tendencies to laxity. When women quarrel, for instance, they mercilessly expose each other's follies and foibles--as they might have gathered from local and domestic gossip. Yelling at the top of their voices they narrate with graphic details each other's darkest sides. Uchendu calls this a transparent orientation, and anyone who would not have his or her sins told in the market place had better watch his or her conduct.

The negative way, though prevalent at the level of speech is not limited to speech alone; it applies also at the level of action and daily living. In daily social interaction, for example, food and drink are tasted by the host prior to their being offered to a guest. This is to show that they are free of any harmful contents. The host thus manifests his or her good will in first tasting what he or she has to offer. Not to taste food before presenting it can be construed as not to vouch for its wholesomeness. More importantly, to refuse something offered even after it has been tasted speaks volumes about how the host's moral, social and spiritual standing is perceived by the

guest. Usually words are not required to make the point.<sup>45</sup> Anyone that must enjoy the confidence of those around him or her must be seen to be beyond guile. This goes beyond an individual's clear conscience, for the clear conscience must manifest itself in ways that are identifiable by the community or it is as good as no conscience at all.

The concept of the good life is so built on transparency that the individual would dread anything with the potential to bring about shame or loss of face in any form. It is the people that give praise or blame and they base their judgment on what they know, see, hear, or in any way perceive about a person's external conduct. Thus the major deterrent of crime, concludes Uchendu, is not feeling guilt but feeling shame.<sup>46</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Traditional moral education in Nigeria has been able to provide comprehensively for all facets of human conduct and interpersonal relationships. It may lack the complexity and sophistication of the nuclear age, but its very simplicity has been its great strength. In its pure form, it has been free of the assaults of casuistic rhetoric that has characterized many modern ethical theories. The theories are often criticized. Barry Williams and Donald MacKinnon, for example, in their book, *Soundings*, claim that on closer inspection a great deal of what Christians often call virtue turns out to be cowardice.<sup>47</sup> Paul Tillich speaks of the moral law as too intolerable to be borne. John A. T. Robinson criticizes the idea of moral laws which come down directly from heaven and are eternally valid for human conduct.<sup>48</sup>

Considered from those points of view, both the Judeo-Christian decalogue and the Kantian universalism of moral law will be found to be in instant trouble. Hegel would argue that nature and the moral agent are governed by separate sets of laws. In his view nature has no concern with moral consciousness, and the moral consciousness has no concern with nature. Nothing matters to the moral consciousness except its own inner purity. The moral agent, nevertheless, has to act and carry out purposes in the world, with the result that he cannot dislocate himself from the world altogether, but must in some measure at least subordinate it to himself.

J. D. Mabott goes further to argue against Kantian universalism: he insists that universalization produces a self-contradiction, since no new rules would be possible. According to him, if everyone said what was false, no one should expect the truth and so no one could be deceived. Therefore, "universal lying" is a self-contradiction, and so would be universal stealing.<sup>49</sup>

## NOTES

1. Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain* (Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1982), pp. 33-34. See also Timothy Rogers Martin, "Andy Warhol as Artist and Teacher" in *Religious Education*, 84 (no 2, Spring, 1989), p. 285.

2. Theophilus Okere, "The Role of Religion in Moral Education," in *New Perspectives in Moral Education*, edited by O. A. Nduka and E. O. Iheoma, p. 52. Etymologically the term *omere-ala* can be broken down into *omere* = "maker of, that which constitutes;" and *ala* = literally "the soil" or "land," but in this instance it signifies human society.

3. Okere's interpretation, while significantly differing from the common usage of the term *omenala* is not necessarily contradictory to it. *Omere-ala* or "maker-of-society" would refer not to the order of material, but to that of efficient causality in the Aristotelian sense. It is "that-



which-puts" human society on its way by giving it the nudge it requires precisely to be human. Okere's interpretation is therefore quite in order. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to consider the common usage *omenala*, in its literal sense of "what-obtains-in-society," "what-thrives-in-society," for that would limit it to the merely conventional sense of practices of whatever type and rob it of its primary meaning of "the-ought-of-society." It is thus a value-studded system of mores, ideals and standards that undergirds the people's behavior. Therefore its role in society is in the order of final causes: that which confers on human society its *raison d'être* precisely as a human society. It is this meaning that gives the term "*omennala*" the crucial place it has in the moral education of the people.

4. Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity in Ibo Culture* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), p. 123.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

6. What Ilogu seems to suggest here is that the Igbos separate duty from the realm of virtue, almost in line with the Kantian idea of duty for the sake of duty. This point of view, though plausible, is quite debatable. A detailed discussion of its deeper implications is, however, not within the scope of this exercise. Since the sense of achievement is highly cherished among the Igbos, one who falls short of this ideal could hardly expect any esteem in society.

7. See Gerhart Piers and Milton B. Singer, *Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytic and Cultural Study* (New York: W. Norton & Co., 1971), p. 99.

8. The question of *Osu* and *diala* distinction is steadily losing importance. People now mix more freely without ever bothering to find out whether the ancestors of their friend were *osu* or *diala*. And it does not make much difference in the relationship if they turn out to be the former. The twilight of the *Osu-diala* institution has arrived. The last hurdles will have been surmounted when the marriage barrier is finally broken. It is social pressure more than anything else that prevents most people from seeking to marry across this social barrier. A few have tried it though especially among the born-again Christians and charismatic groups. Practically no one believes in the deities anymore.

9. A widow was considered to be in ritual danger until she had performed the cleansing rite, normally after one calendar year. Indulging in sexual relationships was considered a blatant act of indiscipline and one capable of spreading pollution in society.

10. See Edmund Ilogu, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-126. The 24 "commandments" as described by Professor Ilogu have been slightly rephrased in some cases for the purpose of clarity and for the benefit of a reader not familiar with the issues covered.

11. I had the occasion to hold hours of discussion of the real import of these injunctions with some very senior citizens of my home community. These people lived through the traditional society as well as the present. They were always glad to draw useful contrasts, sometimes nostalgic and sometimes with gratitude for the changes. Up to the 1930s and 1940s these laws were largely intact. Among the people I talked with were Nze Agwulonu, Samuel Asagwara Njoku, Peter Chima, David Nwachukwu, and my father Raphael Onyeocha Chukwu. These were very knowledgeable people. Most of them have now passed away in their 80s. The explanations that follow are a fruit of the insights gathered from the discussions that spanned from 1977 through 1987.

12. Jesus' opponents cynically attributed his miraculous deeds to the power of Beelzebub the prince of devils [Mt 12:24-27] and he reproached them for attributing the work of God to the agency of the devil.

13. The laws of nature presuppose the author of nature itself with whom there is no discussion or dispute, but before whom there is to be unquestioning obedience.

14. S.F. Nadel, *The Black Byzantium* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 165. The incest taboo is still very strong in contemporary Nigeria. The Western legal system would recognize marriage as valid within the third degree of consanguinity but in most parts of Nigeria so long as any blood relationship could be traced between the prospective intendeds, marriage would not be permissible, and sexual union would be considered more or less incestuous according as the relationship is close or remote.

15. *Ibid.*

16. This state of affairs has long ceased to be in vogue.

17. S.M.E. Bengu, *Chasing Gods Not Our Own, Natal*, (Republic of South Africa: Shuter & Shooter Pietermaritzburg, 1975), p. 72.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Flora Nwapa, *Idu*, (London: Heinemann Publishers, 1987), pp. 34-41.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (London: Heinemann Publishers, 1987), p. 106.

Cosmetic slimness was not particularly appreciated in Nigerian women. Preference was for the plump, rounded figure that was considered evidence of good living. Lanky women were thought to be the nagging type who, because of ceaseless inner conflict of soul were unable to derive proper nourishment from the food they ate.

22. "A woman shall be saved by childbearing", wrote St. Paul to Timothy. *I Timothy 2:15*.

23. John Munonye, *Obi* (London: Heinemann Publishers, 1987), p. 99.

24. *Ibid.*

25. It was possible for women to have concubines, especially if they were widowed. This was not reckoned as adultery. The concubine provided for the woman, maintained her hut, did the masculine jobs in her farm, and was a source of emotional and physical support and protection. If any children resulted from the liaison they bore the deceased's name and not that of the concubine. For more on the phenomenon of concubinage in its institutionalized form see Victor Uchendu, "Concubinage among Ngwa Igbo of Southern Nigeria," *Africa*, vol XXXV No. 2 (1965), pp. 187-197.

26. James M. Hake, *Child-Rearing Practices in Northern Nigeria* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972), p. 39.

27. *Ibid.*

28. See John Kambalame, *et al; Our African Way of Life*, translated by Cullen Young & Hastings Banda (United Society for Christian Literature, London & Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1946), pp. 48-54.

29. See E.A. Ade Adegbola, ed., *Traditional Religion in West Africa* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Daystar Press, 1983), pp. 34-45.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

34. *Ibid.*

35. The entire citation reads: "I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," (Galatians 2:19b-20a).

36. At about the age of seven a boy was considered too old to remain an inmate of the parental hut. See Kambalame, p. 50, note. This is hardly surprising since in traditional Nigeria, once a child was seven years of age he was treated almost as an adult and often would be

brusquely reprimanded for misconduct: "You are not going back to your mother's womb, are you?" It was not uncommon to procure wives for 9 year-olds who gradually grew into it.

37. See Instructions for 12-14 year old lads, number 5.

38. E.W. Smith, *Knowing the African*, p. 138.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 157-158.

40. In the first few lines of exchange the storyteller (S) begins by calling on the participants' (P) attention the same way as a fan solicits a roar of support by shouting "Hip-hip-hip!" which promptly draws the response: "Hurray!

S: *Takwru chee!* (This means nothing specifically beyond the onomatopoeic sound that draws a response).

P: *Eeh!*

S: *Takwru chee!*

P: *Eeh!*

S: *Ote elu o na-ete Opete?*

P: *Mba!* . . . etc.

41. Opete is a flimsy, pulpy, leguminous reed that crumbles under the slightest pressure. The accents are here supplied to aid pronunciation.

42. See Chapter Seven for details on *iju ogu*.

43. See Simon & Phoebe Ottenberg, eds., *Cultures and Societies of Africa* (New York: Random House, 1960), p. 452.

44. V.C. Uchendu, *The Ibo of South Eastern Nigeria* (London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1985), p. 17.

45. The host should draw his own inference. If he feels he has been misunderstood he could either approach the guest and explain himself or invite the neighbors, state his case, and make a public declaration of his innocence of any wrongdoing or bad intentions. Following his declaration special ceremonies are performed that restore communion between him, his former guest, and the community. (Woe to him, however, if his declarations prove to be false, for his ostracism by the community would become total!).

The usual reasons for rejecting such victuals range from the host being perceived as guilty of either doubledealing, tendency to perjury, known tendency to apply poisons in foods for those he disagrees with or fears or hates, scandalous living, e.g., being associated with incestuous conduct. This includes any sexual activities involving people of the same village since people of the same village are considered blood relations and are not supposed to be sexually involved with each other.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Alec Vidler, ed., *Soundings* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 81.

48. J.A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God*, p. 106

49. J.D. Mabbott, *An Introduction to Ethics* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1986), p. 39.

## CHAPTER VII

# THE POVERTY OF CHRISTIAN INDIVIDUALIST MORALITY AND AN AFRICAN ALTERNATIVE

THEOPHILUS OKERE

In a document prepared for the workshops of the 1971 Synod of Bishops, a synthesis of the general debate on Justice in the World reads in part:

How is it that after 80 years of modern social teaching and 2000 years of the gospel of love the Church has to admit her inability to make more impact upon the conscience of her people. . . . It was stressed again and again that the faithful, particularly the more wealthy and comfortable among them, simply do not see structural social injustice as sin. They simply feel no personal responsibility for it and feel no obligation to do anything about it. Sunday observance, the Church's rules on sex and marriage tend to enter the Catholic consciousness profoundly as sin; but to live like Dives with Lazarus at the gate is not even perceived as sinful.<sup>1</sup>

This frustration, expressed at the level of Christian leadership, confirms what historians, sociologists and others have been observing of the great divorce between religion and public life.

Let us, in the first place, define our use of the terms, religion and public life:

-- *Religion*: For the purposes of this reflection we shall understand religion as the historical, organized religions and, more specifically, Christianity whose numerical superiority and geographical spread qualify it to typify ideally the other religions.

We need to know what difference Christianity, as a religion, makes in the public life of its adherents, individually or in groups, and in society as a whole.

-- *Public Life*: Public life can mean: (a) the public section of an individual's life, that is, one's relation to others especially beyond the level of family; (b) the entire life of the community itself, whether this community is a group, village or country, or the world community; (c) the area of inter-subjective interaction and the locus of decisions on what touches the whole.

Our usage shall include these three levels of meaning while distinguishing them. By public life we shall mean especially the moral quality of that life. We ask whether religion makes or has made any difference in the ability of people to act justly toward one another in building a just and peaceful human society.

At the end we shall see that the Christian religion, on account of constraints imposed on it both by the environment and by its own deliberate choices, has tended to have its highest moral influence on the private lives of its individual adherents, less influence on the public life of these same individuals and the least influence on public life understood as the life of the community or society. By championing a consistently and thoroughly individualistic morality, Christianity has deprived the public stage of the immense benefits of its moral vision. But, as we shall try to demonstrate, a communitarian morality such as obtains in many African cultures seems better equipped to correct the imbalances of the individualistic immorality of modern society.

### **THE POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN PUBLIC LIFE--THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION**

Religion expresses itself in many forms, which include creed, ritual or liturgy, and morality. In a well-articulated theology all these elements can be seen to be interconnected and even

integrated, hence an understanding of one element often sheds light on another. However, for the purposes of this essay we may pass over other elements and concentrate on its moral component as the most direct link between religion and society. It is not that the others are less important. For instance, as a belief system, no one will doubt that Christianity has generated and promoted values which today are part of the proud legacy of civilization. This has been made possible because the values so inculcated have been internalized as ideals and models for life.

Through reading the scriptures and spiritual works, sermons, retreats, catechisms, pastoral letters and other forms of catechesis, ideals of behavior have been upheld and models proposed--especially those of Jesus himself, and the various saints--which have had profound effect on people and lasting influence on their private lives. Through such exhortations to virtue and putting of powerful models and ideals before the people, it has contributed indirectly but immensely to setting the moral tone of society.

By setting up institutions like monasteries where these ideals are "realized" it has been possible to put a Christian stamp on the surrounding culture. Religion with its emphasis on the otherworldly dimension contains a decisive spiritual element which accounts for values that are perceived to be lasting and universal. These values often appear in secular garb, such as liberty, equality and fraternity, but often they retain their root meaning and continue to give regenerative energy to the lives of peoples and nations.

Finally, in the last hundred years the Christian church has most noticeably been fulfilling its prophetic role in pleading for social justice in an impressive series of papal encyclicals on the social question, beginning from Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*.

Nevertheless none of these forms of religious influence or intervention in public life would make up, either singly or together, for the lack of an appropriate morality or a Christian ethics of public life. Their collective inadequacy has been made painfully obvious as the tragedies of this century discredit morality and oblige us to look for other solutions.

Exhortations to virtue based on gospel values do not carry the same force as commandments against evil. What seems to be decisive in determining the influence of a religious morality cannot come merely as ideals, models and exhortations to good behavior, essential as these are for personal holiness and for injecting a vague religiosity into a culture. What is needed is rather commandments, prohibitions and the prescription of minimally acceptable behavior backed up with moral sanction, in other words, raising these issues to matters of conscience, sin and punishment. Beliefs, values, ideals, exhortations must be translated into a binding moral code if they are to influence public life from a moral point of view.

Secondly and more importantly, modern society seems to be advancing in the direction of greater helplessness on the part of the individual in effecting any change or having any decisive influence on what happens in society. Even as he thinks himself never so free, the individual finds himself ever so impotent that he can do almost nothing with his freedom. The decisions that matter in public life are taken, most of the time, at the level of corporate and governmental responsibility.

Now, private religious morality has been developed in view of purely individual action. But if such individual action is proving increasingly irrelevant to public life, then religious morality is also that much irrelevant to public life. This seems to indicate that what may be needed is rather a religious morality of public action, a morality of collective action.

Thirdly, it is by now clearly doubtful whether the aggregate of religiously influenced private lives could add up to a religiously influenced public life; whether a morality designed for the individual's private life is transferable and cumulatively effective at the public level; whether the

behavior of a society as a whole will become automatically and totally good if every individual obeys the ten commandments.

Yet something like such an atomistic view of society, and also of morality, seems to have inspired the massive optimism by which Christianity historically has concentrated its moral theological/ethical effort on the individual's life in the vain hope that public life thereby would be sufficiently provided for.

But over and above individual actions, in public life there would still remain an important residue of actions for which no one individual alone would be liable or could claim responsibility, no one except the corporate persona as a whole. As is often the case, here also the whole seems to be something more than the sum of its parts.

## **THE FAILURE OF CHRISTIANITY IN PUBLIC LIFE**

That the Christian religion has failed to influence public life significantly in the sense and the direction of the Gospel is an understatement. The confession of failure credited to the 1971 Synod of Bishops mentioned earlier is borne out fully by the following random list of acts that have been perpetrated by Christian peoples in recent history:

(a) The Atlantic Slave Trade which entailed the degradation of fellow human beings of the black race to mere chattel and objects of merchandise, a trade carried on for centuries by Christian peoples and nations with moral impunity and, at times with ecclesiastical blessing.

(b) Colonialism that is the usurpation of the freedom and sovereignty of weaker peoples; the violence, the wars and the ethnocides that made possible colonial occupation; the partition and sharing of whole continents such as Africa like a cake among Christian states.

(c) Machtpolitik, Realpolitik or power politics in the service of pure national interest; war as a tool of foreign policy.

(d) Unjust trade terms which involve the manipulation of prices, debts and currencies and the imposition of barriers to perpetuate the impoverishment of the poor.

(e) Genocides in Christian history notably those against the American Indians, the Australian Aborigines and the Holocaust of six million Jews and others. In this category one must add the reckless and still unrepented destruction by the atom bomb of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

(f) The continued waste of the world's resources in the production of armaments.<sup>2</sup>

The implied indictment of the Christian religion on its failure as represented by these evils of the public life is not to say that some Christians or even the Christian leadership were in complicity or did not protest evil. Often enough they did, if often belatedly. Rather, that these crimes took place at all in a Christian dispensation, that they were perpetrated by Christians who might pass for saints in their private lives, that is the tragedy. Also, it is bad enough that any one of these crimes took place by way of a strange exception, but that so many and even more happened in the very bosom of Christianity must indicate a serious absence of the Christian code at this level of events.

It is not only a list of failures that is alarming, but the general impression of failure of the Christian religion in public life. Speaking in the case of the United States of America Harold J. Laski's verdict, even if biased, is pertinent:

All in all, it is true to say that the influence of Christianity in the United States is everywhere pervasive without being anywhere generally profound. . . . To this, I think, there must be added the important fact that the pervasiveness of the churches, Roman Catholic as well as Protestant, comes in a large degree from the subtle compromise they have made with the world, rather than from a defiant proclamation of their doctrine. They have not been able seriously to compete with the growing secularization of American life.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly half a century since Laski's assessment and despite increased visibility--religion being everywhere pervasive'the subtle compromise' has assured the effective marginalization of Christianity, not only in the U.S., but worldwide.

### **THE PRIVATIZATION OF RELIGION**

Religion has always understood itself to be a way of life, and whenever it is left free fully to express itself, encompasses the whole of man's life--private and public, individual and communal. To exclude religion from any major area of life would amount to a major, disabling amputation which would reduce drastically its effectiveness and indeed distort its meaning.

To a great extent what explains the failure of Christianity is the phenomenon of the privatization of religion. This is the gradual reduction of the jurisdiction of religion from the whole of life, private and public, to only the private and individual arena. With the privatization of religion Christianity became effectively neutralized, since its competence was limited to the private life and conscience of its adherents, while the public arena, the vast and growing area of social, economic and political affairs that daily touch the lives and shape the destinies of millions remained a prohibited, no-entry area for the Christian conscience. This eclipse of religion from public life created the twilight zone of amorality and set the stage for the compromises and accommodation with the intolerable situations of injustice and inhumanity documented above. Robert N. Bellah aptly remarks: "To the extent that privatization succeeded, religion was in danger of becoming like the family 'a heaven in a heartless world,' but one that did more to reinforce that world, by caring for its casualties, than to challenge its assumptions."<sup>4</sup>

Commentators variously have attributed the privatization of religion--depending on the country--to the Enlightenment and the French revolution, to the disestablishment of the churches, to liberal rationalism and secularization, to persecution by atheistic Communism, to growing pluralism and relativism, to the modern industrial civilization, to the insidious new religion of materialism, to hedonism and to consumerism.

Without denying these links and causalities, one might yet insist that its ancestry must be traced along a route which goes beyond the enlightenment to take in the settlement of the wars of religion: *cuius regio eius religio* implying a regionalization of religious affiliation; and indeed back to the Pandora's box of the Protestant Reformation: *sola scriptura, scriptura sui interpretis* allowing for a purely personal competence in the interpretation of Scripture and, of course, deciding for oneself what was right or wrong.

Through these events Christianity lost its earlier visibility and the ascendancy it had won, for instance, in a Hildebrand or an Innocent III. The gains of the Constantinian revolution were once again reversed and a retreat to the catacombs left the public square once again naked.

### **THE PRIVATIZATION OF MORALITY**

Deeper and older than the privatization of religion, is the privatization of morality itself. Not only was religion denied the right of citizenship in public and, as it were, put under house arrest in the world of the individual believer, but even there the Christian morality deriving from it seemed fatally designed to have no effect on public life. By its own historic option, all Christian morality has ever been targeted on the individual conscience. Its laws, and, its commandments, are for the individual to obey, its sanctions, rewards and punishments go to the individual. It is conceived to make the individual holy, not to make society just. In the received tradition of Christian morality the group cannot posit a human act, cannot sin, cannot go to heaven or hell; morally, the group simply does not exist. And if the major actors in public life today tend, as we have seen, not to be individuals but rather corporate bodies, governments, cabinets, alliances, cartels or multinationals, it becomes clear that the acts of these bodies, even though carrying enormous consequences for the destinies of millions, may be regarded even as outside morality, perhaps even as acts of God. In that case Christian morality which is at least useful to the individual in his private life, proves doubly irrelevant to the events of public life.

Thus, these events seem both to lack their own specific morality and also to lie beyond good and evil. From this position it is but one step to bracketing out from morality even the public aspects and consequences of our private life. For instance the authors of *Ethics in a Business Society*, commenting on the behavior of businessmen could say:

The part religion plays in decisions taken in business is precious little at least at the conscious level. . . . It was not that they were irreligious. Many of them were churchgoers. It was simply that their religious experience did not seem to be relevant to the problems confronting them in making their living. Religion is something to one side, a social experience that is sometimes consoling and pleasant, but one that does not strike very deep.<sup>5</sup>

The privatization of morality itself is a more serious problem than the privatization of religion. The latter is something to which religion has been subjected by historical circumstances and seems capable of being reversed if those circumstances are reversed or significantly modified. But the privatization of Christian morality has been embedded in the pedagogy that transmits this morality from one generation to the next. Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* which has contributed immeasurably in shaping the moral thought of Christendom keeps ethics within the realm of personal individual behavior and virtue while politics becomes a discourse on the various forms of constitution for civil government. On the merits or demerits of the acts of collectivities, whether those acts can be moral or immoral, or even whether these categories have any meaning at that level, Aristotle leaves no clue, and no one seems to have bothered.

The very existence of communal or corporate personality or self-hood that could be the subject of responsible acts was barely even articulated in this tradition, except in legal fiction through the concept of moral personality. Now and again popular notions like the guilt of the Jews or that of the Germans or that of the Americans gained some currency, and in fact the Germans have followed this up with reparations to Israel, but the ethics of corporate action and responsibility as such has never been developed.<sup>6</sup>

The result has been a lopsided development of the Christian moral conscience--a sensitive and often guilt-ridden individual conscience existing side by side with a collective conscience that is more or less amoral and insensitive. It was especially in this atmosphere that the national



sovereign states of the Christian West developed, defining their goals as the pursuit of national self-interest and their sovereignty as non-accountability to any power beyond themselves. Within these states *raison d'état* made them infallible, while interstate relations were marked by rivalry and the spirit of Realpolitik. Machiavelli was perhaps more the faithful, if cynical, chronicler of the spirit of the actual events of his age than the ruthless strategist coldly prescribing immoral principles for the successful future prince, as he has been presented to posterity.

Inevitably, war became the means of settling right and wrong, and might came to be identified with right. It is this morality or the lack of it that explains most of the negative events that mark the history of Christendom and of its culture.

Against this background I wish to present a different approach to the problem from the point of view of African religion and suggest that if Christianity could graft this element of corporate responsibility into what is a very impressive heritage, it could exert greater influence for good in the public life of the world community.

Unfortunately, the history of Christianity in Africa has been only a one-sided history of giving and a disdain of receiving. But as John Taylor has well observed:

There are many who feel that the spiritual sickness of the West which reveals itself in the divorce of the sacred from the secular, of the cerebral from the instinctive, and in the loneliness and homeless-ness of individualism, may be healed through a recovery of the wisdom which Africa has not yet thrown away. The world church awaits something new out of Africa.<sup>7</sup>

If Christianity can learn from other religions and cultures it will see elements from other religions that can not only widen its appeal but also help it to improve its ability to meet the problems of relevance to public life. In Africa religion contains such an element.

## **CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA**

The currently surviving Christianity came into sub-Saharan Africa in the 19th century. The historic circumstance was the drive for colonies which occasioned the scramble for Africa by European powers in search of raw materials and markets in the wake of their industrial revolution and following the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. After agreeing on a peaceful partition of the continent in Berlin in 1884 the colonial powers dispatched to their respective colonies their soldiers and administrators, their traders and their missionaries. French, British or German missionaries, even of the same religious Congregations, followed their own national flags: *cuius regio eius religio* came into operation once more. The missionaries themselves came simultaneously with, or immediately followed, the brutal military expeditions which frequently were necessary to subjugate a recalcitrant tribe. This compromising association, in addition to the missionaries' conceptual baggage of the reigning evolutionary philosophy and sense of civilizing mission among savages, weighed heavy on their work.

Nonetheless, Christianity generally got a sympathetic hearing and made significant impact among the people, if I may use the example of the Igbo of Nigeria. This success it owes especially to the para-missionary strategies it adopted, such as investment in men and resources in the educational and medical fields. This was a veritable revolution. Education gave literacy which gave the power of book knowledge, of new jobs, of new status. Modern medicine was also dramatic in its short-term results of restoring good health and checking epidemics, and even more effective in the long-term result of surreptitiously undermining the religious theory of disease by the introduction of the germ theory.

Of course, Christianity also relied on its own intrinsic appeal as a new message of hope to humanity, but the people were not persuaded by argument that it was a better account of the meaning of life or a better way of relating to God and their ancestors, or a better technique for coping with life, than their traditional religion. The adult male population remained on the whole faithful to their old religion, while conversions were more numerous among women and children. The schools which were popular as the key to a place in the new dispensation became also the missionaries' paramount instrument of evangelization as they looked forward to Christianizing the future, having despaired of converting the present adults. By and large, the Igbo mission became numerically at least perhaps the most spectacular success story of the African missions in the 20th century.

The mutual suspicion between the missionaries and the adult population assured that there was no dialogical encounter between the two religions. Rather the missionaries finally took refuge in the massive condemnation and rejection of the traditional religion with all that this implied for the culture with which that religion had lived and interacted in a millenary symbiosis.

The religion to religion encounter that never was might have shown that African traditional religion was not all witchcraft and sorcery, or the work of the devil.

## **AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION (IGBO)**

It is part of the lot of Africa that even its traditional religion, which is the fruit of ages of complex development, is often passed over in silence like another empty leaf in the book of world religions. But that oblivion, caused mainly by prejudice and ignorance, does not take away its reality or validity.

African traditional religion is the home-grown religion of the black man in Africa. Since it lacks a scripture, it has developed many variant local features, but the basics seem to be the same. A monotheism in the sense of belief in the one supreme God supported by an array of created spirits God's powerful agents, the ancestors or the spirits of dead forbears forms the core of the belief system. Furthermore, there is belief in God's authorship of life and belief in his providence and guidance of human destiny. There is a theory of reincarnation and a moral code which punishes bad behavior and rewards the good here in this life.

In Igbo traditional religion God himself is remote but frequently uses the spirits to intervene in human affairs; He is particularly present in every individual by the indwelling of the *chi*, God's double or man's guardian spirit and personal spirit of destiny.

A priesthood takes care of worship, sacrifice and festivals. A divination system interprets the wishes of the spirits when they intervene; this is perfected in the oracles that pronounce hidden knowledge and adjudicate justice among litigants where the oath-swearing system proves inconclusive.

Morality, which almost invariably has a social dimension, is in the control of the earth goddess *alawho* who is also the goddess of the major social group the village. She provides the sanctions of the moral code presiding over the peace and punishing offenders. Certain special offenses are offenses against *ala*.

## **MORALITY**

The moral code consists of a limited number of prohibitions: murder, incest, marriage within any traceable degree of consanguinity, adultery, theft, sorcery or witchcraft.

Positively it is enunciated in the well known and oft-quoted Igbo equivalent of the Biblical Golden Rule:

*Egbe bere ugo bere nke si ibe ya ebela nku kwaaya* Let the kite as well as the eagle have the right to perch (on the branch), and a curse (a broken wing) on whomever denies that right to the other!

The code is protected by the earth goddess and serious infringements are regarded as abominations requiring ritual cleansing and involving the community whose well-being is thus threatened. Sin and guilt are not seen as the concern of the individual alone: he or she may be the really guilty one, but is also the one in whom all have sinned (*in quo omnes peccaverunt*).

## THE DIALECTIC OF INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

The rugged individualism that seems to characterize the present cultures of the West has given rise to a fresh interest in societies that have a different dynamic. It is a fact that Western society was not always so, given the facts that we know for instance about Germanic societies as described by Tacitus in his *Germania* or ancient documents such as *Beowulf* or *The Battle of Maldon*. It is probable that Christian influence with its emphasis on individual sin, guilt and salvation, along with later liberal philosophies, have helped to shape the present.

One has to be careful however not to exaggerate the opposition between individualist societies and communitarian societies. In the final analysis it is a matter of degree for, even in the most individualistic of societies, the existence of armies and patriotic forces ready to risk or sacrifice their lives for the common good shows clearly that there will always be limits to individualism. In the same way, the fact that in most communitarian societies the individual could choose freedom and autonomy, even in ostracism and asylum, means also that the individual always will have his say as a person. It is therefore in the main, a matter of degree, although there is a better balance between the individual and community in the so-called communitarian setup.

Here, the individual is always and in the first place a member of his community, first of the extended family, then of kindred, the village, the town, enlarging conceptually to clan, tribe and nation. Though the Igbo is an extremely republican society having no feudal-type rulers, and though direct democracy reigned in Igbo hamlets for centuries before white colonial rule, the Igbo is a man defined by his community. He understands his identity in and through his community and finds therein his fulfillment. Reciprocally, the community regards the individual as its own; it does not leave him alone: his successes and failures are its.

John Daly has justly pointed out the relatively recent origin of the exaggerated individualist-personalist thinking which ever more and more seems to characterize Western and Christian philosophy and theology. By contrast, he writes:

The great majority of the peoples of the world think in collectivist, rather than in personalist, terms. It is characteristic of people in collectivist societies to regard the individual as a differentiated part of society, while the West sees society as a plurality of individuals. "If the foot were to say 'I am not the hand, and so I do not belong to the body' would that mean it stopped belonging to the body?"

Up to the 16th century, even in Europe, writers on society looked upon it and not metaphorically as a body. In Asia and Africa today, man as an individual finds his meaning and

identity rather as a member of a group than as an individual. In collectivist societies the life of the individual is so inseparably bound up with that of society as a whole that it has little claim to independent validity. Thought and conduct are to a large extent determined by the community, by its laws and customs. A man tends to be guided by the collective conscience of his group. He is not as conscious of personal guilt as he is of shame. He is less dependent on personal moral decisions and more on the laws and sanctions of the community.<sup>8</sup>

Without derogating from the uniqueness or the personality of the individual, it is fair to say that the community is part of his essence. But it would be as untrue to conclude that the individual thereby loses his identity as to think that the community has no identity at all. The individual is inserted in community. His individualism is thereby qualified, bounded and limited, but by the same token it is supported, enriched, given a direction and bearing. In Igbo society, the *Chi* principle, recognized as the principle of individuality, achievement and destiny, counteracts or rather interacts correctively with the We of society or community. Thus in the subtle dialectic between individual and community, there is independence of the individual, there is dependence on the community, and there is interdependence of each on the other. None is perceived as less important or more dispensable; each is regarded as an integral part of the human condition.

It is in the light of this dialectic between individual and community that Daly reports that in contrast with the practice of secret, auricular confession which the missionaries introduced into the Igbo community, there are traditional public shaming rituals designed to expiate for sins of incest, theft, adultery, etc. with public admission of guilt followed by a sacrifice of reconciliation.<sup>9</sup>

A "modernized" version of this shaming ritual was used in the late 50s in Owerri Division when sins of theft, robbery, poisoning and homicide which had been committed in secret even several decades earlier were voluntarily and openly confessed. This would take place under oath to the Ofo, the symbol of truth believed to instantly kill any perjurers and before the entire community numbering several hundreds. This was how the ritual acquired the curious name of *imevotevoting* someone: a crowd gathered as for someone's election to office but really to be witnesses of his disgrace. At the end, however, the culprit/penitent would pay a fine to become finally reconciled to his community. But, government saw fit to order a stop to this most effective and purifying law and order institution.

Guilt is therefore not only an individual personal affair, but it is shared. The proverb says that if one finger gets dipped into palm oil, all the other fingers are inescapably involved. A community would quite possibly expiate with sacrifice some guilt, incurred long ago by a dead ancestor. The Igbo would have no particular problem with the idea of original sin. Furthermore, group communal punishment was meted to communities that have either collectively offended or condoned serious crimes or were incorrigibly crime-ridden. Ostracism of such a community or village by the larger community or town is not unknown; indeed it is such group excommunications that forced a number of communities to migrate and seek new homes well away from their ancestral homeland.

## CONCLUSION

The example of the Igbo has been taken to give some hint on the working of a non-individualist religious morality. What is important is not the details, but the idea of collective sin and collective guilt committed and incurred by a collectivity, a community that has a selfhood

transcending that of its component individuals. Because it alone, and not the individual, performs certain acts in the public arena, it must be equipped with a conscience to be able to take responsibility for those acts.

Christianity has not exerted the good influence it might have had on public life essentially because as a religion it has been absent from public life. This absence has been due partly to the increasing privatization to which it was condemned by a series of historical events and its subsequent devaluation as a factor in society. But it was also due to a self-imposed silence in-built in its moral code regarding the public zone whereas morality was precisely the one single Archimedean point whence it could most effectively have gotten a hold on public life. The basic flaw of Christian morality has been the absence of the public sector. By its one-sided preoccupation with personal, individual holiness and salvation--owing to its individualist conception of man--and by its own individualistic morality Christianity already abdicated its responsibility to public life long before it was chased out of it by the agents of privatization.

However, reflection since Vatican II has brought to the fore the concept of structured social sin. This is designed to help morality to include those institutions, structures and systems of social organization whose very functioning works to the detriment of some elements in society. Still it remains to locate the responsibility for such social sin and to articulate the type of selfhood that is able to carry the weight of this moral responsibility.<sup>10</sup> After the recognition of structural sin, it is time also to recognize collective sin as more than just a metaphor--sins in politics and economics, sins committed by governments and companies in the name of peoples and shareholders. It is time to acknowledge collective guilt for past crimes and then to build up a collective conscience that would inhibit the future reoccurrence of these crimes.

The concept of corporate responsibility or conscience can help Christian morality offset the extreme moral individualism which leaves the most heinous crimes on earth today--most of them corporate crimes--with no acknowledged authors.

## NOTES

1. J. A. Coleman, ed., *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought: Celebration and Change* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 306.

2. To mention only some of the weapons systems used in the gulf war, a tomahawk missile cost \$1,116,000; the Patriot anti-ballistic missile, \$892,800; the F-14 Tomcat fighter plane, \$44,640,000; a Tornado fighter plane \$52,080,000; an AWACS radar plane, \$90,024,000; the radar-evading F-117 Stealth fighter plane, \$96,720,000; an Apache helicopter, \$8,928,000; an Abrams M-1 tank, \$3,720,000; and a Challenger tank, \$7,440,000. It is a question of wasting immense wealth that could and should be used to eliminate the poverty of the millions of people dying of hunger. Culled from *Modern War and Christian Conscience: La Civiltà Cattolica in Moral Issues and Christian Response*, edited by P. T. Jersild and D. A. Johnson (New York: Holt Rinehard & Winston, Inc., 1993).

3. Harold J. Laski, *The American Democracy* (New York: Viking, 1948), p. 296.

4. R. N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 224.

5. M.W. Childs and D. Cater, *Ethics in a Business Society* (New York: Harper, 1954), p. 94.

6. One notable exception is the new thinking represented by the book by Larry May, *The Morality of Groups, Collective Responsibility, Group-based Harm, and Corporate Rights* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987). The author's avowed aim is to try to fill the gap in ethics caused by the exclusive concern with individual, personal acts. However, such

efforts continue to remain a purely speculative exercise, more interesting to professional philosophers than relevant in public policy and behavior.

7. John Taylor, *Primal Vision* (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 108.

8. J. Daly, C.S.Sp., "Caught between Cultures," *African Ecclesiastical Review*, 17 (No.2; 1975), p. 94.

9. J. Daly, "Incarnation of Christianity in a Local Culture," *African Ecclesiastical Review*, 17 (No. 6; 1975), 328-329.

10. Karen J. Torjesen, "Public Ethics and Public Selfhood, The Hidden Problems" in *Ethics, Religion and the Good Society*, edited by Joseph Runzo (Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 110.

**CHAPTER VIII**  
**NAMES AS BUILDING BLOCKS OF AN AFRICAN**  
**PHILOSOPHY**  
THEOPHILUS OKERE

In traditional Igbo life, there is a lot in a name. The name is more than just a tag or a convenient badge of identity. Many an Igbo man has been more than slightly amused at foreign colonial officials, merchants or missionaries bearing such names as Col. Winterbottom, Lt. Halfpenny, Mr. Ball, David Livingstone or Dinglefoot. The missionaries presented a menu of names that has remained a rich repertoire of jokes for years. Frs. Baker, Jordan, Sheppard and Kilbride one could deal with. But what if in a cluster of rural missions you concentrate priests with the names of Frs. Wolfe, Lyon, Fox and Rabbitte or another group answering Frs. Curtin, Pillow, Door and Carton? Simple villagers have amused themselves without end rehearsing the often hilarious permutations and combinations of these names. They might imagine Wolfe and Lyon paying a courtesy visit to Sheppard and how the host got so alarmed that he quickly ordered his assistants, Lamb and Rabbitte to hide behind Curtin, cover their heads with Pillow, their feet with Carton and take a stand just at the back of Door!

That the people poke fun at these names shows that they consider it strange that human beings should bear the same names as do animals, property and even anatomical parts. For except in the case of sobriquets, nicknames and attention-begging aliases, Igbo names always bear a message, a meaning, a history, a record or a prayer. This is also to say that they embody a rich mine of information on the people's reflection and considered comment on life and reality. They provide a window into the Igbo world of values as well as their peculiar conceptual apparatus for dealing with life. Obviously their range of application spans the whole of life itself and in a study of this nature, one can do no more than select a few examples.

The purpose of this study is to attempt to tease out the meaning from a select number of Igbo common and contemporary names. The names studied here are used most commonly in the Owerri area of Imo State, which, due to its geographic centrality and strategic position in the inter-Igbo communications network, enjoys more than average representativeness. By examining the literal meanings of the names and interpreting them in the normal historical and existential context in which they arise, one can obtain a finer picture of the world of ideas and ideals peculiar to this culture. They reveal the way in which the individual Igbo and, by extrapolation, man in this culture assesses life, nature, history and events and the human condition generally.

One of the earliest written comments on the peculiarity and deep philosophical import of Igbo names was made by the British colonial officer, Major Arthur Glynn Leonards in his "The Lower Niger and its Tribes". He notes that:

In nothing, not even in their customs, can we grasp the natural and ancestral conception so plainly as in these names which invoke, promise, threaten, praise, revile, satirize and sympathize, that in fact express and demonstrate all that is human, that is, all that is best and worst in them.<sup>1</sup>

In this society name-giving is a significant ceremony performed on the occasion of circumcision or when the mother officially ends the post-natal period of enclosure (*omugwo*).<sup>2</sup> The privilege of name-giving is generally reserved to the parents and grandparents whom it gives an opportunity to express the importance of the child in their lives or in general, to make a significant statement on their life experience, and to express deep-felt wishes or their future hopes and expectations for the child.

## A STATEMENT OF MEANING: LIFE AND DEATH, GOD AND DESTINY

### *History*

But there are categories of name. One frequently used category is simply to name the child after the day that it was born. Thus from the four-day Igbo week made up of Orie, Afor, Nkwo and Eke, we have such names as Okere, Okorie, Okoye, Okafor, Okorafor, Nwafor, Nwankwo Okonkwo, Okereke, Okeke and Nweke for males. The corresponding female names would be Mgbere, Mgbafor, Mgbakwo and Mgbekwe. In modern times this has spilled into names like Sunday, Monday, Friday apparently only reserved for males.

Names also make historical statements. Nwaorgu--Son of War--designates some one born in wartime; Nwigwe, Nwachukwu are names of boys whose conception and birth are attributed to the intervention of the great oracles Igwekala of Umunoha and Chukwuabiam of Arochukwu.

Another category of names is the group designating the order of primogeniture in both the male and female lines in the family. Opara is the first born male whereas in the female line the first is Ada, the second Ulu and the third is Ibari.

### *Girls' Names*

A good proportion of the names given to girls is usually metaphorical, in praise and appreciation of their beauty. Parents would want the world to know that their baby girl is the paragon of beauty and, accordingly, may name her after one of the best known symbols of beauty in nature and art:

*Osamma*--The beautiful squirrel  
*Akwugo*--The eagle's egg  
*Oduenyi*--The elephant's tusk or ivory  
*Nwugbala*--The baby egret  
*Nwugo*--The baby eagle  
*Nwuhie*--The calmwood baby  
*Ugomma*--The eagle of beauty  
*Nwulari*--The baby in silk  
*Nwogazi*--The baby guinea-fowl  
*Nwancha*--The soap girl (washed clean)  
*Udara*--The peach (udara) fruit.

Others may choose to celebrate in more poetic language the impact of their little girl's beauty:

*Nwaekuruele*Beauty that compels moping  
*Olujeigbo*The Igbo will strain their necks staring at your beauty  
*Mbelugbo*Destined for the glories of the motor car  
*Ngwanze*The adornment of the noble  
*Nwuloaku*Child of the house of goods  
*Nwigbe*Child worthy of a boxfull of goods



*Nwobiarangadiyamma* One who has come into the home she loves.  
*Statement of Life Experience*

But the vast majority of names given to babies are really abbreviated statements of meaning and significance, interpretations of life's experience or of events in the history of the family. At times the name indicates that the birth of the child is a welcome landmark in the parents' lives especially after a long wait for a baby:

*Iheanacho*--What we have been looking for  
*Ihentuge*--What I have been searching for  
*Akujuobi*--something to sooth the mind  
*Nwaruoulo*--May a child at last reach this house  
*Nwagugbulam*--May I not die of child-hunger

In other instances the child's arrival is used as an occasion to boast and make statements of triumph over misfortune or of vindication over gossiping neighbors:

*Egejuru*--I have heard enough  
*Ikegwuonu*--Let the mouth get tired and quit talking  
*Onyekwere*--Who would have believed it?  
*Ndukagba*--Let the detractors at last leave me in peace  
*Onukwugha* and *Akagha*--The mouth that spoke ill should now recant

Or it may be cast in the form of a prayer to indicate that the child's birth is an answer to such prayer against odds:

*Ahamefula*--May my name not be lost  
*Ugwuagbanwa*--Hatred and ill-will cannot prevent my getting a child  
*Chiekwelaibekam*--May God forbid that my peers surpass me  
*Amarachi*--God's favor  
*Chinyere*--God has given  
Names indicate when the family has had a rough past experience:  
*Soronnadi*--Beware of relations  
*Soribe*--Beware of your peers  
*Onuegbu* and *Akwukwaegbu*--The mouth i.e. detraction and insult cannot kill me  
*Ugwuanya*--Only eye hatred i.e. merely envious and sour looks of hatred cannot harm me  
*Ugwushie*--I am now used to and immune to hatred

A family with a background of conflict with others pleads its innocence and good faith using the arrival of the new child as vindication:

*Oguwunka*--Good faith is, i.e. guarantees old age  
*Oguledo*--It is good faith that keeps me alive  
*Ejiogu*--Having good faith  
*Emenogu*--Acting in good faith  
*Ogugbuaja*--Good faith defeats, i.e. is superior to sacrifice

*Ejimofo*--I have truth and honesty on my side  
*Nwaofor*--Son of, i.e. born under the aegis of, truth and honesty  
*The Kwe Names*

A group of names also reflecting a background of past opposition and animosity voices a promise of greater achievement if only the enemy would give the family a chance:

*Igbokwe*--If only the Igbo, i.e. humanity would let me  
*Ulokwe*--If only my kin would let me  
*Ibekwe*--If only my peers would let me  
*Uwakwe*--If only the world would let me  
*Nnoriekwe*--If Nnorie people would let me  
*Ohakwe*--If the majority would let me

One can see depicted in these names a social atmosphere of distrust and intrigue where people feel frustrated and threatened by others, but also a sense of self-confidence that one can take care of one's life if obstacles are removed.

### *Pro-Child*

Igbo culture is unabashed in its pro-life and pro-child bias as is wellknown to anyone who has studied the issue of polygamy, celibacy, or even illegitimacy in this culture. In appreciation of the blessing or gift of the child (*nwa*) as greater than any other that one could ever wish, we have such names as:

*Ifeyinwa*--There's nothing like a child  
*Nwakaego*--The child is more than money  
*Ginikanwa*--What is greater than a child?  
*Nwakibu*--The child is more than a load of property  
*Nwakuba*--The child is more than riches  
*Nwakuna*The child is more than fame

There are names which show some of the motivation for having children. In guaranteeing posterity and inheritance by one's kin, in perpetuating one's name and in thereby conferring quasi-immortality, offspring acquire a religious and almost divine function. Having children seems to become both a right and a duty. Some such names are:

*Ahamefula*--May my name not be lost  
*Nwaneri*--Only my son will inherit me  
*Nwawulo*--A child guarantees that the home continues (lit. The child is the house)  
*Nwariaku*--May my child inherit my property  
*Nwokokorom*--I lack male children  
*Amaechi*--May the road (house) not be closed (go extinct)  
*Okeahialam*--May I not be deprived of my share or portion

An almost desperate longing for offspring finds a pathetic expression in the name:

*Nwagugbulam*--May I not die of sheer longing (lit. hunger) for a child.

On the other hand, nothing could better expose the *Zeitgeist* of male chauvinism than that a grandfather would give his granddaughter the uncomplimentary name:

*Nwanyimole* What good is a woman?

### *Pro-Life*

Life and death are a privileged pair of concepts in which the Igbo seem to have invested a lot of emotion, convictions, meaning and value. Life (*ndu*) is acclaimed the greatest of all values:

*Ndukaku*--Life is higher than riches

*Ndukuba*--Life is worth more than wealth

*Nduwuisi*--Life is supreme

*Nduawuike*--Being alive is not due to one's strength

*Chijindu*--It is God who holds (sustains) life

*Chikwendu*--May God just let live

*Uzuakpundu*--Life cannot be manufactured by a blacksmith, i.e. is not manmade

*Ndubuizu*--Living or surviving is wisdom

*Ndulaka*--Life will determine, i.e. the future

*Ndukwe*--If life would let me

*Uchendu*--The life-giving thought

*Nnorom ele uwa*--Staying alive and observing the world is better than being dead

*DeathOnwu Names*

On the other side of the spectrum, death (*onwu*) evokes a yet wider range of emotions and thoughts:

*Onwudinjo*--Death is evil

*Onwujialiri*--Death brings dishonor

*Onwuliri*--Death devalues

*Onwugbaramuko*--Death robbed me of pride

*Onwuamaegbu*--Death is a senseless (indiscriminate) killer

*Onwuemelie*--Death has triumphed

*Onwumere*--It is death that has brought me to this

*Onwumelu*--It is death that mars.

*Onwubiko*--Please death! Spare

*Onwuagalaegbula*--Please death! don't kill yet

*Onwuzurike*--Take your time or take a rest death!

*Onwuchekwa*--Death! Just wait a little

Imaginatively envisaging the circumstance in which this name might be appropriately conferred, Leonard writes:

Face to face with the painful and disheartening fact that all the children who were born previous to the arrival of this one had been snatched away from them, and apart from the

inevitable sacrifice and offerings which are duly offered, there is addressed in this name a petition to the spirit of death, which not only begs him to desist, but which implores him to stay his dread hand and spare this offspring, so that it may live and perpetuate the name and substance of the house.<sup>3</sup>

*Onwuha*--Please death! Let go  
*Onwualaezi*--There is no getting death out of the household  
*Onwuzuruigbo*--Death reaches all over Igboland (is universal)  
*Onwuamaenyi*--Death knows no friends  
*Onwuaniibe*--Death accepts no pledge, is implacable  
*Onwuameze*--Death knows no king  
*Onyekonwu*--Who is greater than death?  
*Onwukamuche*--Death is more than I can grasp  
*Ikerionwu*--No strength can overcome death  
*Belonwu*--But for death  
*Ebereonwu*--Can one move death by tears?

The number and rich variety of names based on death, by no means here adequately represented, yield a complex harvest of attitudes and reflections. We should point out that these reflections are demonstrably of a philosophical rather than of a purely religious nature. Death and eschatology are notoriously fluid twilight zones where philosophical and religious thought often become indistinguishable. But in these names the religious perspective seems to recede to the background. Religion covers death with a cloak of optimism and so, in a way, denies death. Because the agenda of religion is necessarily otherworldly in the sense that it deals with relations with beings of a different world than the human one, it looks beyond the event of death. In that way the crushing finality of death for human beings in this world is not fully acknowledged and, to that extent, death is not taken seriously.

The elaborate religious rituals that solemnize funeral ceremonies are all apparently calculated to enhance a belief in a survival that is no longer evident in the mortal remains of a dead relative. These rituals look beyond the corpse; they prepare the dead for the journey to the next life. This next life may be realized in the form of the status of ancestor where the deceased joins the glorious company of the former ancestors of the village, sharing with them a keen interest in the affairs of the living, protecting them, interceding for them and procuring them all sorts of good things, but especially assisting the earth goddess in maintaining peace and justice and the purity of the land. But the next life may also take the form of a return to the present life as a reincarnate to repeat or to amend or else continue one's life here on earth. In either case the fact of death itself is overlooked and attention is diverted to an after death hope of ancestor-ship or reincarnation.

By contrast, Igbo names based on the concept of death take death very seriously. It is seen as crushingly real and final. These names show a hardheaded assessment and recognition of death in all its cruelty and there is no effort to argue it away, to explain it, to ignore it, much less to look beyond it. There is no protest or questioning of human mortality as such, but death is seen as it really is experienced: it dishonors and robs of security and pride; it frustrates and threatens; it is indiscriminate and implacable. Death is ubiquitous, insuperable and omnipotent, so that before its supreme force man, in desperate and total resignation, is reduced to only a meek and futile pleading for a temporary reprieve.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while Igbo religion, like most other religions,

seems to go into death denial by means of its elaborate funeral rituals affirming and assuming continued life after death against the teeth of the evidence, the names of the Igbo bear and affirm death and proclaim purely human and rational, i.e., philosophical rather than theological, reflections and attitudes in the face of this phenomenon.

## GOD

### *The Chi Names*

Another significant area covered by Igbo names is religion as represented by the God or *chi* concept. The name of God in Igbo is *chi*: the supreme God is Chiukwu or Chukwu, the great God, or Chineke, the creator God. *Chi* is also the name of the personal god or double of God within the individual (*chi m*, my own or personal God as it is often referred to), guiding him through life as he works out his destiny. C. K. Meek writes:

One of the most striking doctrines of the Ibo is that every human being has, associated with his personality, a genius or spiritual double known as his *chi*. This conception of a transcendent self is not confined to the Ibo. . . . A man's abilities, faults, and good and bad fortune are ascribed to his *chi*.<sup>5</sup>

But *chi* is not a generic name for gods. It applies only in the two cases just mentioned.<sup>6</sup> The other citizens of the Igbo pantheon are generically known as *muo* or *agbara* or *arusi*--spirits. Even so, there is a long recognized ambiguity in the use of *Chi*. It is not always easy to decide whether in a particular case we are dealing, on the one hand, with the created, personal god and guardian and cooperator in the individual's successes and failures and in working out his destiny, or, on the other hand, whether it refers to Chukwu/Chineke, the supreme but distant creator of all, the famous, withdrawn High God of African anthropological literature. What is clear however is that the two are not identical but similar, coexisting but distinct and with the small *chi* somehow emanating from or participating in the Great *Chi*.

Some have suggested that Igbo culture knew only the personal *chi* before the concept of Chineke/Chukwu was appropriated and popularized by the Christian missionaries. In *The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religious Thought*,<sup>7</sup> Nwoga suggests that Chukwu was the name for the God of the Arochukwu oracle, Chukwu Abiama, and was later promoted by the missionaries to translate their own imported Christian God. But an early missionary, the Portuguese priest J. Alves Correia C.S.Sp who was probably the first to speculate in writing on the possibility that the idea of God was imported into Igboland, only concluded that the Igbo had the same name for God Almighty as the Aros, a small but influential Igbo subgroup--(Chuku était d'ailleurs, aussi le nom donné par la tribu Umuchukwu à leur grande idole.--Furthermore, Chuku was also the name given by the Umuchukwu tribe to their great god.) The idea of God he testifies as obviously indigenous:

"Each time I wanted to inquire from a pure pagan from the bush about who Chuku or Chineke was, I met with a fierce Amam: I don't know. But those pagans who were familiar with white people were very annoyed if it was ever insinuated that they might be ignorant of God's existence, while reserving the right not to be bothered about it."<sup>8</sup>

The evidence of those Igbo names based on *chi*/Chukwu/Chineke indeed supports the view that both idea and name are indigenous. A propos of the missionaries, we should note that their coming is relatively recent and some of these names were evidently already in circulation before their arrival and have continued to be till today. In fact, the only noticeable impact of Christianity

on names is the systematic imposition of the names of foreign saints at baptism. But the baptismal name was always an additional name, coming some time later, at times years after the naming ceremony. Moreover, this ceremony was an out-of-church affair of the extended family, well beyond the influence of the missionary church.

As to the adoption of Chukwu into Igbo parlance, it is gratuitous to suggest that it was the Aro who lent or imposed the name of their God on Igbo theology and not the other way round, or that they necessarily had to have a different supreme God from the rest of the Igbos of which they formed an integral, though admittedly privileged, part. It is rather likely that the concept has its origin in Igbo religious development. From *Chi* the personal god and guardian, it is but a short and natural step to Chi-ukwu (or vice-versa), the great *Chi*, the God creator of all. Not being *muo* or *agbara* and not having altars like the other deities, this god generally is detached and withdrawn from human affairs. The Aro may have, for their own purposes specially appropriated him, given him a cult, a shrine and an oracle that became a Delphi and a Mecca for the Igbo; but they did not create him. The concept and name seem to have been thoroughly, universally and primordially Igbo.

Today there are several names for God the supreme creator, some commonly used all over Igboland, some more commonly used in some parts than in others. In central and eastern Igboland (Delta, Anambra and Abia states), Chukwu is perhaps the most commonly used designation. In Southern Igboland (Imo and Rivers States), Chineke is more typical<sup>9</sup> though Chukwu is nearly as common. Chineke is not a simple concept, but rather a combination of *Chi* (god) and *Eke* (the creator principle), though the mode of combination is not unambiguous. *Chi* means god, as earlier explained, while *Eke* means the principle of creation. In parts of Owerri *Eke* is venerated with his own distinct shrine and worship. *Eke*, while meaning creation etymologically, also suggests division and sharing and the idea of portion, destiny or lot. In that context Chineke could be seen as a combination of the two concepts of god and creator.

The etymology of his name writes Cole, suggests that he is both a deity and a concept, for "Chineke" is a contraction of *chi,na* ("and"), *eke: chi* apparently meaning "god" or "soul," with *eke* approximating "creation" or "division".<sup>10</sup> Some would prefer to read and interpret Chi-na-eke participially as the God that is creating, though this is less plausible even if grammatically not impossible. H. M. Cole aptly observes in a perceptive summary of Igbo pneumatology or theory of the spirit world that:

Beyond this second level of reality, "the land of the spirits" inhabited principally by ancestors, cult deities and other spirits, is a third, more abstract level, that of *chi* and *eke*, which may be thought of as the animating forces of each human being and which combine to form his personal world or destiny. The fourth level, more impersonal yet, is of *chi* and *eke* combined and unified in a single word/concept, Chineke which stands for the creator god, the original *anima mundi*.<sup>11</sup>

In the same area of southern Igboland the designation Obasi di n'elu--the Obasi living on high is also common.<sup>12</sup> The term Obasi is a borrowed corruption of Abasi, the designation for God among Igboland's southern neighbors, the Anang--Ibibio--Efik. In this appellation God's abode is indicated as on high.

In Northern Igboland, especially in the Nsukka area of Enugu state, the most common designation is Ezechitoke, or Eze Chukwu Okike,<sup>13</sup> lit. the king, the god, the creator--a triple combination synthesizing together the concepts of Eze--king or Lord, Chigod, and Oke--creator principle. A typical exclamation in Nsukka would run the full gamut of: *Eze Chitoke Ezechi Abiama*, meaning O God! or literally Lord god creator, Lord god of Abiama.

The wide geographical spread of these terms for God and their commonly agreed connotation and denotation show that the Igbo have used them to designate the supreme God and creator of life and the universe from time immemorial. Some names of God certainly show evidence of external influence (cf. Abasi) but the names also show greater evidence of internal adjustment of basic terms of the language in order to come to grips with a complex concept (cf. *chi*, Chukwu, Eke, Chineke, Chi Okike Chitoke). The complex etymology of both Chineke and Ezechitoke suggests an honest attempt to deal with the complexity of the idea of the supreme God, never known to be easy or simple in any theology. One need only think of the so-called polytheistic theories of the Greeks and the Romans or even the Trinitarian creed of Christianity where the tension remains unresolved between the unity and uniqueness of the one supreme Being, on the one hand, and, on the other, the plurality of the various and multitudinous attributes/persons which his power and perfection and status as creator seem to suggest, if not demand. In their formulation of terms for the Godhead, the Igbo seem also to have worked out their theology or theory of God on something like the principle of *e pluribus unum*.

One final comment is still in order. The shared community of the name *Chi* in Chi, Chukwu, Chineke and Ezechitoke or Chukwu Okike, which links the personal god of the individual with the supreme God to the exclusion of all other so-called gods, seems to point to a very special and exclusive relationship between the individual and his creator. The divine in man is hinted at, as is a certain indwelling of God in the individual. The transcendent in man is also suggested, as is his subordination to his divine guardian. At any rate, there is, if not a certain sameness, at least a reduction of distance between man and his God, mediated by the *chi*. The other spirits (*agbara, muo, arusi*), on the other hand, are really and significantly other than and quite stranger to man and, therefore, by the same token radically different from the supreme God. They do not share the same nature and do not relate to man in the same way, nor are they apprehended by man in the same way. This should issue a serious caveat to all who talk and write glibly about polytheism in the present case. If Chukwu is theos, then the so-called gods are not; if they are theoi, then He is something different.

This background helps us better to understand and appreciate the meaning of the God-related names the Igbo bear. The first set of names evokes *Chi* as the personal god, that is, as the protective companion, the guardian and bringer of good omen, responsible for the individual's security and helping to manipulate his destiny:

*Chinonso*--God is close

*Chioma*--Good God, good luck or fortune

*Chikadibia*--God is greater than the doctor

*Onyewuchi*--Who is his neighbor's god?

*Chiaka*--It is up to God to decide

*Chiedu*--God leads my way

*Chintua*--When God plans

*Chiadighkobi*--The wishes of the heart are different from God's design

*Chiawuotu*--Different people different gods, i.e., destinies

*Chiadighkwe*--My God has not permitted it yet (relative to a close brush with misfortune)

*Onyeberechiya*--Let each one complain to his personal god

*Ibeawuchi*--One's neighbors are not one's god

*Oderaa* Once he has written it down, meaning that no one can thwart God's good plans such as the baby represents

A few names refer to Chukwu Abiam of the Aro Oracle. These names are given to children whose conception and birth have been attributed to the special intervention of Chukwu. It is well-known that childless couples often referred their case to Chukwu and the children born thereafter would carry the name Nwachukwu--Child of Chukwu. People would normally say of the child: Ekutara ya na Chukwu--He was brought as a baby from Chukwu.

But clearly many *chi* names refer to Chi or Chukwu only, that is, primarily in the sense of the supreme God, creator of all:

*Amarachi*--God's favor  
*Arinzechukwu*--But for God's favor  
*Chinua*--May God fight for me  
*Chigere*--Let God listen  
*Chimaroke*--May God know my share  
*Chidube*--May God lead me  
*Chikwendu*--May God allow me to live  
*Chigozie*--May God give blessing  
*Chigboo*--May God prevent, intervene  
*Chijioko*--God is in charge of creation/lot  
*Chikere*--God has created  
*Chieke*--It is God who creates  
*Chinwendu*--It is God who owns life  
*Chijindu* God holds/upholds life  
*Chinyere*--God's gift  
*Chiekezi*--It is God who creates well  
*Chidi*--God exists  
*Chukwudi*--God exists  
*Chukwudifu*--God yet exists  
*Chukwuemeka*--God has been so good  
*Chukwukere*--It is God who created  
*Chukwueke*--It is God who creates  
*Ekechi*--God's creation  
*Ekechukwu*--God's creation  
*Ikechukwu*--By the power of God  
*Ohochukwu*--God's principle of truth  
*Ugochukwu* Honor or favor from God  
*Iheanyichukwu*--Nothing is impossible with God.  
*The Eke Names: Destiny*

*Eke*, as earlier explained, is the principle of creation and apportionment of lot and destiny within the God concept. A few names refer to God from that aspect:

*Ekennia*--The Eke of his father  
*Ekejiuba*--Eke holds the key to wealth  
*Ekechi*--The Eke of god  
*Ekeneme*--It is Eke that makes  
*Amuneke*--Born according to Eke



*Okpalaeke*--First son of Eke  
*Ekejindu*--Eke holds the key to life  
*Ekechukwu*--The Eke of God.  
*The Uwa Names: World as Destiny*

The *Chi* and *Eke* names naturally suggest the introduction of the concept of Uwa-world to round up the cluster of ideas where God, man and destiny are entwined. *Chi* in the sense of God within the individual, presides over one's destiny and *eke* as creator principle gives him his lot or portion. This destiny or lot is called Uwa, literally, the world. It is the result of the work of *Chi* and *Eke*. The phrases *Umu ihe uwa*, meaning things of the world, life's vagaries and distractions, and *Uwa m na chi m*, meaning my lot, portion, destiny, fate and heritage, are frequently heard combinations. *Uwa oma* means good luck. *Onye Uwa ojoo* means someone that is ill-fated, doomed. *Uwa ojoo na ndu aliili* is a common phrase linking bad luck and a life of drudgery.

Because *Chi* and *Eke* are active, Uwa, even though fixed, is not unalterable fate: there is room for negotiation, adjustment and manipulation. It is within this interplay of semi-fixed fate and the individual actively struggling to better his lot that the Igbo have been able to build up their success-oriented ethic, where success depends on some one's "saying yes when his *chi* says yes" (*Onye kwe chi ya ekwe*).<sup>14</sup> Names invoking the concept of Uwa are:

*Uwadiegwu*--The world/destiny is mysterious, awesome  
*Ahuwaanya*--Can destiny be seen?  
*Uwaezuoke*--No one's destiny/lot is perfect  
*Uwaanuakwa*--Bad fortune heeds no pleas  
*Emereuwaonu*--No one boasts about fortune  
*Eluwa*--Shall one rely on destiny/fortune?  
*Lekwuwa/Nebuwa*--Behold the world/Wait and see what destiny brings  
*Uwazie*--May destiny be good to me  
*Uwakwe*--May destiny let me!

## **OFOR/OGU NAMES**

One final pair of concepts needs to be mentioned to complete the picture of the core area where Igbo conception of God, man, life, death and destiny touch each other and at the same time touch the philosophical in man. In the concepts of *Ofor* and *Ogu*, often joined together as *Oforaogu*, we come to the area of conscience and guilt, of vindication and punishment, of good and bad faith. *Ofor* is a physical object made of the stem of a special tree, the *Detarium Senegalense*, supposed to grow in God's compound.<sup>15</sup> What it symbolizes is the authority of the ancestors. It also especially symbolizes the truth and obliges all who swear by it to speak the truth and thus to show innocence or be ruthlessly punished. *Ofor* is not a god, but the power of the truth, or the power of God for eliciting the truth. Some of the *Ofor* names are:

*Nwofor*--Son of *Ofor*  
*Oforkansi*--*Ofor* is more than poison  
*Oforkaja*--*Ofor* is greater than sacrifice  
*Oforegbu*--*Ofor* will not kill me  
*Jideofor*--Hold on to your *Ofor*, i.e. keep your hands clean

*Ofordile*--Ofor is potent  
*Oforjebe*--Ofor goes in front  
*Oguejiofor*--A war justified by Ofor  
*Ohochukwu*--God's Ofor

Ogu is the principle of good faith innocence and guilt, and of ultimate vindication. The Igbo have a strong belief in the principle of vindication. The innocent is always ultimately right: the good will triumph; the clear conscience will be vindicated whereas one who is guilty will be exposed and will loose in the end. Ogu is again a quasi-personification, an abstract principle, not a god, and not even a symbol. Nwoga points out that Ogu is "a concept, an abstract idea. . . . Ogu is . . . an example of an abstract reality, a concept with agency and therefore with the status of independent existence conferred on it by the Igbo."<sup>16</sup> The Ogu names include:

*Oguamanam*--May Ogu not indict me  
*Nwogu*--Son of Ogu  
*Ogugbuaja*--Innocence is stronger than sacrifice  
*Oguwunka*--Innocence is the key to long life  
*Oguledo*--It is innocence that keeps alive  
*Emenogu*--Acting only in innocence and good conscience  
*Ejiogu*--Having innocence and good conscience  
*Oguwuire*--Having innocence guarantees potency  
*Oguwuike/Ogike*--Innocence is strength.

## CONCLUSION

The categories of names which we have studied here briefly are by no means exhaustive. But they are typical enough and show clearly that in this culture, to name is to make a statement of meaning, ranging from the most simple and matter of fact to the deepest thoughts that probe the mystery of reality. From names that use markets to register birthdays and others used to recall historic events and landmarks, we encounter names showing the order of primogeniture and girls' beauty names captured in bold metaphors. There are child-welcoming names, names celebrating triumph over misfortune and detractors, the triumph of prayers and the vindication of the innocent. The pleading-kwe names ask for a fair and just chance in life. The pro-child, that is, child-appreciating names affirm the pricelessness of offspring. The pro-life names affirm and glorify life as the ultimate good. The death-names reflect man's anxiety, abhorrence and helplessness before the mystery of human mortality.

In the chi/eke or God names, whether in the meaning of man's spiritual double or of the supreme God himself, there is affirmation of God's existence and of his attributes as the allpowerful and wise creator and dispenser of fortune, the provident and generous source of life and all its blessings, and the vindicator of the truth. The various prayer-names pay him worshipful homage.

In the Uwa names, man reflects on the ambiguities of his destiny, generally in resignation before this mystery. The Ofor/Ogu names underpin human morality by affirming a strong faith in the final vindication of the good conscience.

This sample of names serves to give an idea of the potentially vast area and the wide variety of subjects which Igbo names cover: life and death; God, creation and destiny; conscience and

guilt; and the great questions and mysteries of life no less than the banalities of daily living. But the names themselves demonstrate the power of the special technique devised by an illiterate culture to put into record some of the best thoughts and ideas of its heritage. Igbo people had no common writing and Nsibidi, the pictorial hieroglyphics<sup>17</sup> did not evolve into a commonly accessible means of recording and communication. Names were then ingeniously pressed into service and became the most effective way of conferring immortality to thoughts that would otherwise not outlive the very breath by which they were uttered. A. G. Leonards has rightly observed that "the conferring of a name upon a child is in no sense a mere social or religious formality, nor is it only an ordinary petition, but an act which, from every native point of view, is a perpetual landmark in the history of the house."<sup>18</sup>

The technique also provides lifesaving security for historical events for whom these names serve as lasting memorials. As the name of the person is called and invoked daily, the event it commemorates is daily recalled and relived for the family, while the bearer feels himself inserted and his roots re-inforced in the immemorial history of which he is now a part. The Igbo name system is a living and self-renewing magisterium, not a depositum of dead clichés buried in obscure letters needing some abstruse exegesis. It is a living continuity, creatively ongoing as individuals transmute their experience into immortality, cumulatively linking the past and the present in a tradition virtually unaltered even by the most powerful agents of change and modernity.

Above all, some names attempt to make statements of meaning, and have turned out to be records of deep reflection on reality and the human condition, expressions of the hopes, the anguish and the mystery of man's existence. Thus, far from being mere identification tags, names in Igbo culture form a great reservoir of sentiments, ideas and values, immortal gems of meaning encapsulating reflective thought that has been distilled out of the lived experience of individual Igbos of all ages.

## NOTES

1. Major Arthur Glynn Leonards, *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes*, (1906; repr. London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd., 1968), p. 551. See also H.A. Wieschoff, "The Social Significance of Names among the Ibo of Nigeria," *American Anthropologist*, 43 (April, 1942), 212-222.

2. C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 295.

3. A. G. Leonards, *op. cit.*, pp. 552-553.

4. On Igbo ideas of the various causes and forms of death and on the religious and social significance of death, see John A. Noon, "A Preliminary Examination of the Death Concepts of the Ibo" *American Anthropologist*, 44 (October-December, 1944), 638-654.

5. C. K. Meek, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

6. Interestingly enough, the most basic etymological relation of *Chi* is again *chi* in its meaning as day or daylight as in the following: *chi aboola*--The day has dawned, It is daylight. *Chi boo*--May daylight dawn, Good night. *Ka chi foo*--(same as above). *Chi di*--It is yet daylight, There is time. *Chi ejiela*--It has turned dark, it is night. *Ubochi*--A day, i.e one basic count of daylight. *Uchichi*--Night, the closing of daylight.

There seems to be some primordial link in the three-level use of *Chi*. Could it suggest that the first creative act or event has been intuited as a dawn, a bringing to be of daylight, with the creator *Chi* as its source and the personal *chi* its repository? The role of both would be essentially

the bringing of light into the cosmic and individual world, while the primordial mystery of life itself would be manifestation. Could this account for the preeminence of Anyanwu, the sun god, in cult as an auxiliary deity closely related to Chukwu as his messenger?

7. Donatus Ibe Nwoga, *The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religion* (Owerri: Hawk Press, 1984).

8. Toutes les fois que j'ai voulu interroger un païen vierge de la brousse sur qui était Cuku, ou Cineku, je me suis heurté à un farouche--Amam, "je n'en sais rien". Les païens, au contraire, qui connaissent les blancs, s'indignaient fort, si l'on insinuait qu'ils ne savent pas que Cuku existe (se réservant, d'ailleurs, le droit de n'en faire aucun cas). J. Alves Correia C.S.Sp, "L'animisme Ibo et les divinités de la Nigeria" in *Anthropos* (Nos. 16-17, 1921-22), pp. 360-366.

9. J. A. Correia, *ibid.*, p. 361.

10. Herbert M. Cole, Mbari, *Art and Life among the Owerri Igbo*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 54.

11. H. M. Cole, *ibid.*, p. 53.

12. C. K. Meek, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 21, 289.

13. C. K. Meek, *ibid.*, p. 20.

14. D. I. Nwoga, *1984 Ahiajoku Lecture* (Owerri: Culture Division, Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports), p. 48.

15. C. K. Meek, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

16. D. I. Nwoga, *1984 Ahiajoku Lecture*, p. 21.

17. J. K. Macgregor, "Some Notes on Nsibidi," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, XXXIX (1909), 209-21.

18. A. G. Leonards, *op. cit.*, pp. 553-54.

**CHAPTER IX**  
**THE STRUCTURE OF THE SELF IN IGBO THOUGHT**  
THEOPHILUS OKERE

**THE PROBLEM AND THE METHOD**

This is an attempt to present a brief account of the constitution of the self in Igbo traditional thought. For the present, I shall avoid the use of the concept of person, much as I would concede that this would be about the nearest Western equivalent. One common pitfall in a study of this nature is to introduce *ab initio* prefabricated categories borrowed essentially from European philosophy, theology, psychology or other science and then try to force African original concepts to pass through their foreign mold. The result is often a distortion of the African idea and a lazy assumption that it has been thought through when it was only superficially scratched. This is not always done overtly or even wittingly. Often there is an effort to define what African concepts are by saying what they are not, that is, that they are like or not like this or that foreign concept. In this way not only is the originality of an African idea sacrificed, but even worse, a Western censorship is surreptitiously allowed to preside over African reflection.

To obviate this difficulty, we shall try, as much as possible to work from inside out, in this case, from the native concepts of Igbo culture and, as it were, to let the culture speak for itself without anybody's censures or promptings. One principal resource is the Igbo language itself as we tap it for the relevant vocabulary that has helped from time immemorial to express these concepts.

**ETYMOLOGICALLY SPEAKING**

To investigate the concept of the self in Igbo culture one starts naturally with the commonest usages as they occur in the expressions: myself, yourself, himself, etc. In Igbo one refers to oneself as *Mu nwa*--Myself, *Gi nwa*--Yourself, *Ha nwa*--Themselves, where *Mu* means "I," *Gi* means "you," and *Ha* means "they;" the attached *nwa* is a demonstrative which means "This here." Thus *Mu nwa*, literally "This I" or "I here," is essentially an emphatic pronoun. But the primitive noun that names the self, the core concept in the structure of the self is *onwe* as in *Onwe m* "myself," *onwe gi* "yourself," *onwe ya* "himself" or "herself." *Nwe*, which seems to be the original root, means to own; *onwe* would then mean "he who owns." Thus the above-mentioned expressions would translate literally: *Onwe m*- "he who owns me" or "myself;" *onwe gi*- "he who owns you" or "yourself," etc. *Onwe* is therefore a self-owner, an independent self. Dialectal variations would include *ike mand ogwe m*, each with rather more obscure etymologies. *Ike* could possibly derive from the root *ke* meaning division or creation and *Ike m* could originally be construed as my portion my own piece of reality. *Ogwe* is literally a log and in its use as self, is reminiscent of the expression commonly used by witnesses *a nom noshishi m ya emee* literally "I was there in my trunk when it happened," that is, planted there and solidly present as myself.

*Onwe* or *Ike* or *Ogwe*

Onwe or Ike or Ogwe roughly meaning self, is the core subject of identity, perduring and enduring all human experience. It is not describable and has no name and no function except as the ultimate author of all the functions of the individual, the carrier of all experience. It is the link between the experiences of yesterday and today, the basis of that proprietorship by which these fleeting multitudes of experience are one and are mine. The onwe or Self is that part of me (in a manner of speaking, because it is not just, and cannot be just, a part of me) of which I cannot speak in the third person: the possessive adjective *m* in *Onwe m* (my in myself) is not exactly the same as the *m* in *ahu m* (the my in my body) which latter does convey some distance, some alterity, a subject-object relationship. Self is not an object but rather the ultimate subject. Myself is myself *Onwe m bu onwe m*. Here we are talking of identity as distinct from mere equivalence.

The self is the basic unit of autonomy. If the etymology of *onwe* has to do with the root *-nwe*, to own, then one must remark how perfectly this fits in with the Igbo expression for freedom. The Greeks would say: We are free because we are autonomous, that is, we give ourselves our own laws. The Igbo, instead of using the idea of lawgiving and self-lawgiving, would define their freedom from the idea of ownership and self-ownership. To say that we are a free people is: *Anyi nwe onwe anyi*--We own ourselves or negatively, *Odigh onye nwe anyi ni*, i.e., there is no one who owns us.<sup>1</sup> Freedom is conceived as self-ownership; a free person is a self-owning self. The basic assumption is that the self is not owned. The expression *Onye nwem ni*--He who owns me, though occurring mostly as a flattering, endearing invocation, is used to designate the closest relationship, especially of blood. *Ndi nwegi ni*--those who own you--designates the most immediate family, the innermost circle and last line of defense for the individual. It is the utmost insult and challenge to threaten some one with: *Mmechaa gi ihe m'echere ndi nwegini*, i.e., after dealing with you I will wait to deal with those who own you, that is, your most intimate family, those to whom you are precious and who would be your most reliable defense. But basically, to be free is to be one's own owner and not to be owned by anyone else.

### *Muo or Spirit*

Around the kernel of *Onwe*, *Ike* and *Ogwe* or self there is a cluster of other elements most intimately involved with it and some how contributing to its make up. Foremost among these is *Muo* or Spirit. Although *Muo* is the principal name for immaterial beings, gods, ancestors and ghosts, it is used also for the immaterial but constituent element in the human being. This indicates that man is thought of as sharing in some way in the peculiar being of spirits. Despite appearances, man is therefore part spirit. The *Muo* or spirit in man is clearly conceived as the cause or principle of life in the individual because when someone dies it is often said that his spirit has left *muo ya ahafula*.

Further usage of the notion of spirit shows that it is regarded as the seat of emotions. *Ihe okwuru gbuchara muo m*, what he said quite killed my spirit, despirited or demoralized me. *Ihe okwuru meturu m na muo*, what he said touched me in the spirit, in my inmost depths. *Muo m anabataghi ya*, My spirit refused to accept it (a suggestion). *Muo m ekweegh*, My spirit rejects it. *Muo* is therefore conceived as the intangible, invisible element in man, the seat of will and emotions, the principle of life and point of connection, similarity and sharing with the world of spirit. It is the *Muo* in man that is responsible for the following activities without which the idea of Onwe/Self could neither emerge nor be sustained : (1) *Uche*, *Iche echiche*--Thinking,

considering, reflecting with some anxiety over one's lot. *Cebara ya echiche*, think it over. *Icheedi gini*, what is it you are ruminating over? *Uche awaala ya aba*, His thought is split into branches, he is in doubt or he is full of thoughts. (2) *Iru eruruto* reflect deeply, usually on some sad, sombre, tragic subject. *Eruo m uwa m--*I am reflecting on my world (lot), my bad luck, fortune, destiny. (3) *Nchetalit*. to think out, to remember, recall. *M cheta Rahurahu nne m nwuru ni* When I just remember my late brother Rahurahu! to quote the Tortoise in the tale.<sup>2</sup> The Igbo verb has a peculiarly dynamic structure whereby the *ta* enclitic confers on the verb root the notion of bringing forth into existence or into presence (for example, *Nku-ta* means to earn or bring in by labour or *oku*, *Nzota* to bring home by struggling or *izo azo*). Hence, *Ncheta* is strictly speaking to fetch out from the past by thinking, *iche uche*. *Ncheta* is a crucial function since it is not only useful in storing the memory of events but also accumulates them and unifies them into a continuity that makes them into a story and thus helps to give the self its unity and identity. (4) *Nghota--*lit. to pluck, to grasp, to understand, to comprehend, to appreciate the full implications of. *Ighotala ihe m n'agwa gi?* Do you understand what I am telling you? The image suggests that understanding amounts to getting a firm grip on a rather slippery object or getting some hold on a complex and confusing mass. (5) *Izu--*deliberation, consensus or wisdom and information resulting therefrom. *Igba izu* is to undertake deliberation to determine in a case an appropriate, generally a consensus, judgment. *Ima izu* is to have wisdom or know how, or to be privy to. *Ama m izu?* Do I know ought? (6) *Ako--*Cleverness, Wisdom, Prudence. *Onye ako* is the prudent one. *Nwaevula ako* is the wise, little ram of folk-tales who outwits the notoriously clever tortoise. (7) *Ngenge, Igba Ngenge--*Imagining, surmising; and finally (8) *Atutu, Itu atutu--*to plan, to project, to order the execution of a plan. These and all such are activities of the Muo or spirit in man. A dead man cannot do them. An animal or any being lacking spirit cannot do them. They are therefore typical of the self of which Muo is a constituent part and it is from its aspect as Muo that the self can do them.

### *Obi or the Heart*

To take care of a whole variety of functions and emotional and moral attitudes the Igbo use the concept of *obi--*literature the heart. It is the psychological center of emotions, sensation and sympathy. *Obi kara aka*, lit. a heart that is mature or ripe, means a brave heart. *Obi mgbawa* means a heart break. *Onye obi miri* (of a watery heart) means a weakly, sentimental person. Beyond the psychological role it plays, the *Obi* has also moral relevance and function. *Obi kporo nku* (lit. a heart dry like firewood) means a wicked one. *Obi nwayo* (lit. a quiet, soft heart) means gentleness, meekness. *Obi ike* (a strong heart) means heartlessness. *Obi oku* (a heart of fire) means a hot temper. *Obi ojoo* (a bad or ugly heart) means wickedness and cruelty, while *Obi oma* (a good or beautiful heart) means kindness. *Obi ebere* (heart of pity) means a sympathetic, merciful and pitying heart. For all practical purposes, *Obi* is the seat and center of virtue and vice, of conscience and morality.

The expression *Mkpuru obi* or "the seed of the heart" accurately designates the anatomical heart of an animal or man. But in one of those notorious twists of missionary/colonial history by which a foreign concept is foisted on a native word, it has acquired inappropriate use in Igbo Christian theology and catechesis as it is used to translate the concept of the soul, the spiritual element in man destined for eternal life or salvation.<sup>3</sup> Yet the heart (*Obi*) often is said to know, to hide or tell information. There is a classic proverb to the effect that: *Obi anagh awo nna ya ochie uka*: the heart will not deny information to its grandfather. Here the grandfather is the Onwethe

self. The expression is used to extort hidden information from a close relation on the basis of the assumption that there can be no secrets when relations are so close, just as the heart keeps no secrets from the self to whom it is so close. This shows that the *Obi* (heart) reveals and confesses to the self whatever it knows, that the *Obi* is itself not the self or *Onwe*, but relates to the *Onwe* (self) as child to grandfather, and that it is the *Onwe* that is the core of the self.

### *Ahu or the Body*

Another key element in the concept of self identity is *ahu*, the body, perhaps derived from *hu* which is the verb "to see," and therefore, perhaps designating the seeable, visible, tangible, sensible part of the self. Generally it is not spoken of as external to the self or as an object apart. The nearest one would come to objectifying the body would be in phrases such as *anu ahumeaning* simply the meat of the body, ie bodily appearance. A certain epileptic patient known to this writer and whose arms and shoulders had been badly charred by fire burns sustained during one of his many fits became famous in the village for the following aphorism: *Ime ahu dila m mma, etu anu ahu huru ya diwa*, Provided the inside of my body is good (healthy), it does not matter how the outside looks. Here *Ime ahu* (the inside of the body) has a meaning already transcending the merely material and approaching the idea of a healthy condition that is not visible but still felt or enjoyed by the individual. Similarly, the popular greeting: *gi na nwa ahu?* (lit. You and your little body, means: How are you? Is your body well?, ie., How is your health?) Also *Ahu gi kwani?* What of your body, often rendered by some other groups in Pidgin English by the well-known How body? meaning How are you? In these expressions *Ahu/Body* is thought of as the indicator of the state of health. *Ahu ojoo* or *Ahu njo--* Bad body--is the normal expression for illness.

In the pet names *Ahunna* (Her father's body) and *Ahu di ya* (Her husband's body) for a favorite daughter and a beloved wife respectively, a person is called a body. This could be no more than a bold though reductive metaphor, but the body is invoked to depict the utmost endearment, closeness and intimacy as indeed the body is so close, dear and intimate to the self that it is hardly distinguishable from it. *Ahunna* and *Ahu di ya* amount to the expression alter ego.

*Ahu* is used also to portray and perhaps locate depth of feeling and emotion as in *Mmetu n'ahu* (body touching) for very touching, which is said of chilling news as it shocks some one. *Ihe okwuru meturu m n'ahu*, What he said touched me in the body, ie., moved me deeply. *Iri ahu*, lit. body-eating, actually means blood-curdling, disgusting and *Ihe na eri ahu* is some touching, pitiful, blood-chilling business. *Oriela ya ahu owuwu* in the song indicates that it was a blood curdling story.<sup>4</sup> In *Igbaji ahu*, literally to shatter the body, actually meaning to show disrespect to some one, and *mmekpa ahu* (constraining the body) meaning trouble or difficulty, as in *Ono na mmekpa ahu* (he is in real trouble), we see that closeness of the body to the self by which disrespect, insult or any difficulties for the body translate into insult and difficulties for the whole self. The same identification of body and self, or the designation of the self through the body alone, shows in the phrase: *Gba m n'ahu*, lit. run away from my body, that is, leave me alone, give me a break.

### *The Personal Chi*

An important element for rounding off the concept of the self is *chi*, the enigmatic but crucial notion or principle with which the Igbo explain their experience of history and religion.



Percy Amaury Talbot terms it the oversoul or the multiplex ego and compares it to the Roman "genius" and the ancient Egyptian "Kra".<sup>5</sup> Contemporary West African peoples such as the Yoruba of Western Nigeria and the Akan of Ghana seem to have the same or similar concepts, but there is really no Western philosophical or theological equivalent. The Igbo *Chi* is the divine double or personal guardian and protector that is variously conceived as part of God in man, or a divine part of man, but presiding essentially over the individual as he or she works out his or her destiny. Considered as a personal deity, *Chi* is distinguishable from the self since the self can pray to it, honor and worship it, blame or praise it. He can persuade it, manipulate, coax and negotiate with it. But *Chi* is not only a religious entity; it is also a philosophical concept. As such, it is also part of the individual's identity and is seen as the prime moving force and principle of individualism in Igbo culture. As such it is strictly personal, indivisible, not shared or sharable with others as the proverb says: *Otu nne namu mana owugh otu Chi neke*: Same mother but different *Chi*, that is, a person has the same mother as his sibling but his *Chi* is strictly his. Thus *Chi* combines a complexity of ideas and has been variously understood as:

(1) A divine force, agent or power unique to the individual, part of the individual and constitutive of the individual. As such it has in fact been dubbed the principle of individualism, a characteristic attribute, in Igbo culture.<sup>6</sup>

(2) A guardian, resident deity, deputizing for the supreme God *Chukwu* or *Chineke*, but resident within the individual. Hence it is often called God's double within the individual who in turn dedicates a shrine to him.

(3) In either case, it is the principle of destiny as well as of fortune. Every individual has a distinct destiny, ie, his allotted path in life, a path however, which is so delicately laid out that it has opportunities, failures and successes strewn along it. The individual's *Chi* enables, helps and collaborates with, him in manipulating these possibilities for his self-realization. Hence the paradoxical juxtaposition of both limitation and enablement which connects the *Chi* idea with destiny in the sense of fatalism, but also makes it the very agent enabling and prodding the individual towards success and achievement as he bursts the molds of fatalism.

*Chi* as a guardian is given credit when the individual exclaims: *Chi m mu anya*, My *chi* is vigilant, after escaping a danger one knows not how. One cannot be greater than his *Chi* as the name goes: *Onye ka chi?* Who is greater than his *Chi*? One cannot therefore go beyond that which is within his allotted path. Yet, to be greater than some one is to be greater than his *Chi*, *Onye ka madu ka chi ya*. This means that not even his *Chi* can bring someone higher than has been allotted to him. *Chi* is so identified with the individual that one is as high or low as the other and no more. Neither can one challenge his *Chi* to a wrestling match: *Ichuru Chi ya aka mgba*. But one's failure is attributed to his *Chi*: *Ebe onye dara owu Chi ya kwadara ya*, lit Wherever one has fallen, it is his *Chi* that has pushed him down. Great achievements are attributed to one's *Chi* (*Owu chi oma m oo*, It is all due to my good *Chi*) just as catastrophic failures are blamed on the same *Chi*, then regarded as treacherous or weak or ill-fated (*Chi m egbuola m oo*, My *Chi* has ruined me).

## ILO UWA OR REINCARNATION

The Igbo theory of reincarnation helps us to see other dimensions of the self and we may start by inquiring what aspect of the self is believed to reincarnate. Surely not the entire person as

constituted before death since at least part of him, that is, the body or the skeleton can still be around while the reincarnation of the deceased is being noised abroad. Reincarnation in Igbo is known as *Ilo-uwa*, returning to the world, not a returning into the physical world but perhaps more accurately into *Uwa*/world in the sense of destiny or lot. The question, *Oloro uwa onye?* Whose world or destiny did he return to? clearly shows that it is a question, not of the physical universe which is shared by all but rather of the inner world, lot or destiny, or perhaps more accurately life cycle of the individual who often would talk of *uwa m ozo*, my next life cycle or *n'uwa ya mbu*, in his first life cycle or use the well-known expression *Uwa n'uwa m na'alola*, in whatever future life cycle I may return to. Belief in reincarnation is universal among the Ibos, says Basden.<sup>7</sup>

In the face of the obvious skepticism of Christian believers, Igbo traditionalists have developed arguments to justify their belief based essentially on striking resemblances in bodily, emotional and at times behavioral disposition between the deceased and the new born. Onyewuenyi brings out these reasons clearly as he recalls the phenomenon of child prodigies used as proof of preexistence and preexistent knowledge as well as bodily marks made at the deceased's funeral ceremonies to facilitate recognition of him when he returns to the new cycle of life.<sup>8</sup>

The author goes further to pose a most relevant question, namely that of the paradox: How can Africans sincerely and truly believe in reincarnation while at the same time recognizing the personal individual existence in the spirit world of the ancestors who are believed to have reincarnated? or as he puts it later, since the birth of the little one(s) in no wise puts an end to the existence of the deceased ancestor in the spirit world.<sup>9</sup>

One answer is to dismiss all this as an untenable contradiction. Another answer is to interpose a second soul so as to have one reincarnating and the other remaining as ancestor. Yet another is to posit the so-called African *force vitale* as *deus ex machina*. What is mistakenly called reincarnation, we are told, is really the ancestors perpetuating themselves through reproduction, by exercising vital influence on living descendants.<sup>10</sup> But however we want to explain it, what is certain is that the self alone subsists in all this, whether or not it uses one and the same body, one or more souls or faculties. Such a self is obviously different from and not reducible to any one or indeed any number of its components, for instance the soul, that might then be said to reincarnate in the context of a body/soul division.

The same may be said in the case of the Igbo belief in ghosts where the person/ghost is visible to dogs, to sick persons in delirium or to visionaries, but not necessarily to others; the ghost through having some bodily qualities like shape, sound and motion, remains intangible and may retain other powers that normally would be attributed to spirits. What is it that appears as a ghost? Who is it behind the ghost? Finally we have the case of metempsychosis or the transformation at will into the shape and characteristics of animals such as tigers or buffaloes,<sup>11</sup> often in order to use their physical powers to harm enemies. Or the case of witches who appear in the form of rats and bats at night, roaming around as vampires in search of prey while simultaneously they are sound asleep at home. Prescinding from any judgment of truth or falsehood over these beliefs, and inquiring only what understanding of self enables the Igbo to make these multiple attributions to the one self, one is obliged to think that the concept of self is essentially one of ultimate identity. The many and varied activities of mind and body, of soul and spirit, of emotions and of intellect and will, the various categories of soul and oversoul, and the forms of existence as ancestor or ghost or reincarnation, all these are so many masks behind

which there is one and only one major operator, namely, the self or *Onwe*. Nwoga made a very perceptive observation in his 1984 Ahajoku lecture, which I would like to quote at length:

The Igbo person is principally an *identity*. The reflexive pronouns--oneself, himself, myself, yourself are not merely compliments to emphasize statements, but they are based on the pronoun, "self," which a dictionary goes into great strains to define as "an identical person, personality, ego; a side of one's personality; what one is; personality; identity. . . . When the Igbo person uses *Onwe m*, I believe that we are dealing not in imagery but in primary statement of reality. For the Igbo, it is this identity that is made manifest in the biological, social and religious activities in which the individual engages or in which he is involved. That identity has a reality of its own which has characteristics that cohere to it. The biological processes are essential to the person. He has to eat and drink and keep the body from harm. Religious activities invigorate the person, supplying him with help from deities and unseen external forces and also protecting the person from the dangerous activities of spirits. But though the person is dependent on these activities, they do not define the person. There is still the person whose valor is aided and abetted, but not subsumed, under these other activities. That is the identity that sickens and/or strengthens to determine the status of the person. Initiatory rites act on that identity to release it for heightened performance of the person. . . . In masquerade performance, it is this identity that is transformed."<sup>12</sup>

This identity is no other than the self, the *Onwe*.

But we cannot round off this study of the self in Igbo thought without at least a brief mention of the defining context in which the identity plays itself out. If we have been looking at the structure of the kernel of the self, one must immediately add that this hard core is surrounded by a thicker layer of enveloping relationships. The self as so far studied remains in a way only an abstraction. Even though one can be thought of as a unit and in abstraction from any thing else, in fact, the self is never alone. The individual is never a pure, isolated individual. There is an Igbo saying to the effect that *Madu anagh agba ka ugba* A human being does not fall like a bolt from the blue, lit. no none falls from the sky like the *ugba* (oil bean) cotyledon, that is, by some inexplicable explosive mechanism. There is no big bang that throws a human being from nowhere into the world. This is often quoted by parents to children to insist that every one has a source, a link, a belongingness, the parents being the source of their children. Everyone comes into the world belonging and relating.

The human being is conceived as the focus of a web of relationships. He is related first of all to parents and siblings but gradually to a whole kinship network that widens in concentric circles to include the entire village group or town. Father and mother, *Nne na nna* (the Igbo reverse the order) are the sacred source of one's existence. An insult to one's parents is an insult that touches one to the depths of one's being. The ultimate curse among young people and which inevitably starts a fight is *nne gi nwuokwa*, May your mother die! Conversely, when one wants to touch some one with a solemn appeal or prayer, he virtually disarms him with *Kaa biko nne gi anwuna*, please may your mother not die . . . and goes on to make the request. Parents are an integral part of personal wholeness. Igbo folklore is replete with the evil and misfortune that is the orphan's lot.

Next to the parents are, of course, brothers and sisters, *umunne na umunna*, and the more of them there are, the richer and fuller is one's sense of self. An *Olu nwa*, an only child, is pitied and thought somehow incomplete and disadvantaged. The sibling relationship is particularly valued and nourished by the use of specially reserved terms of endearment and courtesy which designate the level of kinship, the sex and especially the age and seniority relationship. An elder

brother is addressed as *dede*, an elder sister as *dada*, an aunt as *adee* and an uncle as *opanna* or *opaa*. In some places *Ndaa* is the all-purpose term to cover all genders and age groups but fulfils the same function of asserting intimacy courtesy and corporate belonging.

Beyond the nuclear, but within the extended family, cousins and more distant relations are referred to as brothers and sisters and special rights and obligations accruing taking care especially of children, widows and orphans and taking corporate responsibility on behalf of all members. The individual lives and moves within this orbit of solidarity. This solidarity continues in diminishing degrees towards the exterior peripheries of consanguinity, but it remains vibrant within the limits of the village-group or town. The prefix *Umu*, the children of, attaching to hundreds of place names in Igboland *Umuonyike*, *Umukabia*, *Umuchima*, *Umuelemai*, *Umuleridemonstrates* the important role of kinship in defining the Igbo person's self-understanding. It makes a statement of corporate solidarity based on blood relationship even when some sub-groups are known to be relatively new immigrants. It also makes this statement of solidarity within the geographical ancestral land shared by these villages, which is a piece of land consecrated and bequeathed by the ancestors, and ruled and protected by the earth deity, which thus confers on this solidarity a quasi religious character. It is this convergence of blood and soil *Blut und Boden* which creates and supports the living space and the network of relationships where the *Onwe*/self sees itself as part of a community and this community as a constituent part of the self. This is why in this culture, the self is a congenitally communitarian self, incapable of being, existing and really unthinkable except in the complex of relations of the community.

## CONCLUSION

All the elements we have discussed hitherto are no more than manifestations of the *Onwe*, the self-owning self.

- We have examined the *Muo* as the special aspect of *Onwe* that is synonymous with the very life of the individual, while being responsible for the vital faculties and functions of thought and memory, understanding, deliberation and wisdom.
- The *Muo* is the spiritual and most intimate manifestation of the self.
- The *Obi* is again the self as emotion and morality.
- The *Ahu*/Body is the external but by no means merely exterior manifestation of the *Onwe*; it is as intimately part of the self as the *Muo* or *Obi*, only differently.
- *Chi* is the divine part of the self; in a way of speaking it is god made man, as transcendent to the self as it is also immanent to it, helping to work out the individual's destiny as much from within as from without.

It is not easy to figure out the complex relationship between these elements and the *Onwe*, or with each other. Cumulatively however they make up, not *Onwe* itself, but the sum total of all the functions and actions attributed to *Onwe*. And if any new functions or activities are ever found, they will still be attributable to *Onwe*. This goes to point out that *Onwe* is perhaps neither defined nor definable, but remains essentially the ultimate subject of all attributions. One can distinguish, but cannot separate, these functions, qualities and actions from their subject of attribution. Neither can this subject be reduced to any one of them or any combination of them. The self/*Onwe* is neither this nor that attribution, but is rather the sovereign and ultimate

proprietor of all attributions of the individual.

## NOTES

1. M. M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs* (London, Frank Cass & Co Ltd. 1964), p. 145.

2. The cunning tortoise was being transported across a river by the spider. He jests at the spider's hind anatomy even as the latter weaves a bridge of webs from his own entrails. In disgust and anger the spider cuts him loose and lets him fall into the river to face a series of woes and tests. He is forced to gulp down a hot soup on condition of not cooling it by blowing cool air into it. But he got over this by the famous lament over his late brother Raurahu while using his sobs to blow the soup cold.

3. This means not only an inaccurate rendering of "Mkpuruobi" as well as of "soul", but also more ominously, the imposition of a dualistic body/soul division on an indigenous anthropology rich with the complexities and nuances we are at pains to point out in this article.

4. A ballad commonly heard in the fifties described a car accident that plunged several victims into the Imo River. The pity of it all was expressed in the refrain: Oriela ya ahu owuwu o!

5. Percy Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* (1926; repr. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd.), II, 279-295.

6. B. I. Chukwukere, "Individualism in an Aspect of Igbo Religion" *Igbo Traditional Life, Culture and Literature, The Conch* 3. 2, ed. M.J.C. Echeruo and E. N. Obiechina (Owerri, 1971).

7. George T. Basden, *Niger Ibos* (1938; repr. Frank Cass & Co Ltd. 1966), p. 286. Cf. D.I. Nwoga, *1984 Ahiajoku Lecture* (Owerri: Ministry of Information, Culture, Youth and Sports, 1984), p. 46.

8. Innocent Onyewuenyi, "A Philosophical Reappraisal of African Belief in Reincarnation," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 22 (no. 3, 1982), 162.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 166,

11. G.T. Basden, *op. cit.*, pp. 286-287.

12. D.I. Nwoga, p. 46.

## CHAPTER X

# THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN VALUES ON CULTURE

CHUKWUEMEKA NZE

In dealing with the subject encompassed by the above title, some definition must be given for key terms or notions. In this work, therefore, Christian values are defined as those ideals or principles which Christianity cherishes. Our preoccupation here is not to treat the worth of Christianity or its values, for the high values of Christianity are well-known and appreciated, especially in Africa.

Our main concern here is to relate and evaluate this worth to a definite culture, namely, to Africa. The choice of Africa is obvious for an African author. It becomes attractive and obvious, too, once we exclude European, including United States, culture, which Africans, rightly or wrongly, identify with Christianity. That is, since European culture has been synonymous with Christianity, African culture as a recipient of that culture bears the influence or weight of Christianity and can reflect its influence on its Culture.

Our second duty will be to select certain sections of this culture to highlight these Christian influences. To fathom the extent of the influence of Christian values on an African culture some historical and sociological perspectives will be necessary as they will mirror this influence where it exists. The missionaries came to Igboland in 1857, where they met a pattern of life not all of which ran counter to Christian principles. The spread of Christian influence was balked by such elements as the vast size of the area, the complete absence of roads and means of communication, as well as other harsh environmental circumstances which inhibited free movement of the early missionaries to all corners of the area. These facts may have accounted for the less universal preponderance of the Christian influence on the host culture.

Such claims as these may be seen as too lofty in view of the allegation of mass caving in of Igbo culture to the invading European culture. But the assumptions that local culture and Christian values were polarized and conflicting and that Christian values dislodged their host counterparts can be maintained only with notable qualifications, for it must be remembered that the host culture was traditional and natural, that is, it was unadulterated, original or God-given. It approximated in part, and accorded with Christian values and to that degree was not in conflict to them. Equally important in this regard is the similarity in human nature which tends to minimise the differences. We have been purposely cautious because there were indeed areas where conflict existed between the host culture and the Christian values. Nonetheless, since grace builds upon nature and nature exists in Africa as elsewhere, there is much of enormous positive value in African traditions and religious consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

### RELIGION

We shall concentrate on specific areas such as religion and social life to determine the extent of the influence of Christian values on culture; first, let us treat religion or the belief system, the main carrier of Christian values. "Religion," according to the *Chambers Encyclopaedia*, is "man's relation to divine or superhuman powers and the various organised systems of belief and worship in which these relations have been expressed." Further, this "belief in the existence of such relations is a general human conviction, common to all peoples and to all stages of culture."

According to this definition, therefore, the white missionaries should and did find a religion in their new found land.

Traditional African society believed in the existence of gods; each object has a separate creator; therefore, the traditional African society was pantheistic in its belief. On the contrary, the Christians are monotheistic; their God is an omniscient, omnipotent, super-sensible supreme being. In the Christian sense God is accessible by reason and human spirit. To the African, the gods' existence is both material and spiritual. His belief assures him that gods exist, and their affirmation and justification of their existence is the fulfilment of their contractual obligations.<sup>2</sup>

The African, contrary to the Christian manner, is in daily direct contact with his gods for the good of all. Religion is a personal thing for the Christian; it is for the salvation of the individual. In contrast, African traditional religion was usually a communal affair, practised not just for the spiritual and physical benefit of an individual or his immediate kin, but for the well-being of all within the purview of the celebrant. Shrines of deities erected in compounds and in villages generally honored these deities and invited them to protect and prosper all within the compound or village.<sup>3</sup> The collective erection of these shrines of deities is often a collective response to a collective responsibility.

Although the traditional African has been invited to embrace the Christian religion which is practised two to three hours a week, as a member of the extended family he makes use of religion in his day-to-day activities. His life is religion and religion is his life: the constant and general foundation of African tradition is the spiritual view of life.<sup>4</sup> Pope Paul VI was simply amplifying Bishop Shanahan whose conclusion on the life of the Igbo people was that the average native was admirably suited by environment and training for an explanation of life in terms of the spirit, rather than of the flesh. He is no materialist, indeed nothing was farther from his mind than a materialistic philosophy of existence: it had no appeal for him.<sup>5</sup> For the African, to be is to be religious in a religious universe.<sup>6</sup>

From the above it can be seen that there have and still do abound areas of similarity between Christian and African values. Differences surely existed in the application and in the living of some of these values. Probably, the traditional African extended family system was defective in that it failed to value to the same degree all men the world over and adopted a different attitude towards those who did not come from the same "town." According to many African traditions the sacredness of life cannot be applied universally to include every human being to the same degree. The killing of human beings, for example, was common in the olden days, either in the course of funeral rites as a means of providing attendant spirits to accompany a dead chief into the great beyond, or as a sacrifice to atone for sins.<sup>7</sup> In each case, the victim was someone procured or bought from a distant town. Acts of injustice committed against a "non-native" belonged to a different moral species from that committed against one who was a son of the soil.<sup>8</sup> Towards a foreigner of equivalent status, injustice had no longer the same character as against the elders or brothers of a clan,<sup>9</sup> to kill whom was a crime and abomination against the earth god, ala.

Other anti-religious practices such as the killing of twins and the ostracism of their mother, local slave trade, child-kidnapping and human sacrifice existed partly on account of defects in the extended family system, attitudes regarding the value of man and ignorance or superstition.

It is true that the traditional religious practices of the African are anthropocentric in the sense that all the religious practices invariably point to one objective, namely, human life and its preservation. Prayers and sacrifices offered to the gods and the ancestors all have one end in view, namely, the welfare of man.<sup>10</sup> However, it was not until the advent of Christianity and its

interaction with the native culture that the extended family system took on macro-dimensions. All human beings, irrespective of race or ethnic origin, are seen and accepted as members of this extended family, that is, as children of God and hence members of one family. In other words, man is now given his value simply because he is man, and is not discriminated against because he hails from a different area.

Some aspects of African culture have been civilized by wholesome interaction with Christian values which have had a purificatory effect. It is due to Christianity that today twin babies are no longer destroyed, that their mothers are no longer tabooed and ostracised, that the practice of local slave trade, child-kidnapping and human sacrifices have been dropped, and that the frequent local community feuds and bloody clashes have been immensely reduced or, in some localities, even totally abandoned.

Similarly, such acts as robbery, arson, rape and burglary, which were considered to be acts of bravery if perpetrated against enemies, but as horrible crimes when committed against members of the same community, now receive general and objective condemnation as crimes and evils wherever and on whomsoever they are committed. This extension of the scope, meaning and application of the traditional African extended family system is a benefit deriving from the contact between Christianity and African culture.

## **RELIGION AND SOCIAL LIFE**

Turning to the second phase of the problem, let us examine the influence of Christian values on our social life. Here close examination reveals a situation similar to an injection which was intended to procure life, but instead brings death to the patient. Rather than the complimentary and revitalising role which Christian values played on some of the religious spheres of African culture, their relation with certain aspects of social life permitted no compromises.

Generally, Christianity crushed Igbo African beliefs and methods of social control such as divination and such dispute-settling methods as the consultation of oracles. The place and authority of dead ancestors were doubted and shaken. John Christopher Taylor (first C.M.S. Missionary and Pastor at Onitsha, 1857-1869) is quoted as saying that already the *dibeas* were ashamed in his district as their craft is now in danger of being exposed before the light of Christianity in the eyes of their long down-trodden vassals. Reporting how glad he was to see the converts throw away the traditions of their homeland in their enthusiasm to embrace the new faith,<sup>11</sup> Taylor gives testimony to the overwhelming of African culture by an invading Christian one. It is equally testimony to the fallible nature of the early Christians who failed to look into the social control and cultural values of the *dibeas* before uncritically imposing Western religious patterns.

Religious intolerance is more manifest in the dealings of Christianity with such aspects of African culture as marriage. Almost all the Christian churches have refused to recognise polygamy within the African context. Others refuse inter-denominational marriages involving their members. The Africans regard polygamy as a healthy institution which insures respect for husbands and love for wives, assures social security, and checks flirting or prostitution. The insistence of Christianity on monogamy is an arbitrary imposition without adequate consideration of the *raison d'etre* of the traditional institution of polygamy which sustains the extended family patterns and assures continuity, the bedrock of the traditional ancestral worship.

The African practice is to bury an elderly person soon after death with preliminary ceremonies; after a year or more the second burial takes place with more vigorous and detailed



ceremonies. It is this second burial which helps the spirit of such a departed individual to join and rest happily with the ancestors in the land of ancestral bliss. Without it the spirit of the departed hovers about in the air and may harm its kindred living members. But once this second burial is performed, the spirit of the departed assumes his place in the land of ancestral bliss where he can plead effectively with the gods for the well-being of the members of his family.

The missionaries' attack upon this tradition was two-pronged. The attack upon second burial was aimed at neutralizing traditional belief in ancestral spirits, *Ndichie*. This Christian effort may have been motivated by simple evangelistic enthusiasm to uphold the doctrine of monotheism, but the final outcome has not augured well for either Christianity or African culture.

Another traditional institution that underwent pressures from Christianity is the *ozo* title-taking. This ethically and socially elevated traditional title was condemned as pagan, and true Christians are not allowed to take the title in spite of the enormous social control principles associated with this institution. The most disturbing aspect of the whole matter was the total rejection without prior consideration of the meaning or sense of these traditional institutions.

Morality is another area where there is considerable proximity between Christianity and African culture. This is probably due to the fact that the morality flows naturally from religious creed and that man, in both the African and the Christian cultures, has a hereafter whose condition is determined by the quality of one's present life. According to African culture, to gain that hereafter as a place of comfort one must behave in ways consonant with the endless demands of the divinities and ancestors. In this way one's actions and behaviour must not precipitate calamity for oneself, one's family and or for society at large.<sup>12</sup>

For Christianity, as for African culture, no human action or behaviour good or bad escapes the vigilant attention of both God and the earth god, *Ala*: they reward or punish man according to his actions, good or bad. Christianity and African Culture diverge from each other only in their choice of instrument for the execution of the reward or punishment.

The dwindling moral life in our society today may well be traced to the weakness of Christianity in punishing evil. It reserves punishment *postmortem* and *in camera* as far as the living are concerned. Traditional religion believes in punishing evil and condemning any immoral act immediately. The idea of an eternal hellfire or punishment hereafter for all evils is strange and a source of jokes in the village. The sick and the aged who cherish fire for the provision of heat express their delight and desire for the eternal hellfire. As for reward in heaven, they query whether heaven is an insurance company?

Having destroyed belief in, and fear of, the wrath of the gods and the ancestors through the Christian faith's insistence that such gods do not exist nor possess any powers, Christianity creates doubts, confusion and vacuum in the minds of the people. It has, in the words of John Mbiti, generated "doubt and unbelief." On account of this uncertainty and chaos which contact with Christianity has brought into the belief system, an Igbo attends communion at the same time as he believes in the potency of traditional magic; he ties up in the same handkerchief the rosary and the traditional talisman. Africans get themselves baptized Christian, send their children to school, and come to terms with modern technology by buying a lorry and learning to drive it; yet they insist that the lorry is not just a mechanical device but also a force whose control properly belongs to the god of iron whose emblems and charms they therefore display on the lorry.

The influence of Christianity has caused certain customs and beliefs to be discarded or modified, at the same time that it has caused others to be retained by one level of society while on another level new alternatives are being accepted. In other words, Christian influence on culture has been selective; it has not been systematically complete or effective. Thus while

human sacrifice, the slave trade and the killing of twins have been discarded and old and new ideas have been amalgamated in the sphere of religion, the European ideal of monogamous marriage accepted by the Christianized elite exists side by side under the law with the institution of polygamy among the urban and rural masses.<sup>13</sup>

This position with one foot in Christianity and the other in tradition poses a serious dilemma for both Christianity and tradition. The antithetical posture sometimes adopted by Christianity and tradition on certain issues often spells doom and disaster for the belief system as a whole. Christianity understands that Ozo title-taking is essentially connected with pagan religious ceremonies or is accompanied by them, and it insists on removing the pagan elements to make Ozo a social title.<sup>14</sup> The result is the death of that time-honored institution that has been an embodiment of such cherished and positive ethical and social values as justice, truth and solidarity. Now dry materialism like a dry cough is attempting to destroy the society. Previously, an Ozo titled man made a covenant with his ancestors and the awareness of the unfailing sanction from the divinities and ancestors was responsible for the prevalence of law and order in the traditional society. The destruction of this healthy means of social control has unleashed widespread armed robbery, bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds, sexual immorality, cases of murder, indiscipline in schools and even desecration of holy places.

Christian activities which effaced the destruction of twins, cannibalism and other obnoxious religious practices deserve praise and commendation. However, it is undeniable that Christians have played some negative cultural roles in their religious zeal. The Church, remarked Rodney, often took up the role of arbiter of what was culturally correct and African ancestral beliefs were equated with the devil.<sup>15</sup> Of course, this is a natural outcome where Christians behave as though there were two worlds, Africa and Europe, created by two different gods. Christian missionaries seemed to assume that Africa or the African world was created by an imperfect god, and to consider themselves as the only perfect product from a perfect God. If the whole universe and Africa is part of it is the handiwork of an omnipotent God then it has its merits and demerits as permitted by its creator.

African personality would have been debilitated and emptied had the churches gone on to disallow the use of African names for baptism. Our names are, quite strangely, what we are. They are not saccharine but, like an aircraft's blackbox, record the content or totality of the individual African. The continued insistence on the use of European names for baptism by Africans would have been ruinous.

African tradition, or culture has its own authentic institutions and patterns of behaviour and values. It is a tradition or culture that values highly the ideals of truth, liberty, social justice, and achievement. Therefore, it would be in the spirit of Pope Gregory, that:

If Christianity has found anything in the Roman, the Gallican or any other tradition which may be more acceptable to Almighty God it should carefully make choice of the same and sedulously so teach the Church, for things are not to be loved for the sake of places, but places for the sake of good things.

This, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Runcie, reechoed summarily during his evangelistic visit to Nigeria when he admonished that the culture of the people must be respected. Indeed, respect for people's culture is indispensable to the growth and acceptance of Christian influence.

No doubt, some havoc has been caused to African culture as a result of misdirection and misunderstanding, caused in turn by sentiment and overzeal. But since Christian influence has recently tended to take a completely new direction (by searching into some aspects of our culture prior to making pronouncements on them, e.g., setting up cultural issues committees and relaxing

the rules guiding the choice of baptismal names) its destructive role has been relaxed. Recently, it has resumed its expected complementary role, which is tantamount to the purification of culture where necessary of all its destructive and distasteful elements.

## CONCLUSION

We have observed the undulating influence of Christian values on African culture, that is, the good and bad effects of the influence of Christian values especially on the religious and social aspects of culture. Some of the havoc is of a permanent nature, for example, the dismantling or divulging of the masquerade cult or secrets. The knocking and shaking of others have been withstood due to the resilient forces inherent in the culture.

The effect has been a more distinctive and permanent manifestation of the legacy or influence of Christianity, which is the invisible and unofficial striving to live in conjunction both the Christian and the traditional life. Thus, the individual Christian in his subconscious and in moments of crisis clings tenaciously to, or relapses without conflict or qualms, into traditional life. But credit must go to Christianity for the tremendous impact it has had on the advancement of knowledge and learning in Africa: the opaque scales that blindfolded the people have been pulled down. All now know that all men are equal before God, and probably this new thought has been the motive force behind the struggle for independence. Ignorance and superstition have been put to flight after contact with Christianity, and this is an invaluable asset indeed.

## NOTES

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**CHAPTER XI**  
**THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE OF CHRISTIAN VALUES:**  
**DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEMATIC**

CHUKWUDUM BARNABAS OKOLO

When the modern African reflects upon his fundamental experience, almost intuitively he grasps three historical events which have exercised profound influence on his cultural roots and values, namely, slavery, colonialism, and Christianity. Indeed at the first conference of Independent African States in Accra (Ghana) its first president, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, spoke these words with obvious pride: "In the last century, the Europeans discovered Africa. In the next century, the Africans will rediscover Africa." It was to him and other independent African statesmen a mark of triumph that the yesteryears of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism were then over. The new age for the recently independent African had begun; with the attainment of colonial freedom, there should follow also a great responsibility, namely, "to rediscover Africa."

Nkrumah spelled out the existential task which faced the modern, politically-liberated African, namely, to rediscover himself and his world anew after his sad and humiliating experience of slavery and colonialism. Great scholars, Africans and non-Africans, have reflected extensively on the colonized blacks or Africans. These reflections have appeared mostly in political and sociological literature; few were made by philosophers at a philosophic level.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand there has not been as much philosophic reflection on the African experience of Christianity as on the other two. To what extent is Christianity disruptive of African culture and values? What are the possible tensions experienced by the African in his effort to live out Christian values in an African culture? What are the sources of these tensions? These are the dimensions of the problematic and the main burden of the essay. The analysis of the concept of "value" among philosophers and the nature of Christian value are component parts of the inquiry.

### **THE CONCEPT OF VALUE**

Like "good" or any other simple notion, "value" is not easily definable; indeed, as John Hospers writes, "The attempt to give a satisfactory definition of value is an unexpectedly difficult and tricky business."<sup>2</sup> In its ordinary, simple meaning "value" means worth of some sort: a thing has value if it is worth something. In common usage this worth usually is in terms of the economic or quasi-economic, but among philosophers it covers a multitude of uses and applications.

As a more concrete term, William Frankena distinguishes two main uses of "value":

(a) What is valued, judged to have value, thought to be good or desired, (the expressions 'his values,' 'her value system' and 'American values' refer to what a man, a woman and Americans value or think to be good.) (b) What has value or is valuable or good, as opposed to what is regarded as good or valuable. Then 'values' mean 'things that have value,' 'things that are good,' or 'goods' and for some uses also things that are right, obligatory, beautiful or even true.<sup>3</sup>

Hospers easily distinguishes three senses of "value," namely as (1) "a liking or preference," (2) "that which promotes a goal (end) independently of one's liking or preference" (he makes a distinction between what one de facto likes--is of value to one--and what one ought to like as a

means to something else), and (3) "that which has value or worth in itself without reference to any end."<sup>4</sup>

In this essay the term is used in its wide sense to cover not only what one ought to like, whether as ends-in-themselves or as means to further ends. For it is clear that philosophers make a distinction between what is valued by people in their own culture, for example, and what they ought to value. Ethel M. Albert indeed holds that:

more than two thousand years of discussion of the relationship between what is valued and what is worthy to be valued have yielded many permutations and combinations of the themes proposed by the Athenian philosophers: absolutism vs. relativism; exalted moral idealism vs. interest in the world as it is; rationalism vs. irrationalism . . . both what is valued vs. what is valuable and what is valued vs. what is actually done.<sup>5</sup>

Our point here is not to enter into these controversies among philosophers, but to note the distinction they often make between what people actually do value and what they ought to value, since this is relevant to our discussion on the relation of Christian to African values.<sup>6</sup>

Lastly philosophers make a distinction between intrinsic good or value and instrumental good. The former is applicable to those things that are valuable, desirable, worthwhile or worth having, and as such good for their own sakes. The latter "instrumental good" refers to those things held as worthwhile and hence good insofar as they lead to other goods desired for their own sakes. Money is an easy example of instrumental good, whereas happiness for most philosophers is an intrinsic good. There is a considerable disagreement among philosophers as to which goods are intrinsic and which are only instrumental, but what is important to this essay is not the controversy, but the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental good.

## **NATURE OF CHRISTIAN VALUE**

One must admit that the African finds Christianity problematic precisely because of the nature of its values and the ethical imperatives it imposes upon those who profess it. It is the nature of Christian ethics, moral theology, etc., to specify what values and norms Christians ought to pursue in the light of their supernatural vocation and orientation in Christ. Hence one general definition given to Christian ethics is a "systematic and critical reflection on the moral judgments of those who share a certain perspective, the key to which is the life of Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>7</sup> Charles H. Dodd sees Christianity as "an ethical religion in which ethics are directly related to a certain set of convictions about God, man and the world." He gives four principal motives of Christian ethics, namely, "Christian eschatology," "the idea of the 'Body of Christ' "; "the imitation of Christ," and the "primacy of love or charity."<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, because of man's essentially supernatural horizon as a child of God and not of mere nature, Christian values unlike natural human values have a different source and reference point, namely, revelation and Christ. Man's vocation and orientation are in Christ as man's redeemer; through Him man is called to an intimate sharing of life with God. These Christian values are normative for human conduct as a result of man's new existence in Christ as a child of God and heir to the Kingdom. Christian values are also intrinsic rather than instrumental; they are pursued for their own sake as ends-in-themselves.

Christians generally pursue common values because of their common religious *Weltanschauung*. This includes a belief in a transcendent God as the Creator and End of man, the Fall and Redemption of man (Incarnation), the Trinity, Christ as man's ethical ideal, Scripture as divinely inspired, the existence of grace, Sacraments the church, etc. As a result of

these common beliefs and certain fundamental convictions, Christians share a common attitude towards the world or nature, and particularly toward man.

What is emphasized at this point is that belief in a transcendent absolute (God), personally related to man and providentially to the world, has meant for Christians a different, if not radical, view of the world from, e.g., that of the naturalists or atheists. The Christian, unlike the non-Christian, has dual sources of truth, law, knowledge, and hence, values, namely, "nature and grace" "reason and faith" and "man and God." These need not, and should not, contradict each other since God is the ultimate source of everything according to the Christian faith.<sup>9</sup>

In its authentic Christian affirmation this belief in God has profound consequences upon one's fundamental options, goals and values. "When I believe in God," Hershel Jonah Matt explains, "I affirm my faith in the One Who is my ultimate Lord and Master; the only one whose absolute sovereignty I accept, the only one to whom I owe absolute allegiance and acknowledge absolute obligation. He alone has absolute claim upon me."<sup>10</sup> This type of faith has its own morality, ethics, and values based on the life of Christ. Christian values are thus normative for all Christians as ideals to be pursued concretely through their various cultures, so that the actions and values of Christians are judged in their ethical significance from the perspective of Christ and the teachings of the Church, since Christ alone is the "Way, the Truth and the Life."<sup>11</sup>

Because the heavenly kingdom and its values are often antithetical to those of this world, Christianity itself or the churches find themselves in a position of tension in nearly all cultures. H. Richard Niebuhr refers to this tension in his *Christ and Culture* when he speaks about "the double wrestle of the church with its Lord and with the cultural society with which it lives in symbiosis."<sup>12</sup> The more basic problem is how Christian values are related to human cultures and men's natural values. How is Christ or the church related to culture defined briefly as the total way of life of a people?<sup>13</sup> Is Christ "above culture," "against culture" or the "transformer of culture" as described by Niebuhr?

This is not the place to discuss the controversy. There is no doubt, however, that some tension exists with Christ or Christianity in practically every culture. "It would still be impossible to find any culture invaded by Christ in his army of followers which remains unchanged," Sam Eriwo comments.<sup>14</sup>

The reason for this is the nature of the Christian values themselves as grounded in man's supernatural vocation as a child of God and in the whole history of his salvation. Consequently at times certain values demanded by Christianity, such as love of poverty, suffering, forgiveness of one's enemies, love of all men, humility, particularly as recorded in the New Testament, are the reversal of man's natural values.

Also because man ordinarily pursues natural ends or goals in his culture, plus the fact of his limited notion of what is good, his essential moral weakness, the influence of passions, greed, and so on, definite tensions are bound to arise between the ideals of one's culture and many of the values demanded of Him on the basis of revelation or faith. Needless to say not every Christian value is a reversal of natural value. "Kindness" and "generosity" for example, are both natural and Christian values, while Christianity confers on them special character and importance. Such is the nature of Christian values.

## **DOMINANT AFRICAN VALUES**

It has been necessary to consider first of all the philosophical notion of "value" as a basis for understanding the nature of Christian values. Now we shall attempt to understand the African in his dominant cultural aspirations and values.

The "African" in this analysis is the black, largely sub-Saharan African and his "dominant values" are those of his traditional culture prior to his contact with Christianity and still significant to him. The traditional African is religious to the core of his being: Professor J. Mbiti speaks of him as "notoriously religious." Indeed, as I indicated elsewhere:

"Religion is the main principle that dominates his life and sets a definite tone in his relationship with nature and his fellow man. The triangle of God, nature, and man is inseparable because these 'supreme beings' form the same one reality. Religion is not therefore something extraneous to the African, a 'beyond' in his experience."<sup>15</sup>

Along this line too, mention is to be made of the observation of the religious life of the African by Bishop Shanahan, the great apostle of Igboland in Nigeria. He was convinced "that the average native was admirably suited by environment and training for an explanation of life in terms of the spirit rather than of the flesh. He was no materialist. Indeed nothing was further from his mind than a materialistic philosophy of existence. It made no appeal to him."<sup>16</sup> In spite of its profession of religious transcendence. African traditional religion is a natural one, rooted in the ethos and belief system of a people. Its cultural values are a mixture of good and evil; and from the perspective of revelation or Christian faith many African values are antithetical to those of the heavenly kingdom.

Traditional values and beliefs of the African that stem from his culture include polygamy, belief in One Supreme God as well as many other minor deities; love of children, music, dancing; respect for old age and authority; belief in a future life, marriage and funeral celebrations; a sense of family togetherness and of the extended family, etc. What happens to these cultural beliefs and values when the traditional African embraces Christianity has remained a source of deep tension in the African church. How are these values related to Christian values, to many of which they appear antithetical?

The unfolding of the dimensions of this problematic is our next point, but this much is certain: when a culture receives Christ as a new reference point in its ethical values and aspirations it does not and cannot retain all its values because of the inherent problem and presence of sin as an essential part of the human condition. What values change and what values remain the same, and the criteria for the change, are part and parcel of the problematic.

## **DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEMATIC**

The traditional African culture may well be a theocratic one because of the dominating sense of the numinous and the sacred, but it is far from being Christian. The African finds Christianity disturbing in many of its values and ideals and consequently has every reason to raise constantly the problem of what it means to be African and a Christian at the same time. There is real tension regarding the relationship of Christ to African culture in the African church today and it is important to discern its main sources.

We can easily isolate three distinct sources, the first is the ardent quest of the modern African to regain his existential integrity after the experience of his tragic past of slavery, colonialism and the violence these evils have worked upon his personality and culture. This quest can be described best in the phrase of Amilcar Cabral, the late leader of Guinea Bissau, as "Africans repossessing themselves culturally and materially."

Decolonization of his continent became an inescapable imperative for the post-independence African, who also manifested an explicit desire to assert the truth about himself and his world through the projection of his personality and cultural values to the world community. Kwame Nkrumah said it well when he wrote: "The desire of the African people themselves to unite and to assert their personality in the context of the African Community has made itself felt everywhere."<sup>17</sup>

Consequently in recent times and in black Africa there has been a notable cultural revival reflecting an unconditional desire of the African to return to his cultural roots as the only path to his authentic being. The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC '77) held in Lagos (Nigeria) remains clear testimony to this fact. "The flame which burnt throughout the period of celebration was, we are told, to be kept burning to symbolize the continuation of the spirit of cultural revival, self-discovery and determination of the black race which FESTAC '77 engendered."<sup>18</sup>

In the sphere of religion as in politics the desire for the church to take deep roots through African culture and its values has been an equally marked phenomenon. A little reflection sufficed to bring home to the African clergy in particular that the church in their continent was "a missionary, hence, foreign church," partly because of the fact that Western missionaries constituted the main labor force in many parts of the continent. Moreso, because Western ideas, values and standards characterize the church functions and structures (even in areas where the local hierarchy is predominantly African). Professor Fashole-Luke notes that, "Several political leaders--and African priests--have criticized Western Christian Missionaries for producing churches which are pale imitations of Western church patterns of thought and structures and reflections of Western cultural imperialism."<sup>19</sup>

But the clamor to return to the African roots in the profession of Christian belief, to Africanize the church or, in its more current phrase, "to incarnate Christianity in the local culture" is hardly the end of the problem for the African Christian. The realization, for instance that the early missionaries destroyed some elements of the African culture in the name of Christianity, such as, title-taking and native names, is only the tip of the iceberg as far as the real problems of the African church are concerned. Africans strongly desire to be fully Africans and fully Christians: is this possible? It depends upon the essence of "Africanness" and that of Christianity neither of which is easy to determine or define.

Moreover, what are the criteria for rejecting or accepting African cultural values on the basis of a new life in Christ? And how can Western cultural values be separated from the content of the message itself? Some factors, such as monogamy or Western forms of Catholic liturgical celebration imposed by Rome might seem easy for the African to detect, isolate, and question as examples of Western cultural imperialism; but in fact this is not always easy, and in any case such a task is almost a lifelong process. These are some of the areas of the problematic for the African church today.

Another great source of tension in the African experience of Christianity particularly in incarnating Christianity in the local culture is the criteria put forward or rather approved by the Vatican for "African Catholic Christianity." The late Pope Paul VI, in his address to the Bishops of Africa in Kampala, Uganda, 1969, gave the blueprint in no uncertain terms: "Your church must be first of all Catholic, that is, it must be entirely founded upon the identical, essential, constitutional patrimony of the self-same teaching of Christ, as professed by the authentic and authoritative tradition of the one true church. This condition is fundamental and indisputable."<sup>20</sup> Making his point clearer still, the Supreme Pontiff said: "To make sure that the



message of revealed doctrine cannot be altered, the church has even set down her treasure of truth in certain conceptual and verbal formulas. Even when these formulas are difficult at times, she obliges us to preserve them textually."<sup>21</sup>

The understanding of the church which has remained popular in Catholic theology is that faith or truth is one, universal, unchanging; only its modes of communication or expression are different. This calls to mind the philosophical categories of "essence" and "accident," but is such dualism warranted in the case of the Christian faith? Is the message of Christ one, timeless, and universal? Are there such things as timeless truths or, for that matter, absolute Christian values for all men and for all times?

If faith comes "by hearing"<sup>22</sup> and if "whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver," according to the scholastic maxim,<sup>23</sup> then faith has meaning for a people only through their culture, which makes all the difference in the question of hermeneutics and faith. The problem of timeless, universal truths is all the greater in modern times because of the increasing number of respectable scholars who uphold cultural relativism as an anthropological principle, that is to say, the idea that each culture is a unique and integral unit, not a part of a macro-culture. In effect this is a plea for tolerance and respect for different patterns of culture, as well as for all the races of mankind. It calls into question the idea of universal values and truths. Can two different cultures and peoples understand the same absolute truths in exactly the same way?

Since faith or the Gospel message is and can only be culture-bound, that is to say, received or interpreted by people in a given culture who are influenced by its values, it is difficult to think of transmitting "pure Gospel news" uninfluenced by some culture to people of a different culture. Hence the idea of the "essence" of the Christian message universally valid for all Christians is no less a problem than that of absolute, timeless values. In effect, the task set forth, by the Bishop Delegates of East Africa in their deliberations on "Evangelism" appears extremely difficult, to say the least: "We have first to give Africans what is pure Christianity applicable to all human beings and then what is Christianity in African cultural wrapping."<sup>24</sup> How is this possible, for what exactly is "pure Christianity," or what may be the criteria for African Catholic Christianity, is itself problematic?

The blue print for "African Christianity" or for Africanizing the church became clear to the African particularly after Vatican II with its acceptance of theological or cultural pluralism in the life of the One church and of the One faith. Again, as Pope Paul VI distinctly put it:

The expression, that is, the language and mode of manifesting this one Faith may be manifold; hence, it may be original, suitable to the tongue, the style, the character, the genius and the culture of those who profess this One Faith. From this point of view a certain pluralism is not only legitimate but desirable.<sup>25</sup>

It was in this sense that he meant the African to pursue his own "African Christianity."<sup>26</sup>

The Pope urged the African, "Formulate Catholicism in terms congenial to your own culture; you will be capable of bringing to the Catholic Church the precious and original contribution of 'Negritude' which she needs particularly in this historic hour."<sup>27</sup> Pope John Paul II in Nairobi 11 years later (1980) sealed the views of his predecessor in this question of African Christianity by telling the Kenyan bishops: "Thus not only is Christianity relevant to Africa but Christ in the members of his Body is Himself African."<sup>28</sup>

It is thus obvious that the supreme authority in the Catholic Church shows encouraging sensitivity to the rich cultural traditions and values of Africa as an important contribution to the universal church. The African church on its part has taken the task of incarnating Christianity

into the local culture seriously, and in some places has made remarkable progress along this line. In Zaire, for example, the Eucharistic celebrations and rites are significantly Africanized.

But despite positive signs of approval to Africanize Christianity along determined and accepted criteria, the Vatican itself often stands in the way of progress toward Africanization. In areas that concern the African church and its identity, the African is often subjected to the authority and control of the Vatican. A Zairean mass scheduled by the Zairean church to honor Pope John Paul II during his first historic visit to Africa in 1980 was suddenly cancelled a day before the Pope's arrival by the order of the Vatican Congregation for Sacraments. This undue exercise of Vatican power was a bitter disappointment to the African church, particularly to local ecclesiastics. Cardinal Malula, Archbishop of Kinshasa, registered his protest in no uncertain terms: "As for liturgical life, we would have wished that Your Holiness could have had a first-hand, living experience of a eucharistic celebration in the so-called Zairean rite."<sup>29</sup>

The same fear of obstruction from the Vatican seems to underline the slow pace of the African Church at indigenization or incarnating Christianity in the local culture in such other areas as the use of African staple foods for the Eucharist in the Catholic liturgy:<sup>30</sup> why not African wine and drink instead of foreign bread and wine; why not African liturgical rites and functions for mass, marriage, baptism, etc.? The African church often blames the Vatican for slowing down the process of Africanizing the church. "Rome does not approve of this or that," one often hears from African bishops. Whether the fears are real or merely fictional, the African at times finds the Vatican a barrier on his way to Africanize Christianity.

The attitude of the reigning pontiff, Pope John Paul II, during his visit to Nigeria (1982) was not to ease the many socio-cultural problems which the people experience in Christianity such as polygamy or in Roman Catholicism such as the mandatory celibacy for the African priests. As far as these core problems of African Christianity are concerned, for the Pope tradition is and should be the rule for Africans as well as the Europeans. He was, for instance, emphatic on one man and one wife as the only ideal Christian marriage for all Catholics: "God made them one man and one woman until death." He was equally emphatic on clerical celibacy as mandatory for African priests as for all the priests of the Roman Church, asking the priests to "rely on grace to resist temptation against celibacy." The Pope did not seem to recognize the need even for a dialogue on these issues: on these problems for him *Roma locuta est, causa finita*.

The Pope recognised and commended the African's great love for children and sense of family unit and solidarity, but failed to see the connection between the great love the African has for children and the high value placed on polygamy and the non-celibate state in the African culture. It is precisely because of the African love for children that monogamy, celibacy, the childless marriage, etc., have become problematic in the African experience and practice of the Christian faith. This implies regarding such rules and regulations as instances of Western cultural imperialism. Incarnation of Christianity in the local culture will mean very little unless the Vatican takes these problems seriously. Its reluctance to carry on serious dialogue with the African on these prime values of his culture is an indirect war against the Africanization program. The important point we wish to stress is that the African at times finds the Vatican a source of paradoxical tension in its enthusiastic call for "Africanization," on the one hand, and its unwillingness to give the African a free hand in the process, on the other.

This, or course, is not to say that the Vatican has all the blame, The African indigenous church is also to blame, and this is the third major source of tension. A free and independent spirit of inquiry and action is not among the foremost characteristics of African bishops and cardinals, a few exceptions notwithstanding. They seem to lack initiative and courageous action,

even in the very causes such as the Africanization question which they ought to champion and on which they ought to speak out.

It is not easy to pinpoint the exact cause. A foreign critic, Henri Fesquet, points to their "exaggerated docility in respect to the Holy See,"<sup>31</sup> because of their training in Western scholastic methods. A young Nigerian theologian, Nathaniel Ndiokwere, put the same idea differently--"Leaning so much on Rome," he writes, "has slowed down liturgical adaptation. There is a clash between allegiance to Rome and obedience to church laws, on the one hand, and indigenization and initiative, on the other hand. As long as this obstacle is not removed there will be no meaningful adaptation, what more, dialogue in search of solution."<sup>32</sup>

It might not be the whole reason, but it does seem to be an important one, for there seems to be a display of "over zeal" by the African bishops to please the Holy See at all costs, and never to risk a confrontational stance with it even at the expense of the good of the African church.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen that in this question of Christ and African culture, or the African and Christian values, difficulties and tensions are not wanting. We have also tried to identify their important sources or dimensions. In conclusion some points basic to the inquiry need to be stressed.

First, the African may well count himself fortunate to be blessed with such a basically sound and enduring religious and moral tradition. But this does not at all mean that the Christian religion based on Christ's love ethic constitutes a mere superficial dimension in his moral life. The Christian religion means for the African fundamental changes in many of his cultural values and options such that a real conversion is required for him to be a Christian in the authentic meaning of the term and in its ethical implication.

For Christ or the Gospel to be firmly rooted in the African soil would indeed mean a reversal of many traditional values and practices long cherished by the African, such as the killing of the enemy, an eye-for-an-eye-morality, idol worship, etc. It would mean also a new ethical reference point, Christ's own love ethic as his "new commandment."<sup>33</sup> His introduction of fallen man to that divine *agape* (love) which is self-unclaiming and non-preferential is in itself a significant departure from the traditional ethics of the African. In practice this new faith with its new morality means to the African a higher idea of God and more perfect rules of human conduct.

Secondly, the attitude of Christ or the church to the local culture cannot now be said to be that of hostility. The ideal relationship can be said to have been clearly articulated by Pope Pius XII in 1951 in one of his Encyclicals, which said, among other things:

The church from the beginning down to our own time has always followed this wise practice: let not the Gospel on being introduced into any new land destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful. . . . Whatever is not inseparably bound up with superstition and error will always receive kindly consideration and, when possible, will be preserved intact.<sup>34</sup>

In his own way Pope Paul VI endorsed these views of Pope Pius XII by his own criterion for the authentic incarnation of Christianity in the African culture: "Not every religious feeling is good," he told the Kenyan bishops in 1969, "but only that religious sentiment which interprets the thoughts of God, according to the apostolic teaching authority established by the sole master, Jesus Christ."<sup>35</sup>

With the mind of the Vatican on the criteria for African Christianity made clear to the African bishops, it should be the main burden and responsibility of the bishops and their

theologians to apply the criteria to the needs of their various cultures. The final judgment on which African values are to be or not to be Christianized should be that of the African bishops and their theologians. "You will be able to formulate Catholicism in terms congenial to your own culture." said Pope Paul VI to the Kenyan Bishops in 1969. Consequently the Vatican should be able to trust the initiative, prayerful wisdom and the reflection of the African church in carrying out this mandate of incarnating Christianity in the local culture, and not bind the African church with all sorts of rules and regulations which in practice produce a negative effect on the whole enterprise.

"The Holy Spirit after all acts in his church today as yesterday, . . ." Cardinal Malula of Zaire--perhaps the most progressive African cardinal on Africanizing Christianity--boldly stated. "In the past, foreign missionaries Christianized Africa. The Spirit of God was with them. Today Africans are called on to Africanize Christianity. The same spirit of God will be with them."<sup>36</sup> A task of this nature demands a double thrust of fidelity according to the cardinal, "Fidelity to the Holy Spirit and fidelity to Africa."<sup>37</sup> The Vatican should manifest some faith in the ability and wisdom of the African church to handle its own cultural problems in its own way and not to indulge in what, to many African theologians and bishops, appears an arbitrary exercise of power in this important question of Christianity and African culture.

The third point we wish to stress as a concluding reflection is that for African theology or Christianity to come of age, more initiative, courage and independence of thought will be required of the African bishops and their theologians. The type of Christianity needed in Africa, among other things, is one that answers the real fears and needs of the African people, one that integrates their good cultural values with Christian ones, one that answers or attempts to answer the questions raised by the people's historical and cultural situations. This would mean taking difficult stands on issues and defending unpopular causes like polygamy and non-celibate priesthood if these are judged to be important values of the African culture, as in fact they are.

The challenge of African Christianity would mean also, in effect, a lot of trial and error, mistakes and failures, hindsight and foresight, and retroactive as well as prophetic wisdom. It would require above all the kind of inner freedom and resources of creativity and imagination that usually come with hard work, tireless effort and a determination and courage to be one's self. Whether the African church is ready to rise to the challenge is the question.

Lastly the African should be under no illusion that African Christianity, even when fully of age, would mean the absence of all tensions. The problem of Christ and any culture is one of unresolved tension in the sense of ultimacy. The root of the tension may be traced partly to the nature of revelation itself which is essential to Christianity. Its source is God, Spirit and Incomprehensible. The Gospel message as the history of man's salvation transcends all cultures, but its proclamation is by and to people deeply tied to a culture. The very meeting point of God with man, supernature with nature, universal with particular is itself the root of tension.

We can also regard man himself as the source of tension for man is a profound mystery, as St. Augustine has characterized his nature. To Blaise Pascal man is, "an irrational composite of metaphysics and of history, inexplicable in his grandeur if he truly comes from clay, inexplicable in his misery if he is still that which God made him; to understand him it is imperative to return to the irreducible fact of the Fall."<sup>38</sup> Consequently his culture, the sum total of his handiwork partakes of the same mystery which characterizes his essential nature. The important point for the African to note is that in spite of all kinds of tensions, the dialogue of encounter between Christ and his local culture must continue and it must be vigorous.

## NOTES

1. See such works on the evils of Colonialism and slavery as Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), and *The Dominated Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957); Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism* (London: Panaf, 1964) and *Towards Colonial Freedom* (London: Heineman, 1962); and *Black Orpheus*, tr. S. W. Allen (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1976).

2. *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 581.

3. William Frankena, "Value and Valuation," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 8 (New York: MacMillan, 1967), p. 230. The article contains as well other philosophical usages of "value" and "valuation."

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 583-584.

5. Ethel M. Albert, "Facts and Values," *The Range of Philosophy Introductory Readings*, Harold H. Titus and Maylon H. Hepp, eds. (New York: Van Nostrand, Reinhold, 1970), p. 252.

6. In the case of Plato, for example, the main task of his philosophy is to draw man away from the fleeting values of the senses to the type of life and good that man ought to live and pursue. Likewise Aristotle propounded his practical science of ethics based on the knowledge of what different men find good or valuable and distinguished these goods from the good for man.

7. Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: MacMillan, 1969).

8. C.H. Dodd, *Gospel and Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 85.

9. Cardinal Newman's celebrated view summarized it all: "Nature and grace; reason and revelation come from the same Divine Author whose works cannot contradict each other" *The Idea of a University* (London: Longman's, Green and Co. 1947), p. 194.

10. Hershel Jonah Matt, "What Does it Mean to Believe in God?" *Theology Today* (1954), p. 258.

11. *John* 14:6

12. *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1956).

13. Culture for H.R. Niebuhr is "the work of men's minds and hands. . . . Hence it includes speech, education, tradition, myth, science, art, philosophy, government, law, rite, beliefs, inventions, technologies." *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

14. Sam U. Erivmo, "Traditional Culture and Christianity Rivals or Partners," *African Ecclesiastical Review (AFER)*, 21 (1979), 217.

15. Chukwudum B. Okolo, *The African Church and Signs of Times--A Socio-political Analysis* (Kenya: GABA Publications, 1978), p. 2.

16. Quoted by John P. Jordan, *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria* (Dublin: Elo Press Ltd., 1971), p. 115.

17. Quoted in *Axioms of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Panaf Books Ltd., 1967), p. 4.

18. Sam U. Erivwo, p. 216.

19. Fashole-Luke, "What is African Theology?" *AFER* 16 (1974), 383.

20. "Address to Bishops of Africa, Kampala, 1969" *AFER* 20 (1978), p. 322.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 325.

22. *Romans* 10:17.

23. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 85, a. 5.

24. *AFER* (1975), p. 43.

25. "Address to Bishops of Africa, Kampala, 1969," *ibid.*, p. 325.

26. "And in this sense you may, and you must have an African Christianity." *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
28. *AFER* (1980), p. 196.
29. Quoted by Luke Mbefo, "Recalling the Pope's First Visit to Africa," *The Leader* (1982), p. 3.
30. See Chukwudum B. Okolo, "Christ in Palm Wine," *Bulletin of African Theology* (Kinshasa, Zaire), 3, (1980), 16-23.
31. Quoted by Richard McBrien, "Despite Growth, Church in Africa Has Problems," *Catholic Exponent* (Sept. 24, 1982).
32. *Catholic Life: A National Christian Magazine* (Nigeria), (Christmas Edition, 1982), pp. 4-5.
33. *John* 13:34.
34. Pope Pius XII, *On Promoting Catholic Missions* (Rome, 1951), No. 56, p. 59.
35. Pope Paul VI, "Address to Bishops of Africa, Kampala, 1969" *Ibid.*, p. 323.
36. Cardinal J. Malula, "The Church at the Hour of Africanization," *AFER* (1974), pp. 370-371.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

**APPENDIX**  
**TRADITIONS, CULTURES AND VALUES**  
GEORGE F. McLEAN

This chapter concerns the appropriation and realization of values by persons living with others and in time. Optimistically, time might be seen as the opportunity to become aware of the good one has received in creation, to be attracted in turn to creative action, and therein to exercise one's freedom. More pessimistically, the history of human freedom has never been a tale simply of the good, for the human potentiality to do good is correlatively the ability to fail and do evil. Consequently, the task here is not simply to draw from history a vision of the good and of values, but to determine how to decipher these from a history of human ambiguities and to work with persons of other outlooks in applying these in new and creative ways. In a word, the task is one of interpretation, that is to say, of hermeneutics.

**DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM**

The term `hermeneutics' is derived from the son of Zeus, Hermes, the messenger of the Olympian gods. This etymological root with its three elements(1) a messenger, (2) from the gods and (3) to mankind suggests three corresponding dimensions of our problem, namely, hermeneutics, values and historicity.

*Hermeneutics.* The circumstances of the Greek messenger make manifest the basic dilemma of hermeneutics and interpretation, which has come to be called the hermeneutic circle. This consists in the fact that any understanding of the parts requires an understanding of the whole, while the grasp of the whole depends upon some awareness of its parts. This appears in four ways. First, the herald had not merely to pass on a written text, but to speak or proclaim it. This could be done only by reading through all the parts of the message in sequence. But grasping these as parts requires some understanding of the whole message from the very beginning. How can a whole of meaning depend upon parts, which for their very meaning depend upon the whole? Secondly, the message had to be conveyed in a particular historical time and place, and with specific intonation and inflection. But this would convey only one particular sense from the many potentialities of the words. Thirdly, the messenger had not only to express, but also to explain the message and its ramifications or meaning. This required a certain awareness of the broader context of the issue and of the language as the repository of the culture within which the message was composed. In sum, in order to interpret, convey, or receive a message, some sense of the whole is required for assembling and interpreting its parts; but how can one know the whole before knowing its parts?

This appears also from the task of the messenger in translating or bearing the meaning of the text from the source, in its own context, to others in their distinctive set of circumstances and with their projects and preoccupations. The etymology of the term underlines this task. `Interpret' combines *praesto*: to show, manifest or exhibit, with the prefix *inter* to indicate the distinction of the one from whom and the one to whom the message is passed.<sup>1</sup> This difference could be between past and present, as when an ancient text is being reread today; between one culture and another, as when a text in an other language than one's own is being interpreted; or indeed,

between persons, even in the same culture and time, provided full attention be paid to the uniqueness of each person. But given this difference, how is communication and its implied 'community' between the two contexts possible? And were it not to be possible we would be left with never-ending violent clashes between persons, classes and values.

*Values.* The term 'value' was derived from the economic sphere where it meant the amount of a commodity required in order to bring a certain price. This is reflected also in the term 'axiology,' the root of which means "weighing as much" or "worth as much." This has objective content, for the good must really "weigh-in" it must make a real difference.<sup>2</sup>

The term 'value' expresses this good especially as related to persons who actually acknowledge it as a good and respond to it as desirable. Thus, different individuals or groups, or possibly the same but at different periods, may have distinct sets of values as they become sensitive to, and prize, distinct sets of goods. More generally, over time a subtle shift takes place in the distinctive ranking of the degree to which they prize various goods. By so doing they delineate among objective moral goods a certain pattern of values which in a more stable fashion mirrors their corporate free choices. This constitutes the basic topology of a culture; as repeatedly reaffirmed through time, it builds a tradition or heritage.

By giving shape to the culture, values constitute the prime pattern and gradation of goods experienced from their earliest years by persons born into that heritage. In these terms they interpret and shape the development of their relations with other persons and groups. Young persons, as it were, peer out at the world through cultural lenses which were formed by their family and ancestors and which reflect the pattern of choices made by their community through its long history often in its most trying circumstances. Like a pair of glasses, values do not create the object, but reveal and focus attention upon certain goods and patterns of goods rather than upon others.

Thus values become the basic orienting factor for one's affective and emotional life. Over time, they encourage certain patterns of action and even of physical growth which, in turn, reinforce the pattern of values. Through this process we constitute our universe of moral concern in terms of which we struggle to achieve, mourn our failures, and celebrate our successes.<sup>3</sup> This is our world of hopes and fears, in terms of which, as Plato wrote in the *Laches*, our lives have moral meaning and we can properly begin to speak of virtues.

The reference to the god, Hermes, in the term 'hermeneutics' suggests something of the depth of the meaning which is sought and the implication of this for the world of values. For the message borne by Hermes is not merely an abstract mathematical formula or a methodological prescription devoid of human meaning and value. Rather, it is the limitless wisdom regarding the source and hence the reality, the priorities and hence the value of all. Hesiod had appealed for this in the introduction to his *Theogony*: "Hail, children of Zeus! Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are forever. . . . Tell how at the first gods and earth came to be."<sup>4</sup>

Aristotle indicated this concern for values in describing his science of wisdom as "knowing to what end each thing must be done; . . . and this end is the good of that thing, and in general the supreme good in the whole of nature." Such a science will be most divine, for: "(1) God is thought to be among the causes of all things and to be a first principle, and (2) such a science either God alone can have, or God above all others. All the sciences, indeed, are more necessary than this, but none is better."<sup>5</sup> Hence, rather than considering things in a perspective that is only temporal and totally changing with an implied total relativization of all hermeneutics or



interpretation is essentially open to a vision of what is most real in itself and most lasting through time, that is, to the perennial in the realm of being and values.

*Historicity.* In undertaking his search for unchanging and permanent guides for human action Socrates had directed the attention of the Western mind away from the temporal and changing. In redirecting attention back to this changing universe, the modern mind still echoed Socrates by searching for the permanent structures of complex entities and the stable laws of change. Nevertheless, its attention to the essentially temporal character of mankind and hence to the uniqueness of each decision, individual and corporate, opened important new horizons.

In the term hermeneutics, the element of translation or interpretation stresses the presentation to the one who receives the message. In this their historical situation, and hence the historical character of human life, becomes essential. This brings into consideration not merely the pursuit of general truth, but those to whom truth is expressed, namely, persons in the concrete circumstances of their cultures as these have developed through the history of human interaction with nature, with other human beings and with God.

This human history sets the circumstances in which one perceives the values presented in the tradition and then mobilizes his or her own project toward the future. Given the admixture of good and evil in human action the process of realizing the good in human history always has been compromised with evil. Consequently, the past as well as the present must always be deciphered or interpreted in order to identify both its value content and the contradictions of that content; and projections towards the realization of values in the future must provide also for encountering and overcoming evil.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

In working upon these three themes: hermeneutics, values and historicity, there are two major problems. One concerns truth; it is the rationalist/enlightenment ideal of clarity for all knowledge worthy of the name. The other concerns the good as the object of our will; it is our penchant for considering either only what is good or of value, or only what is evil.

### *Truth*

The Enlightenment ideal focuses upon ideas which are clear and distinct both in themselves and in their interconnection. As such they are divorced often intentionally from existential or temporal significance. Such an ideal of human knowledge, it is proposed, would be achieved either through an intellect working by itself from an Archimedean principle or through the senses drawing their ideas from experience and combining them in myriad tautological transformations.<sup>6</sup> In either case the result is an a-temporal and consequently non-historical ideal of knowledge. This revolutionary view was adhered to even by the Romantics who appeared to oppose it, for in turning to the past and to myths they too sought clear and distinct knowledge of human reality. Thinking that this could be attained if all was understood in its historical context and sequence, they placed historicity ultimately at the service of the rationalist ideal.

In the rationalist view any meaning not clearly and distinctly perceived was an idol to be smashed, an idea to be bracketed by doubt, or something to be wiped clean from the slate of the mind as irrational and coercive. Any type of judgment even if provisional made before all had

been examined and its clarity and distinctness established would be essentially a pre-judgment or prejudice, and therefore a dangerous imposition by the will.

This raises a number of problems. First, absolute knowledge of oneself or of others, simply and without condition, is not possible, for the knower is always conditioned according to his or her position in time and space and in relation to others. But neither is such knowledge of ultimate interest for the reality of human knowledge, as of being, develops in time and with others. This does not exclude the more limited projects of scientific knowledge, but it does identify these precisely as limited and specialized views: they make specific and important but not all-controlling contributions.

Secondly, as reason is had completely by everyone according to Descartes,<sup>7</sup> authority could be only an entitlement of some to decide issues by an application of their will rather than according to an authentic understanding of the truth or justice of an issue. Further, the limited number of people in authority means that the vision of which they disposed would be limited by restricted individual interests. Finally, as one decision constitutes a precedent for those to follow, authority must become fundamentally bankrupt and hence corruptive.<sup>8</sup>

Hermeneutics will need to relocate knowledge in the ongoing process of human discovery as taking place within a still broader project of human interaction.

### *Good*

A second problem area for hermeneutics concerns the good, for it is important to avoid the danger of attempting to take either the good or the bad values or their negations in isolation one from another. In considering only the good, or values, there is danger of abstracting from human life; one loses the sense of the struggle to realize values and tends to supplant this with an idealistic simplicity and inhumane rigor. Ultimately this can only discourage and then destroy authentic human efforts toward the realization of values. Further, by considering only its values we are in danger of taking as an absolute norm a tradition which, being in human history, can only be ambiguous. This would result in our continuing its disvalues as well or, upon recognizing evil therein, rejecting the tradition as a whole.

Finally, it is sometimes observed that the tendency to turn to tradition gives a priority to conservatism in personal ethos or public politics. Those who by privileged education have been able to become familiar with that tradition are constituted thereby as an elite, while others, rather than being encouraged in their freedom, are pressed into a state of dependency.

Other problems derive from treating the negation of value without the broader context of the good that is, of making evil the context for the consideration of the good. The meaning of evil is dependent upon the good and cannot be understood without some notion thereof. On the one hand, one might surreptitiously suppose a pattern of values which, being unarticulated and uncriticized, is in danger of being partial or false and later disastrously misleading in our effort to realize a society worthy of mankind. On the other hand, and still worse, one might have no notion of the human good and thus reduce the description of evil to the simply factual. In that case, it would be no more than a structure described by a value-free theory, without relation to the area of human freedom or responsibility. The antithesis, evil, without its thesis, good, is either blind to, or devoid of, value concern.

Finally, where all, including evil, is a mere state of affairs, one cannot hope to generate a sense of the good or of value. When the horizon becomes one of mere psychological manipulation of the ego, the response can be only through further manipulation. This allows the

ego to dominate the self and thereby excludes human freedom. Politically, for lack of an horizon adequate for the appreciation of freedom no progressive liberation can occur. Instead socio-political changes become mere substitutions of one manipulator for another until there arrives one whose permanence is due to his or her success in repressing others.

The problem then is how to understand or interpret human values in a tradition, which, in its human ambiguity, contains not only its classical ideals, but its historical contradictions. This enables one, in the words of John Dewey, to discover in thoughtful observation and experiment the method of administering the unfinished processes of existence so that frail goods shall be substantiated, secure goods be extended and the precarious promises of good that haunt experienced things be more liberally fulfilled.<sup>9</sup>

The response here will follow a dialectical pattern. The thesis will concern the hermeneutics of value discovery in history and tradition. The critique or antithesis will look at the way contradictions of value also are integral to the dynamics of human social structures and the problems this generates for deciphering the values in one's tradition, for sharing in the vision of other people and for working together toward a future which more fully realizes human values. The final step will look for the ways in which tradition and critique are mutually interdependent, working as thesis and antithesis toward the elaboration of a synthesis in which each person can make his or her full and proper contribution to life in our times.

## **TRADITION**

This section will attend: first, to tradition as the normative locus and summation of the ambiguous human experience of values; second, to the notion of application as the progressive revelation of meaning and of value in the concrete circumstances of history; and third, to hermeneutics as a method for making positive use of the distinctiveness of one's own point in history in order more broadly to appreciate this content of human experience.

To situate and emphasize the relation of meaning to tradition John Caputo, in *Act and Agent: Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development*,<sup>10</sup> notes that from its very beginnings, even before birth, one's experience is lived in and with the biological rhythms of one's mother. Upon birth there follows a progressively broader sharing in the life of parents and siblings; this is the context in which one is fully at peace, and hence most open to personal growth and social development. In a word, from its beginning one's life has been historical: it has been lived in time and with other persons. In the family one's life and learning is realized in relation to the prior life and learning of family members upon which it depends for development and orientation. This is the universal condition of each person, and consequently of the development of human awareness and knowledge.

In terms of this phenomenological understanding interpersonal dependence is not unnatural quite the contrary. We depend for our being upon our creator, we are conceived in dependence upon our parents, and we are nurtured by them with care and concern. Through the years we depend continually upon our family and peers, school and community. Beyond our personal and social group we turn eagerly to other persons whom we recognize as superior, not basically in terms of their will, but in terms of their insight and judgment precisely in those matters where truth, reason and balanced judgment are required. The preeminence or authority of wise persons in the community is not something they usurp or with which they are arbitrarily endowed, but is based upon their capabilities and acknowledged in our free and reasoned response. Thus, the burden of Plato's *Republic* is precisely the education of the future leader to be

able to exercise authority, for while the leader who is wise but indecisive may be ineffective, the one who is decisive but foolish is bound upon destruction.

From this notion of authority it is possible to construct that of tradition by adding to present interchange additional generations with their accumulation of human insight predicated upon the wealth of their human experience through time. As a process of trial and error, of continual correction and addition, history constitutes a type of learning and testing laboratory in which the strengths of various insights can be identified and reinforced, while their deficiencies are corrected and complemented. The cumulative results of the extended process of learning and testing constitute tradition. The historical and prophetic books of the Bible constitute just such an extended concrete account of one's people's process of discovery carried out in interaction with the divine.

The content of a tradition serves as a model and exemplar, not because of personal inertia, but because of the corporate character of the learning by which it was built out of experience and the free and wise acts of succeeding generations in reevaluating, reaffirming, preserving and passing on what has been learned. The content of a long tradition has passed the test of countless generations. Standing, as it were, on the shoulders of our forebears, we are able to discover and evaluate situations with the help of their vision because of the sensitivity they developed and communicated to us. Without this we could not even choose topics to be investigated or awaken within ourselves the desire to study those problems.<sup>11</sup>

Tradition, then, is not simply everything that ever happened, but only what appears significant in the light of those who have appreciated and described it. Indeed, this presentation by different voices draws out its many aspects. Thus tradition is not an object in itself, but a rich source from which multiple themes can be drawn according to the motivation and interest of the inquirer. It needs to be accepted and embraced, affirmed and cultivated. Here the emphasis is neither upon the past or the present, but upon mankind living through time.

But neither is tradition a passive storehouse of materials to be drawn upon and shaped at the arbitrary will of the present inquirer: rather, it presents insight and wisdom that is normative for life in the present and future. Just as prudence (*phronesis*) without law (*nomos*) would be as relativistic and ineffectual as muscular action without a skeletal substructure, so law built simply upon transcendental or abstract vision, without taking account of historicity, would be irrelevant idealism. Hence, there is need to look into historicity to see if human action in time can engender a vision which sufficiently transcends its own time to be normative for the present and directive for the future.

This would consist of a set of values and goals which each person should seek to realize. Its harmony of measure and fullness would suggest a way for the mature and perfect formation of persons and of mankind.<sup>12</sup> Such a vision would be both historical and normative: historical because arising in time and presenting an appropriate way to preserve and promote human life through time; normative because presenting a basis upon which to judge past ages, present actions and options for the future. The fact of human striving manifests that every humanism, far from being indifferent, is committed to the realization of some such classical and perduring model of perfection.

It would be erroneous, however, to consider this merely a matter of knowledge, for then it would engage, not entire peoples, but only a few whom it would divide into opposing schools. The project of a tradition is much broader and can be described only in terms of the more inclusive existential and phenomenological horizon as described Samay and Caputo in *Act and Agent*<sup>13</sup>, namely, as including both body and spirit, knowledge and love. It is, in fact, the whole

human dynamism of reaching out to others in striving toward ever more complete personal and social fulfillment through the realization of understanding and love, and thereby of justice and peace.

Finally, the classical model is not drawn forward artificially by overcoming chronological distance; rather, it acts as inspiration of, and judgment upon, man's best efforts. Through time it is the timeless mode of history. We do not construct it, but belong to it, just as it belongs to us for it is the ultimate community of human striving. Hence, historical and cultural self-criticism is not simply an individual act of subjectivity, but our situatedness in a tradition as this fuses in us past, present and future.<sup>14</sup>

As mentioned in the introduction, the sense of the good or of value which constitutes tradition is required also in order to appreciate the real impact of the achievements and deformations of the present. Without tradition, present events become simply facts of the moment, succeeded by counter-facts in ever succeeding waves of contradiction. This would constitute a history written in terms of violence in which human despair would turn to a Utopian abstraction of merely human origin a kind of *1984* designed according to the reductive limitations of a modern rationalism.

This stands in brutal contrast to the cumulative richness of vision acquired by peoples through the ages and embodied in the figure of a Bolivar or Lincoln, a Gandhi or Mother Theresa, or a Martin Luther King. Not mere matters of fact, but eminently free and unique as concrete universals they exemplified the above-mentioned harmony of measure and fullness which is at once classical and historical, ideal and personal, normative and free. Living in their own times, they emerge out of history to judge and inspire peoples of all times and places.

## APPLICATION

In considering application we turn, as it were, from the whole to its parts, from tradition to its particular meaning for each new time, to ordering the present and constructing the future. This is a matter, first of all, of taking time seriously, that is, of recognizing that reality includes authentic novelty. This contrasts to the perspective of Plato for whom the real is the ideal, the forms or ideas transcending matter and time, of which physical things and temporal events are but shadows. It also goes beyond rationalism's search for clear and distinct knowledge of eternal and simple natures and their relations. A fortiori, it goes beyond method alone without content.

In contrast to all these, Gadamer's notion of application<sup>15</sup> means that tradition, with its inherent authority or normative force, achieves its perfection in the temporal unfolding of reality. Secondly, it shows human persons, not as detached intellects, but as inextricably enabled by, and formative of, their changing physical and social universe. Thirdly, in the area of moral values and human action it expresses directly the striving of persons to realize their lives, the orientation of this striving and its development into a fixed attitude (*hexis*). Hence, as distinct from the physical order *ethos* is a situation neither of law or of lawlessness, but of human and therefore developing institutions and attitudes which regulate, but do not determine.<sup>16</sup>

There are certain broad guidelines for the area of ethical knowledge which can serve in the application of tradition as a guide for historical practice. The concrete and unique reality of human freedom when lived with others through time constitutes a distinctive and ever-changing process. This is historicity and means that our responses to the good are made always in concrete and ever changing circumstances. Hence, the general principles of ethics as a philosophic science of action must not be purely theoretical knowledge or a simple accounting from the past. Instead,

they must help people exercise their conscious freedom in concrete historical circumstances which as ever changing are ever new

Here an important distinction must be made between *techné* and ethics. In *techné* action is governed by an idea as an exemplary cause which is fully determined and known by objective theoretical knowledge (*epistémé*). Skill consists in knowing how to act according to that idea or plan; and when it cannot be carried out perfectly some parts of it are simply omitted in the execution.

In ethics the situation, though similar in the possession of a practical guide and its application to a particular task, differs in important ways. First, in action as moral the subject constitutes oneself, as much as one makes the object, for agents are differentiated by their action. Hence, moral knowledge as an understanding of the appropriateness of human action cannot be fully determined independently of the subjects in their situation.

Secondly, adaptation by moral agents in their application of the law does not diminish, but rather corrects and perfects the law. In a world which is only partially and generally ordered, the law cannot contain in any explicit manner the concrete possibilities which arise in history. It is precisely here that the freedom and creativity of the person is located. This does not consist in an arbitrary response, for Kant is right in saying that without law freedom has no meaning. Nor does it consist simply in an automatic response determined by the historical situation, for then determinism and relativism would compete for the crown in undermining human freedom. Human freedom consists rather in shaping the present according to a sense of what is just and good, and in a way which manifests and indeed creates for the first time more of what justice and goodness mean.

Hence, the law is perfected by its application in the circumstances. *Epoché* and equity do not diminish, but perfect the law. Without them the law would be simply a mechanical replication doing the work not of justice, but of injustice. Ethics is not only knowledge of what is right in general, but the search for what is right in the situation and the choice of the right means for this situation. Knowledge regarding the means is not then a matter of mere expediency; it is the essence of the search for a more perfect application of the law in the given situation. This is the fulfillment of moral knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

It will be important to note here that the rule of the concrete (of what the situation is asking of us) is known not by sense knowledge which simply registers a set of concrete facts. In order to know what is morally required, the situation must be understood in the light of what is right, that is, in the light of what has been discovered about appropriate human action through the tradition with its normative character. Only in this light can moral consciousness as the work of intellect, (*nous*) rather than of sensation, go about its job of choosing the right means.

Hence, to proceed simply in reaction to concrete injustices as present negations of the good, rather than in the light of one's tradition, is ultimately destructive. It inverts the order just mentioned and results in manipulation of our hopes for the good. Destructive or repressive structures would lead us to the use of correspondingly evil means, truly suited only to producing evil results. The true response to evil can be worked out only in terms of the good as discovered by our people, passed on in tradition and applied by us in our times.

The importance of application manifests the central role played by the virtue of prudence (*phronesis*) or thoughtful reflection which enables one to discover the appropriate means for the circumstances. This must include also the virtue of sagacity (*sunesis*), that is, of understanding or concern for the other. For what is required as a guide for the agent is not only technical knowledge of an abstract ideal, but knowledge that takes account of the agent in relation to other

persons. One can assess the situation adequately only inasmuch as one, in a sense, undergoes the situation with the affected parties. Thus, Aristotle rightly describes as "terrible" the one who can make the most of the situation, but without orientation towards moral ends, that is, without concern for the good of others in their situations.

In sum, application is not a subsequent or accidental part of understanding, but co-determines this understanding from the beginning. Moral consciousness must seek to understand the good, not as an ideal to be known and then applied, but rather through discerning the good for concrete persons in their relations with others.

This can contribute to sorting out the human dilemma between an absolutism insensitive to persons in their concrete circumstances and a relativism which leaves the person subject to expediency in public and private life. Indeed, the very statement of the dilemma reflects the deleterious aspect of the Platonic view of ideas. He was right to ground changing and historical being in the unchanging and eternal. This had been Parmenides' first insight in metaphysics and was richly developed in relation to human action through the medievals' notion of an eternal law in the divine mind. But it seems inappropriate to speak directly in these terms regarding human life. In all things individual human persons and humankind as a whole are subject to time, growth and development. As we become increasingly conscious of this the human character of even our abstract ideals becomes manifest and their adapted application in time can be seen, not as their rejection, but as their perfection. In this, justice loses none of its force as an absolute requirement of human action. Rather, the concrete modes of its application in particular circumstances add to what can be articulated in merely abstract and universal terms. A hermeneutic approach directs attention precisely to these unfoldings of the meaning of abstract principles through time. This is not an abandonment of absolutes, but a recognition of the human condition and of the way in which this enriches our knowledge of the principles of human life.

What then should we conclude regarding this sense of the good which mankind has discovered, in which we have been raised, which gives us dominion over our actions, and which enables us to be free and creative? Does it come from God or from man, from eternity or from history? Chakravarti Rajagopalachari of Madras answered:

Whether the epics and songs of a nation spring from the faith and ideas of the common folk, or whether a nation's faith and ideas are produced by its literature is a question which one is free to answer as one likes. . . . Did clouds rise from the sea or was the sea filled by waters from the sky? All such inquiries take us to the feet of God transcending speech and thought.<sup>18</sup>

## **THE INTERPRETATION OF TRADITION: HERMENEUTICS**

Thus far we have treated the character and importance of tradition. This bears the long experience of persons interacting with this world, with other persons and with God. It is made up not only of chronological facts, but of insights regarding human perfection which have been forged by human efforts in concrete circumstances, e.g., the Greek notion of democracy and the enlightenment notions of equality and freedom. By their internal value these stand as normative of the aspirations of a people.

Secondly, we have seen the implications of historicity for novelty in the context of tradition, the continually unfolding circumstances of historical development, and the way in which these not merely extend or repeat what went before but constitute an emerging manifestation of the dynamic character of the vision articulated by the art, religion, literature and political structures of a cultural tradition.

It remains for us now to treat the third element in this study of tradition, namely, hermeneutics. How can earlier sources which express the great achievements of human awareness be understood in a way that is relevant, indicative, and directive of our life in present circumstances? In a word, how can we draw out the significance of tradition for present action?

First of all it is necessary to note that only a unity of meaning, that is, an identity, is intelligible.<sup>19</sup> Just as it is not possible to understand a number three if we include but two units rather than three, no act of understanding is possible unless it is directed to an identity or whole of meaning. This brings us to the classic issue, described above as the hermeneutic circle, in which knowledge of the whole depends upon knowledge of the parts, and vice versa. How can we make this work for, rather than against us?

The experience of reading a text might help. As we read we construe the meaning of a sentence before grasping all its individual parts. What we construe is dependent upon our expectation of the meaning of the sentence which we derived from its first words, the prior context, or more likely a combination of the two. In turn, our expectation or construal of the meaning of the text is adjusted according to the requirements of its various parts as we proceed to read through the parts of the sentence, the paragraph, etc., continually reassessing the whole in terms of the parts and the parts in terms of the whole. This basically circular movement continues until all appears to fit and to be clear.

Similarly, as we begin to look into our tradition we develop a prior conception of its content. This anticipation of meaning is not simply of the tradition as an objective or fixed content to which we come; it is rather what we produce as we participate in the evolution of the tradition, and thereby further determine ourselves. This is a creative stance reflecting the content, not only of the past, but of the time in which I stand and of the life project in which I am engaged. It is a creative unveiling of the content of the tradition as this comes progressively and historically into the present and, through the present, passes into the future.

In this light, time is not a barrier, a separation or an abyss, but rather a bridge and opportunity for the process of understanding, a fertile ground filled with experience, custom and tradition. The importance of the historical distance it provides is not that this enables the subjective reality of persons to disappear so that the objectivity of the situation can emerge. On the contrary, it makes possible a more complete meaning of the tradition, less by removing falsifying factors, than by opening new sources of self-understanding which reveal in the tradition unsuspected implications and even new dimensions of meaning.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, not all our acts of understanding are correct, whether they be about the meaning of a text from another culture, a dimension of a shared tradition, a set of goals or a plan for future action. Hence, it becomes particularly important that they not be adhered to fixedly, but be put at risk in dialogue with others.

In this the basic elements of meaning remains the substances which Aristotle described in terms of autonomy and, by implication, of identity. Hermeneutics would expand this to reflect as well the historical and hermeneutic situation of each person in the dialogue, that is, their horizon or particular possibility for understanding: an horizon is all that can be seen from one's vantage point(s). In reading a text or in a dialoguing with others it is necessary to be aware of our horizon as well as of that of others. It is precisely when our initial projection of the meaning of a text (another's words or the content of a tradition) will not bear up under the progressive dialogue that we are required to adjust our projection of their meaning.

This enables us to adjust not only our prior understanding of the horizon of the other with whom we are in dialogue, but especially our own horizon. Hence, one need not fear being



trapped in one's horizons. They are vantage points of a mind which in principle is open and mobile, capable of being aware of its own horizon and of transcending it through acknowledging the horizons of others. The flow of history implies that we are not bound by our horizons, but move in and out of them. It is in making us aware of our horizons that hermeneutic consciousness accomplishes our liberation.<sup>21</sup>

In this process it is important that we retain a questioning attitude. We must not simply follow through with our previous ideas until a change is forced upon us, but be sensitive to new meanings in true openness. This is neither neutrality as regards the meaning of the tradition, nor an extinction of passionate concern for actions towards the future. Rather, being aware of our own biases or prejudices and adjusting them in dialogue with others implies rejecting what impedes our understanding of others, of texts or of traditions. Our attitude in approaching dialogue must be one of willingness continually to revise our initial projection or expectation of meaning.

There is then a way out of the hermeneutic cycle. It is not by ignoring or denying our horizons and prejudices, but by recognizing them as inevitable and making them work for us. To do so we must direct our attention to the objective meaning of the text in order to draw out, not its meaning for the author, but its application for the present. Through this process of application we serve as midwife for the historicity of a text, tradition or culture and enable it to give birth to the future.<sup>22</sup>

### *Method of Question and Answer*

The effort to draw upon a text or a tradition and in dialogue to discover its meaning for the present supposes authentic openness. The logical structure of this openness is to be found in the exchange of question and answer. The question is required in order to determine just what issue we are engaging in order to direct our attention. Without this no meaningful answer can be given or received. As a question, however, it requires that the answer not be settled or determined. In sum, progress or discovery requires an openness which is not simply indeterminacy, but a question which gives specific direction to our attention and enables us to consider significant evidence. (Note that we can proceed not only by means of positive evidence for one of two possible responses, but also through dissolving counter arguments).

If discovery depends upon the question, then the art of discovery is the art of questioning. Consequently, whether working alone or in conjunction with others, our effort to find the answer should be directed less towards suppressing, than toward reinforcing and unfolding the question. To the degree that its probabilities are built up and intensified it can serve as a searchlight. This is the opposite of both opinion which tends to suppress questions, and of arguing which searches out the weakness in the other's argument. Instead, in conversation as dialogue one enters upon a mutual search to maximize the possibilities of the question, even by speaking at cross-purposes. By mutually eliminating errors and working out a common meaning we discover truth.<sup>23</sup>

Further, it should not be presupposed that the text holds the answer to but one question or horizon which must be identified by the reader. On the contrary, the full horizon of the author is never available to the reader, nor can it be expected that there is but one question to which the text or tradition holds an answer. The sense of the text reaches beyond what the author intended; because of the dynamic character of being as it emerges in time, the horizon is never fixed but continually opens. This constitutes the effective historical element in understanding a text or a tradition. At each step new dimensions of its potentialities open to understanding; the meaning of

a text or tradition lives with the consciousness and hence the horizons not of its author but of persons in history. It is the broadening of their horizons, resulting from their fusion with the horizon of a text or a partner in dialogue, that makes it possible to receive answers which are ever new.<sup>24</sup>

In this one's personal attitudes and interests are, once again, most important. If our interest in developing new horizons is simply the promotion of our own understanding then we could be interested solely in achieving knowledge, and thereby domination over others. This would lock one into an absoluteness of one's prejudices, for being fixed or closed in the past they would disallow new life in the present. In this manner powerful new insights can become with time deadening pre-judgments which suppress freedom.

In contrast, an attitude of authentic openness appreciates the nature of one's own finiteness. On this basis it both respects the past and is open to discerning the future. Such openness is a matter, not merely of new information, but of recognizing the historical nature of man. It enables us to escape from what had deceived us and held us captive, and enables us to learn from new experiences. For example, recognition of the limitations of our finite planning enables us to see that the future is still open.<sup>25</sup>

This suggests that openness consists not so much in surveying others objectively or obeying them in a slavish and unquestioning manner, but is directed primarily to ourselves. It is an extension of our ability to listen to others, and to assimilate the implications of their answers for changes in our own positions. In other words, it is an acknowledgment that the cultural heritage has something new to say to us. The characteristic hermeneutic attitude of effective historical consciousness is then not methodological sureness, but readiness for experience.<sup>26</sup> Seen in these terms our heritage is not closed, but the basis for a life that is ever new, more inclusive, and more rich.

## **SOCIAL CRITIQUE AND TRADITIONAL VALUES**

As was noted above one major fear arises regarding the hermeneutic project as described by Gadamer, namely, that recognition of the authority of tradition might undermine the freedom of those to whom the tradition is mediated. This could be the result of a romantic attitude towards the past as having been in possession of the complete meaning of human life and of the structures for its realization. In that case the past would rule the present: text would become dogma.

H.G. Gadamer's response focuses rather upon new and unique applications of the tradition for the present and future. It is neither desirable, nor even possible, to attempt simply to reconstruct the text objectively according to its original horizon. Instead, from its perspective the text challenges us to live up to its insights and values in our own circumstances, while from our perspective we question it in order to draw from it new implications for our life. Gadamer considers this questioning to be a matter of understanding, and its implied fore- or pre-understanding to be an essentially contemplative act, the task of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) here is to correct any misunderstanding.

In contrast, critical hermeneutics focuses upon the material conditions which causally shape our awareness. It is concerned, not with understanding and hence judgments and prejudices, but with interests and ideologies, and with their correction through the social sciences. Its task is to identify the material causes and thereby to make possible action to remove or adjust those

material factors which by impeding the proper flow of dialogue and communication give rise to misunderstanding and conflict.<sup>27</sup>

There is real continuity between the hermeneutic efforts of Gadamer and critical hermeneutics. Both are directed ultimately towards understanding, both search for theoretical truth, and both oppose dogmatic acceptance of the "text." However, where Gadamer seeks this through understanding, critical hermeneutics seeks it through an explanation of the conditions for misunderstanding and their correction. Yet, even in this, the positions are still not as far apart as at first they might seem for, if today's interests lie less in the materials of production than in the techniques thereof, it is not so much material possessions as knowledge and its implementation that hold the keys to power.

Hence, the roots of critical concern lie deep within the development of modern vision, and indeed within the nature of intellectual knowledge. As reflexive, the person had been understood classically to be self-aware and hence capable of reasoning, language and self-responsibility. As long as, with Aristotle, in the act of knowledge the subject was understood to become the object and all was received according to the mode of the receiver, self-consciousness was not undermined by the distinction between subject and object.

With Descartes, however, the object of knowledge came to be seen as ideas rather than things. As the conditions of knowledge, which previously had been within consciousness but were not distinctly attended to, did not figure in his clear and distinct ideas of natures, it became crucial to know these conditions of knowledge, that is, to have critical knowledge. Kant thematized as categories the factors which actually, but only implicitly had been in knowledge. Hegel articulated them in a developmental pattern through which the subject is progressively realized in and for itself and for us. He saw this as taking place, not through pure theoretical reason or practical reason acting in separation, but in the lived process of the socialization of the person in the universal history of mankind.

In search of a real, rather than an ideal, basis for his dialectic, Marx turned to labor in interaction with others as social labor as the mechanism for the evolution of the human species through history. This works by creating the conditions for the reproduction of social life. Indeed the very identity of the social subject is altered with the scope of his or her power of technical control. This, in turn, determines the epistemological order by constituting the conditions for apprehending the world.<sup>28</sup>

In this way Marx was able to integrate much in his understanding of history. By adding to the forces of production the institutional framework or relations of production his analysis encompassed both material activity and a critique of ideologies, both instrumental action and revolutionary practice, both labor and reflection.

Unfortunately, in increasingly focusing upon work alone as the self-generative act of the species, he lost the ability to understand his own mode of procedure. Though he did not eliminate the structure of symbolic interaction and the role of cultural tradition, they were not part of his philosophical frame of reference for they did not coincide with instrumental action. Yet, it is only in these terms that power and ideology can be comprehended and dissolved by a mode of reflection to which Marx applied the Kantian term "critique."<sup>29</sup>

Since instrumental action by the forces of production responds only to external stimuli, communicative action is required for liberation from the suppression of man's nature by the institutional framework of socially imposed labor and socially determined rewards. For when due to progress this labor is no longer objectively necessary for the common good, in continuing to demand it, the state reflects only the private interests of the class in power.<sup>30</sup>

## THE SYNTHESIS OF TRADITION AND CRITIQUE

We are then in an essentially dialectical situation which reflects the hermeneutic circle. On the one hand, the pattern of interests can be evaluated only in the context of a tradition and its sense of human life and meaning. On the other hand, tradition must be critically examined continually in order to avoid, by mechanical repetition, becoming an instrument of repression rather than of liberation. As both tradition and critique are required and both are interrelated, it becomes important to look more closely into this dialectic. There are two ways in which tradition must draw upon critique if it is to respond to what Habermas refers to as an "interest in emancipation" which surpasses technical or instrumental and practical interests. First, Gadamer's hermeneutics concerns the application of our cultural heritage in the present by a renewal and reinterpretation of tradition in order to draw out its new implications. The means for this are especially the humanities in which the tradition through texts in their literary form, and as values and ideals is articulated. Here, the emphasis is upon appropriating the tradition, identifying with it, and acknowledging its presence as fore-understanding in our every question.

In social critique the sciences must not only describe regularities as do the merely empirical sciences, but also identify the controlling relations of dependence at a deeper level which have become fixed ideologically. Self-reflection, governed by an interest in emancipation, subjects these to a critique which, in turn, allows the real implications of the tradition to emerge.

There are roots in Gadamer's thought for recognition of the importance of this critical element, for he sees historical distance and a consequent new horizon for questioning as a prerequisite for drawing out new implications of the meaning of the text or tradition. This, in turn, reflects the importance of distinguishing the text from the intention of its author(s), for the text transcends the author's psychological and sociological context. This emancipation of the text from its psycho- and socio-cultural decontextualization is a fundamental condition for hermeneutic interpretation: "distanciation now belongs to the mediation itself."<sup>31</sup>

This is reflected both on the essential or structural level and on the existential level. In the former it becomes necessary to go beyond Gadamer's description of discourse as a spontaneous conversation of question and answer and to begin to consider discourse as a product of praxis by which it is crafted from smaller units. Here meaning takes place in structures: "The *matter* of the text is not what naive reading of the text reveals, but what the formal arrangement of the text mediates."<sup>32</sup> Hence, structural analysis is required in order to understand the *depth semantics* of the text as a condition for grasping its matter.

If the sense of the work is its internal organization, the reference of the text is the way in which being unfolds *in front*, as it were, of the text. This is the existential reality of being emerging as temporal and historical as the power to be. In sharp contrast to a deadening repetition of the past, frozen in a fixed ideology, the creative space opened by reference to the "power to be" constitutes a critique of ideology.

This implies not merely a liberation from the structures of our environment, but a liberation of the self as well. Hermeneutic understanding is not an imposition of the reader upon the text; rather, the text provides an interlocutor which enables the reader consciously to examine his or her own subjectivity. By making possible imaginative variations of one's ego, one can achieve the distance required for a first critique of his/her own illusions and false consciousness, and of the ideology in which he/she has been reared.<sup>33</sup>

Critical distance is then an essential element for hermeneutics. It requires an analysis by the social sciences of the historical social structures as a basis for liberation from internal determination by, and dependence upon, unjust interests. The concrete psycho- and socio-pathology deriving from such dependencies and the corresponding steps toward liberation therefrom are the subject of studies by J. Loiacono and H. Ferrand de Piazza *The Social Context of Values: Perspectives of the Americas*.<sup>34</sup> Critical distance also has an existential dimension which is made possible by the temporality of being and man's projection toward the historical future (see the studies of O. Pegoraro and M. Dy in the same volume.) Together these open up the possibility of liberation of the subject.

### *Dependence of Critique upon Tradition*

The relation between hermeneutics and social critique being dialectical, just as the distancing characteristic of the critical social sciences can make possible some dimensions of awareness essential for emancipation in a world of increasingly technical and convoluted structures, so also tradition provides other dimensions of awareness essential for the critique to which these sciences contribute. Paul Ricoeur has attempted to codify these contributions in his article, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology."<sup>35</sup>

First, a critique must recognize that it is carried out in the context of interests which establish a frame of meaning. The sequence of technical, practical and emancipating interests reflect the emergence of man out of nature and correspond to the developmental phases of moral sensitivity. Habermas studies Kohlberg closely on this and employs his work. But to the question of the basis of these interests no adequate answer is provided. They are not empirically justifiable or they would be found only at the level of technical interests. Neither do they constitute a theory as a network of working hypotheses for then they would be justified at most by the interest in emancipation, which in turn would fall into a vicious circle.

The only proper description of these interests as truly all-embracing must lie in Heidegger's existentials, which are hidden only in being so present as to be in need of being unveiled by a hermeneutic method. Thus Gadamer's hermeneutic project on the clarification of prejudices and Habermas's suggestion of critical work on interests through the social sciences though not identical share common ground.

Secondly, critiques of ideologies appear in the end to share characteristics common to those of the historical hermeneutic sciences. Both focus upon the ability to develop the communicative action of free persons. Their common effort is against a reduction of all human communication to instrumental action and institutionalization, for it is here that manipulation takes place. Hence, success or failure in extending the critique of interests beyond instrumental action determines whether the community will promote or destroy its members.

Ricoeur moves from this concern regarding the general horizon of social critique to the observation that it is unlikely ever to be successful if we have no experience of communication with our own cultural heritage. This can be required in a dialogue, for the effective basis of any real consensus must lie not in an empty ideal or regulative idea, but in life that has been experienced and shared. "He who is unable to interpret his past may also be incapable of projecting concretely his interest in emancipation."<sup>36</sup>

Thirdly, today communicative action needs more than a model to suggest what might otherwise not occur to our minds, for the rationalization of human life has become such that all of its aspects are controlled pervasively in terms of instrumental action. Whereas Marx could

refer in his day to surplus value as the motive of production, this is true no longer. Instead, the system itself of technology has become the key to productivity and all is coordinated toward the support and promotion of this system; this is the ideology of our day. As a result the distinction between communicative action and instrumental action has been overridden so that control no longer can be expected from communicative action.

This raises a new type of question, namely, how can the interest in emancipation be kept alive. Undoubtedly, communicative action must be reawakened and made to live if we are not to be simply subjects indeed 'slaves' of the technological machine. But how is this to be done; whence can this life be derived if the present situation is pervasively occupied and shaped by science and technology as the new, and now all-encompassing, master? The answer of Ricoeur and Gadamer is that it can be done only by drawing upon our heritage in the manner suggested by Heidegger. We need now as never before to reach back into our heritage in order to retrieve contents which were present seminally, but never developed. These are the resources of our tradition, which can give rise to the radically new visions needed for the emancipation of mankind living in an age of increasing domination and manipulation and this not primarily of economy and politics, but of minds and hearts.

Finally, there is a still more fundamental sense in which critique, rather than being opposed to tradition or taking a questioning attitude thereto, is itself an appeal to tradition. Criticism appeals unabashedly to the heritage of emancipation as an ideal inherited from the Enlightenment. But this tradition has longer roots which reach back to the liberating acts of the Exodus and the Resurrection. "Perhaps" writes Ricoeur "there would be no more interest in emancipation, no more anticipation of freedom, if the Exodus and the Resurrection were effaced from the memory of mankind."<sup>37</sup>

According to the proper norms of communicative action, these historical acts should be taken also in their symbolic sense according to which liberation and emancipation express the root interest basic to traditional cultures. In this manner they point to fundamental dimensions of being, indeed to Being Itself as the unique existence in whom the alienated can be reunited to the logos which founds subjectivity without an estranging selfishness, and to the spirit through whom human freedom can be creative in history. Remembrance and celebration of this heritage provide needed inspiration and direction both for any in power who might be indifferent to the needs of the poor and alienated and for the alienated poor themselves. It enables both to reach out in mutual comprehension, reconciliation and concern to form social unity marked by emancipation and peace.

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## NOTES

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3. J. Mehta, *Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1967), pp. 90-91.

4. Hesiod, *Theogony* trans. H.G. Everland-White (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), p. 85.
5. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 2.
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7. R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, I.
8. H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroads, 1975), pp. 240, 246-247, 305-310.
9. John Dewey, *Existence as Precarious and Stable*, see J. Mann & G. Kreyche, *Perspectives on Reality* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), p. 379.
10. G. McLean *et al.* eds. (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy and The University Press of America, 1986).
11. Gadamer, pp. 248, 250-251.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 252-253.
13. See n. 4 above along with Ch. III by S. Samay, "Affectivity: The Power Base of Moral Behavior," pp. 71-114.
14. Gadamer, p. 258.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 281-286.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 278-279.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 281-286.
18. *Ramayana* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1976), p. 312.
19. Gadamer, p. 262.
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22. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-332.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 225-332.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 336-340.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 327-324.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 324-325.
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28. J. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon, 1971), pp. 28-35.
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30. For a more extended treatment of the character of the critical hermeneutics of J. Habermas, see G. McLean, "Cultural Heritage, Social Critique and Future Construction" in R. Molina, T. Ready and G. McLean, eds., *Culture, Human Rights and Peace in Central America* (Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy and The University Press of America, 1988), pp. 1-24.
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