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Some Reflections on the Moral Quandary of 1960 Africa

by BRIAN ROSE

IT is easy to think in fragments about Africa; to see an Educational problem, an Economic problem or a Political problem. Such thinking at once simplifies and confuses the real issues. The problem throughout Africa has its roots in inter-personal relationships, and these know no geographical boundary. And like all failures of relations, the African problem is first and foremost a moral one.

It is a fact that the African controversy all over the world throughout 1960 has involved not so much economic or geographical considerations, as moral ones. And this, in a highly sceptical world, is a strange thing, except to those completely engagés who realise that every moment involves — as Jean Sartre would say — a choice upon which may hinge the fate of civilisation. There is thus at present a considerable though often lonely debate in which every intelligent African, white or black, is implicated: a re-examination of those values which understrut our way of life, and which constitute the touchstone of our aim.

Morality finally rests upon man's ability to choose: an example of that *active intelligence* that Jacques Maritain insists separates man from the rest of the animal kingdom. But the very act of choice necessitates a reasonably careful and intelligent assessment of factors involved. It is an accepted fact that below a certain level of intelligence, morality ceases to have meaning, which clearly indicates the intellectual framework in which real morality works. The difference between animal and human choice — and hence the basis upon which a true morality evolves, is that the animal chooses between a hierarchy of drives and tissue needs, all of which have immediate urgency. Man, however, is able to ignore immediate satisfaction for some ultimately more satisfying long-distance objective, and in this postponement to express that wisdom of the race which is true morality. Concomitant with this he learns to tolerate the not infrequent conflicts within himself that originate in the withholding of these satisfactions.

Maritain has tried to express this race wisdom that is true morality in terms of Natural Law, which involves not the Imperative, but the *Should*. Opposed to him are those who feel that morality expresses essentially an ephemeral set of attitudes, significant only in the historical moment of their appearance, a view that would hardly be compatible with Toynbee's majestically pessimistic analysis of history.

In insisting on the prime necessity to make choices, the existential philosophers set themselves against neutrality, and indeed one of the dangers of the African scene is that far too many people who have the intelligence, the education and the experience, are sitting on the touch-line: when their weight is needed in the scrum. This failure to commit themselves, a sort of spiritual and moral cowardice, has dangers manifold. On the other hand, many commit themselves with a reckless enthusiasm neither intelligent nor advised, often choosing some immediate satisfaction which immediately makes impossible the attainment of a more desirable goal further ahead. Since such behaviour clearly lies beyond the ultimate control of law, it could be influenced either by religion or politics. The latter respond to the lightest touch of present demands and tend to render confusion the more obscure, whilst modern religion in Africa seems to have followed priests rather than prophets, and meets the unstable present with formulae rather than with the friction of living mind and spirit.

Religion in its moments of eruption and impact is not as conservative and traditional as it seems when it has become institutionalised. Customary morality, often closely linked with religion, too often expresses the L.C.M. of the group, whilst all real religion has been the H.C.F. Religion is the story of the lonely man, not the well-adapted one of present-day Group Dynamics, and even Margaret Mead has had to admit that some American communities are so well-adapted in their inter-personal relationships that they have to look for leadership beyond the group.

This concept of adaptability all too easily leads on to conformity, a damaging precept for any

community in times of rapid change. Conformity is useful in regimenting those who either have not the ability to be moral, or who endanger the common good by their neutrality. But *any* young person growing up in the ferment and instability of 1960 Africa is doomed if he faces his future with a bundle of moral clichés and a handful of rigid attitudes. Choose he must, but his choice should be moral—in the sense that it should be a rightful and rational decision made after consideration of all the factors involved. This is the great sin of the politician, who presents a dichotomy of choice—either *this* or *that* —when in fact there exists a plurality of choice, and often neither of the factors offered politically is worth serious consideration.

All choice is influenced by attitudes and factors often lying inarticulately in the unconscious. We in Africa have apparently yet to learn that we are part one of another; that justice is indivisible; that as the self-centred person ultimately kills himself by thrombosis or ulcers, so the self-centred community kills itself slowly, strangling itself in its own neurosis. There is a great risk that group morality might express an out-dated reaction pattern that guarantees wrong choice, whereas the truly religious mind would meet the situation openly, without formula, except the promotion of communal well-being. It is this sense of Pauline *Caritas*, this immediate existential involvement, this abandonment of neutrality that has become so urgent in Africa.

There is, of course, an obverse side to all this: that spiritual and psychological growth is only achieved when, having chosen, we abide by the results of our choice. This, ultimately is responsibility, and it is an individual decision, not the conformity of mass to the will of few. There is no responsibility for action to which one was opposed; though the real neutral is always compromised beyond adequate defence.

Modern Africa has just enough time to evolve a way of life that will be conducive to happiness and productivity: it has just enough time to come to terms with itself. It remains fundamentally a backward sector of the world, and economically an undeveloped area. It is into such areas that an expanding, more highly developed society would infiltrate. And once the population explosion of the orient reaches the empty confusion of Africa, only a well-integrated, well-stabilised society will be able to cope with the repercussions.

In terms of education, these considerations have far reaching implications. They infer that a training in rigid mental conformity, often mistaken for discipline, is treason: for he who would survive must have a lively mind capable of arriving at right action from immediate analysis, not by the application of rule-of-thumb formulae that suited occasions long past. This means a training in adventurous intelligence, a confronting of young minds with situations demanding originality and resourcefulness: a training in principles. It means that what we should encourage is non-conformity, a rich outgoing curiosity, a sturdy contempt for ponderous ready-made solutions, a reliance on the individual decision, and a willingness to co-operate with others of a similar calibre. It means that we need finer scientific training: not mechanical rote; that we must regard the active teacher—passive class, as a menace; that we must not rest until every child participates in education with that excitement and satisfaction that should always attend it. And it means something further.

It is little use, as Martin Buber has remarked, to be well armed with method if one has no idea where one is going, And where are we of Africa going? What is our goal? That is a question of value, one which the scientist shies at. And every year teachers enter classrooms with no clearly defined idea as to the *sort of person* that they hope their year's work will promote. Indeed, under the influence of the rejection of value judgements in scientific procedure, and the suspicion of the validity of values hitherto regarded as eternal which sociologists and psychologists have engendered, many otherwise earnest people look askance at ultimate value goals — an attitude to which much existential philosophy encourages them. This vitiates leadership.

Leadership rests ultimately on consent, not on domination, and while it infers an awareness of group goals in the leader, it is supported by a willingness of those led to examine and to accept by choice the propositions offered. Two disasters have befallen modern Africa. A variety of causes have helped to splinter the intellectuals at a time when an hereditary aristocracy has ceased. A return to T. S. Eliot's class consensus is thus impossible. Uncertain of value goals, divided among themselves, the modern intellectual has sold out his leadership to the astute politician who is concerned not with ultimates but with short time satisfactions. Real leadership in Africa will only result when sufficient intellectuals make common cause and provide a reinstated moral policy. There are signs that this

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conformers of the world, and this diversity in unity is a heritage we must not lightly cast aside, least of all in religion. There is no desire for all to get into one kraal or laager — it's so dull, besides being fatal to man's search for truth.

Jt is fashionable to attack Christian National Education in a negative way — they shouldn't do this, and they shouldn't say that. Mere diagnosis of an illness does not automatically bring about a cure. Wherever possible, there must be positive treatment. We say we know what is wrong with C.N.E. It is possible that we can take preventive measures — isolate ourselves, or gargle meaninglessly with words. This may serve our own ends, but what about the children in our care? Surely they are worth some positive effort? Or do we feel that if we all thought the same way, then wrong would obviously be right, and we could live happily ever after? That, at any rate, is how the political arm of C.N.E. thinks. It is hardly likely that the English-speaking teacher will bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image, however sweet the music of the sackbut and psaltery. The danger is there all the same.

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should help to co-ordinate and prevent unnecessary duplication, that the state should act in full publicity in these matters, etc. It is, however, also true that private initiative may fall short of its task, that the state will have to take over where stimulation fails to elicit a satisfactory result, that the state has a right to know what is done with subventions, how it is done and to what extent the general interest has been served.

A nation in so intricate a situation as the South African knows this. Yet we must help to develop an all pervading sense of educational responsibility in all its citizens as individuals, as citizens of their country and as representatives of Western culture. Just like charity, education begins at home and educational responsibility begins with those who produced the child. There is no apology for parents — and for those who are loyal to them — to confine their educational responsibility to the home (or: the school). Educational responsibility *begins* at home but then it appears to be one of the most fundamental responsibilities of the citizen as a member of a community which finally embraces a whole world.

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cation. Grants to cover at least 60%—70% of total expenditure would come from a properly-constituted central government. Each region would raise the rest of the money by taxation, but an equalisation formula would ensure that less privileged areas would not suffer.

Under this system, as is the case in England today, a number of National Advisory Councils could be established e.g. for "The Training of Teachers" and "Technical Education and Industry" and so on.

There is a need for reform in the organisation and administration of education in South Africa. Rather, however, than have unacceptable ideas and patterns of organisation foisted upon the country, it is obvious that those who fear further domination through education will cling to what they already have and will resist any change. It is clear, therefore, that the present is not the time to attempt any such change which can only result in deeper division than is unfortunately the case.

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may be accomplished sooner than the pessimist might imagine. The second disaster that has fallen on Africa is the state of neurosis into which people of all races have been led. This shows itself in an inability to choose: somewhat like the induced neurosis that modern Conditioning has produced in dogs. Indeed, the formula that neurosis was basically an inability to make a choice could hardly be gainsaid by any modern psychologist. Presented with pairs of alternatives both of which are disagreeable, the ordinary person abstains from choice and produces ultimately a conflict of indecision that can only be seen at a community level as a massive maladjustment. The tragedy lies in the fact that the choices are really manifold, and that the two offered seldom operate at an immediate and functional level at all.

This whole problem would make the theme for a national or even international conference of educationists, a departure that might well mark the beginning of new adjustments throughout African society. To the intelligent person of whole mind, Africa offers unlimited opportunities.