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Education for a Multi-Racial Country

by H. JAC. ROSSEAU

Here we live: here is our home.
How can all of us live here happily and fruitfully?

AS Africa's hot wind of change grows into a gale, this question is burning into the hearts of the 6 million Europeans and 3 million other Non-Europeans who share Africa with over 200 million Africans and African Arabs.

Outnumbered 125 to 1 in the Belgian Congo, 100 to 1 in Kenya, 25 to 1 in the Federation as a whole and 12 to 1 in Southern Rhodesa, 4 to 1 in Algeria, and 3 to 1 in South Africa, they are beginning to realise that force cannot save them: in Algeria the 7 million Arabs cannot be controlled even by a nation of 45 million Frenchmen pouring millions of francs into the struggle hourly.

What are we to do? What *ought* we to do?

Our problems in multi-cultural Africa embrace Europe's plus some of the most baffling in the world, and *only basic ethical principles can save us, for these are the most practical.* No teacher or statesman can have a better aim than Christ's: "I have come that they may have life . . . more abundantly." How can we achieve life abundant? "Love God — love your neighbour." Who is my neighbour? Everybody, replied Christ in the story of the good Samaritan, even those who dislike me most or whom I dislike most. Whatever I wish them to do to me I must do to them. Self-preservation as the first law of life? Never! Those who seek to save their life shall surely lose it.

Fine words — but do they work?

Nothing else will: force is clearly failing — threats of "going it alone" are ridiculous. Everyday experience and years of research in factory, school, farm and other enterprises prove that people work best if their employers, teachers or other leaders demonstrate personal interest and faith in them and their efforts. Human energies are most constructively liberated by a spirit of community and trust in which varied talents and backgrounds find full scope: they are most effectively wasted and frustrated and turned to hatred and destruction by an atmosphere of distrust and hostility.

Sheer commonsense. National welfare depends on developing and using every atom of ability no matter where such ability is to be found. What drowning man refuses to be saved because the rescuer has black hands or speaks Chinese? Applying the words of the great Negro educator Booker Washington to ourselves: "Twenty million hands will help to pull us upwards, or they will pull us downwards. The Africans can constitute 70% and more of the ignorance, crime and disease of this country — or 70% of its intelligence and progress; they will contribute 70% of its agricultural, industrial and commercial prosperity — or they will prove a veritable body of death, stagnating, depressing, retarding every effort at advance."

Our wealth is our people: it is not the minerals or the soil or the rivers but the people who make a country either backward and poor, or advanced and rich. Keen and intelligent people are making even deserts bloom as the rose.

What kind of education will arise on these foundations of religion and psychology and economics? First, let us consider what each of us wants for himself and those he loves: *life abundant — for each and all.* Education will therefore be universal, at least at the primary level, with enough scholarships to enable poor but meritorious pupils to develop their talents to the full for the common weal. To foster life abundant, schooling will not be bowed down with books and examinations but take time to look at the problems of wise living: health, agriculture, work, human relations, spiritual advances, wise citizenship. Because we learn to live better only by practising better living and by thinking about it to improve our efforts, young people will for instance become more sensible citizens by participating in the government of school societies, visiting and studying government, agriculture and industry, discussing underlying facts like the need for greater production by all the people, community service through Red Cross, Scouts, evening classes, and so on.

Such education will increase national productivity, making further educational advance possible.

Second, education must foster *national unity* not only in these ways but also by promoting

contacts, discussion, joint projects, mutual respect, pride in one another's achievements. We develop unity only by practising unity. Though the existence of different home languages and backgrounds makes it virtually impossible to teach children of all groups in the same primary classes, they must increasingly meet in the same primary schools and in the same secondary and university classes. At our University College even in the residences integration is working well without any lowering of conduct or achievement; next must come gradual integration of upper secondary classes. Integration will demand give-and-take on the part of all concerned: but tolerance and patience are required wherever people desire to live as friends rather than enemies. Where integrated schools of quality have existed, as at Lovedale until about 1925, they have produced outstanding citizens, created respect for each other (the Europeans by no means always topped their classes!), and above all developed mutual understanding. If unity is strength, why do we educate for crippling disunity?

Third, the details of the educational system will be hammered out in *consultation* among the most intelligent representatives of all groups, for we all resent being told, "Just do as I tell you: I know what is best for you!" Moreover, only as the leaders of emergent groups face the practical problems of implementing ideal plans do they come to appreciate that blaming everything on the Government solves none of the facts of life, such as the need for wisdom, stability and higher productivity. Joint consultation being an essential prerequisite, details like medium of instruction, curricula and administration need no elaboration here.

Two thorny problems remain, however: On the one hand, this education for all — who will pay for it? On the other hand, it obviously implies government by all the people within the foreseeable future — what will happen to the advanced groups then? Only the briefest discussion is possible here.

First, the money. In Europe and America a country's revenue is applied to the education and welfare of all alike, rich or poor. In Africa the poor are so numerous that the few others have a heavy burden to carry. Though our taxes are not as severe as in the U.K. or U.S.A., to raise them considerably would repel many urgently needed immigrants and even drive some competent citizens to more favourable countries. Slightly increased taxes could be better utilised for the interest on large five-yearly development loans from the U.K., U.S.A. and U.N. over the next 15-20 years, by which time the children entering school now will be increasing the national productivity and revenue.

As for the franchise, advanced groups fear domination by illiterate masses. There are grounds for this fear, but today it is an exaggerated fear. It is important to remember that after 100-150 years of contact and education there are many intelligent, civilised and responsible men in the less advanced groups and that it is they who will be the parliamentary leaders. Not the masses but the leaders will govern — and as they come up against the concrete facts of life they soon realise that they can develop their country only by making conditions attractive for Western capital and competence, and by educating their people to productivity and responsibility. There are signs of this even in the Belgian Congo, where there are virtually no well-educated leaders. A European sugar baron in the British West Indies recently stated that universal franchise had had the same effect there: an unprecedented spurt of development, in which non-Jamaicans had been encouraged to play a large part. India's experience has been similar.

We have no option but to take this calculated risk by practising our own highest principles as civilised democrats and Christians: nothing is clearer in modern Africa than that he who seeks to save his life by selfish policies shall lose it. All over the world frustrated desire for life abundant is bursting into flame, and we cannot save ourselves by trying to live in isolation in an armed camp. Southern Africa is fortunate in having the most considerable leavening of Westerners in Africa. Our function must be to act as catalysts of progress towards life abundant for all, raising our country to levels of prosperity we never dreamt possible. This exhilarating challenge must be met today: tomorrow will be too late. The future is not ours to see; we can but trust in God and do the right.

Real culture demands rebellion more than adjustment. Those who feel that the average man is always right and that we should educate on a mediocre level are only helping the forces of disintegration. If adjustment were the goal of culture we should still be in the old stone age.

Frederick Mayer.