



Will we make or mar ?

by Bernard FONLON

*If we could first know
where we are,
and whither we are tending,
we could better judge
what to do,
and how to do it.*

— Abraham Lincoln¹

This review has now completed one year of existence. And, apart from the general intention to promote culture in Cameroon, it has espoused, up to this, no definite orientation, no well delineated policy. But we have not been unmindful of the need for such a guiding line for a periodical of this kind ; we have given careful thought to this all along, only we deemed it wiser to hasten slowly, to hasten surely.

At length, we have come to the conclusion that **Abbia**, being a cultural review, a Cameroon cultural review, should adopt as central policy whatever happens to be the most important problem in Cameroon cultural progress at any given period.

At the Meeting of the Waters

A fact at once crucial and historic about our country, at present, is that, today, three cultural currents are met in Cameroon : the African mainstream — the culture of the land, the culture of the masses ; and the French and British tributaries — the cultures of the westernised few.

Now, at this juncture, the question that rises uppermost in our minds is this : What shall we do with these, where do we go from here ?

A look at each of these cultures in turn may help to furnish an answer to this question.

1) The Speech **A house divided against itself cannot stand**, made at Springfield, Illinois, on June 17, 1858, on the occasion of Lincoln' nomination to the United States Senate.

Although the African way of life is the culture of the many, and although all of us, however up-rooted we may be, share in it to a certain extent, the fact remains that, the African tradition, today, is largely a dormant culture, because it is not the vehicle and instrument of modern progress ; and, as we know, it is the power to promote scientific thought and technical know-how that endows a culture with dynamism.

Furthermore, **Cultural Initiative** (and by cultural initiative I mean the right or authority to introduce new measures or new courses of action in matters cultural) does not rest with the unlettered masses that live according to the ancient ways. This initiative, this authority lies exclusively in the hands of the westernised few. Without this power, no man or group can initiate cultural policy or bring significant influence to bear on cultural progress. Here, it may be observed, in passing, that one of the gravest injuries that colonialism inflicted on African culture was that it wrested this initiative from the hands of the African and thus seriously impaired our cultural **continuum**. For, from the position of initiator in his own welfare, the African was reduced even below the level of participant and became, in affairs touching his intimate self, a mere passive on-looker. It was only with the coming of independence that **Cultural Initiative** returned, or seemed to have returned, into African hands.

There is also this fact that, from the moment that colonialism set foot on African soil, the African way of life has been locked in a life and death struggle with European influence ; and it looks almost certain that, from this unequal warfare, European culture will emerge the winner. Indeed, victory for the whiteman's way of life seems all the more assured as the African himself, through a sense of shame born of a purposely inculcated inferiority complex, has taken an active part in spurning and demolishing the legacy of his fathers.

On the contrary, though the culture of the few, European culture is the culture of government, the culture of science and technology, the culture of commerce and industry, the culture of the schools and the churches, in a word, the culture of those persons and institutions in whose grasp **Cultural Initiative** is solidly entrenched. For the administration and the institutions I have enumerated constitute the brain and the nerve centres, the heart and the blood-vessels of the body politic. In other words, European culture among us is a force charged with dynamism and resilience, an imperative for our political, economic, social and cultural advancement.

However, the two specimens of this culture, that are met in our country today, are not of equal strength. The Anglo-Saxon is weaker, and, this, for obvious reasons.

It was through West Cameroon that British influence came into the present set-up ; but in this federation, West Cameroon occupies a position that is inferior geographically, inferior demographically, inferior politically, inferior in resources. The numerical, territorial, and economic inferiority of West Cameroon is a self-evident fact, but the political side of it may need an explanation.

This federation came into being with the union of two states, one (the Cameroon Republic) already endowed with external sovereignty and the other (Southern Cameroons) scarcely enjoying internal self-government. There could be, therefore, no bargaining between them as between equals ; for, at the conference table, Southern Cameroons could not speak with that dignity, that authority, that is the prerogative, today, of even tiny Zanzibar.

The result of this many-sided inequality is that, in this federation, that initiative of which I spoke above, that power to introduce policy, to shape the course of events in things political, economic, social and cultural, lies, to all intents and purposes, entirely in the hands of East Cameroonians.

In three years of unification, sundry uses and institutions, thanks to articles five and six of the federal constitution, have now come from the East into the West. Furthermore, in West Cameroon, they now drive on the right, the franc has replaced sterling as legal tender, the school year has now been stream-lined to fit that of the East and the scientific Metric System has now replaced the unwieldy British measures.

But I have searched in vain for one such use or institution brought into the East through West Cameroon. Outside its own federate frontiers, the influence of West Cameroon is practically nil.

By the very nature of things and by the force of circumstances, therefore, the tide is running hard against Anglo-Saxon influence in the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Thus, this much is clear that, if we leave things to chance, if the will and the positive choice of our leaders do not intervene, there is hardly any hope of worthy British uses and institutions surviving in our cultural corpus.

The influence of the French, on the contrary, thanks to their colonial cultural policy, thanks to their chummy attitude to the blacks, thanks to their vast economic interests, thanks to their

numerous physical presence, is very strong — and waxing stronger.

Furthermore, the French, in colonial days, denied that there was anything of sterling worth in the African way of life and rejected the blackman's values as so much savagery. The only way to save the African culturally was to wash his brain clean of his primitive barbarism and make him French as thoroughly as possible.

That was the famous policy that has gone down in colonial history as **Assimilation**. Thus it is that the African *élite*, in the former French colonies, especially those of them who spent years in France and went through institutes of higher learning there, underwent a cultural grilling and indoctrination of which English speaking Africans have no idea. The thoroughness of this process was all the more assured as most of these young men and women left for France at a very tender age, often straight from the primary school. A process which furnished a well-fashioned *évolué* cut to strict Cartesian shape, but, more often than not, with trauma in his soul.

The result, for this country, is that the East Cameroon intellectual in whose hands lie nine-tenths of the cultural responsibility in this federation, is virtually a French man. And with all the goodwill in the word, with all the effort at intellectual honesty, he will act and react as a French man.

The massive evidence, therefore, is that, in East Cameroon, the influence of the French, already overwhelming, is tremendously reinforced and consolidated by the Cameroonians themselves.

Therefore, unless the East Cameroon leader and intellectual, in whose hands cultural initiative lies, is prepared to share this authority with his brother from West of the Mungo, unless he is prepared to make the giant effort necessary to break loose from the strait-jacket of his French education, unless he will show proof of intellectual probity and admit candidly that there are things in the Anglo-Saxon way of life that can do this country good, there is little chance of survival, neither for English influence, nor even for African values in the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

With African culture moribund, with John Bullism weak and in danger of being smothered, we will all be French it two generations or three !

One of Four Possibilities

Where two or more cultures meet, as they have done in Cameroon, one of four possible policies can be adopted with regard to their future development.

Firstly, within the framework of a political union more or less loose, each culture is allowed to live its own life and pursue an autonomous destiny. This is most likely to happen where the two cultures are of equal strength or where each cultural community is ferociously bent on defending its own way of life, regardless of the intrinsic worth of that way of life. Switzerland, Belgium, India and Canada are notable examples.

The next possibility is where the weight of one of the cultures is so heavy that it smothers the life out of the rest, or where the other cultural partners are not particularly keen on preserving their own traditions. An example of this is the hegemony of Anglo-Saxonism in the United States where immigrant communities have but one burning ambition, to shed their former selves and become American, out and out ; where the Negro, in his ardour for complete Americanisation, asks with disdain : **What is Africa to me ?**²

A third possible policy is to refrain from choosing any predetermined mould into which to force these cultures, but to leave them alone to sort themselves out at haphazard, that is, without the guidance of knowledge and principle.

The last possibility is where the intrinsic worth of each of the cultures is admitted and it is decided to examine their constituent elements carefully in order to use the best of them to build up a new, rich, harmonised and dynamic system : new, because it is a **tertium quid** better than its antecedents ; rich, because of its diversity ; harmonised, because of its unity ; dynamic, because of its power to foster creative thought and concrete cultural achievement.

Four roads, therefore, lie open before us : independent development, elimination of the weak by the strong, **laissez-faire**, and scientific integration. Which do we choose for Cameroon ?

Separate development is to be excluded because to choose it would be to reject the goal that the Cameroon people have set for themselves, to wit, national unity ; and a nation, as I pointed out in the first issue of this review, is essentially a unit of thought and feeling ; and this it can only be, thanks to its culture. Furthermore, power in the new political outfit is so concentrated in the hands of the federal authorities that separate development, if it is to proceed without friction, will call for a revision of the Constitution.

That the dominant culture should smother out the dormant, is to be rejected out of hand ; for that would mean to cast away a

2) Countee Cullen : **Heritage** (poem).

peerless opportunity for cultural enrichment : each of these three cultures has something to offer us, something of intrinsic beauty that the others cannot give. To allow one culture to oust the rest would be to mar an historic chance, to wreck the noble mission that Cameroon has been called upon to fulfil in the name of all Africa. When President Ahidjo says that this country is a pilot state, he is not bragging, nor is he using a phrase void of meaning. It is precisely the historic opportunity to effect an integration of these three cultures that has invested Cameroon with the singular, enviable mission to pilot the rest of Africa into continental unity. It would be a curious lack of a sense of history to be indifferent to an enterprise of these dimensions.

Laissez-faire also merits outright rejection ; for given the passiveness of African culture and the impotence of Anglo-Saxon influence, on the one hand, and the ascendancy of the French on the other, **laissez-faire** can have but one outcome : Complete Frenchification.

There is only one road left, the only one that is right, namely, a carefully thought-out integration of the best elements from the three cultures.

In this affair, the Cameroon Bilingual Cultural Review is not neutral. It cannot be neutral. It has taken its stand for Cultural Integration in Cameroon.

The Challenge

Before the independence of Ghana, the prevalent propaganda was that Africans were innately unfit to govern themselves. Thus it is to the lasting credit of the Ghanaians to have seen, right from the start, the overwhelming importance of their independence not only to themselves but to all Africa, and, indeed, to the entire Negro race : to fail was completely out of the question ; they had no choice but to succeed ; else, they would betray a whole continent, a whole race, and give occasion to the enemies of the black man's freedom to dance for very joy.

As the African revolution gathered strength and swept along irresistably, it began to dawn upon thinking African leaders that independence for a balkanised Africa was little better than the colonial yoke ; and so the idea of African unity began to gain speedy ground. Struck with terror at the prospect of the might of a United Africa, the blackman's enemies began wispering into influential African ears that such unity was unrealistic, impossible, utop-

ian. Looking round, they saw something which they believed they could exploit with devastating effect to wreck all hopes for the achievement of African oneness : they began to inculcate the idea that Africans cast, respectively, in the French and in the English moulds were so radically different that all their efforts to come together were, **a priori**, doomed to failure.

Just as Ghana's independence exploded the first myth and blazed the trail of freedom for the rest of Africa, Cameroon reunification has a clear mission to demolish the second and lead the way to African unity. The overwhelming importance of this rôle cannot be over-stressed : we have no choice but to succeed ; to fail would be to let down a whole continent, to let down a whole race.

Furthermore, this Cameroon experiment, already so wide in scope, has a third, more essential dimension in depth. For, as I observed earlier, it seems as if, in the unequal struggle with the whiteman's ways, African culture, long become languid, is doomed to be worsted, doomed to be ground underneath as by a massive roller.

With this opportunity for cultural integration in Cameroon, we have an historic chance to vindicate the resilience and the vitality of African culture, to show that, though dormant, it is not dead, that, though passive in appearance, it possesses, notwithstanding, hidden springs of resistance, and that, with renewal, it is destined to play an irreplaceable rôle in the modern Africa.

However, in what does this mission consist essentially ?

I have said before that the union of a people is not complete until they have forged for themselves a soul, that principle of life and continuity, that unity of thought and feeling that only a common culture can give. And the only way for Africa to acquire this principle is to create a new culture thoughtfully, methodically, diligently, from those which are met on the continent today.

Thus, if we fulfil this mission with intelligence and devotion and energy, the culture which we forge for ourselves here will be, at least, the nucleus of an all African culture, since the main cultural forces on the African continent are the same that are met today in Cameroon.

The Essential Operations

As I have said before, the final end of our striving in this enterprise is to create a new, rich, harmonised and dynamic culture **from all that is best** in those we have inherited. To arrive at this, three

operations will be necessary : firstly, a keen-sighted, objective, scientific **examination** of the constituent elements of the cultures concerned ; next, a logical, dispassionate, decisive **choice** ; and lastly, a judicious, energetic **carrying into effect** of that choice.

But how shall that which is best be known ; what acid test shall reveal its worth ?

First, and in general, an element to be chosen must be true and good and beautiful in itself ; secondly, it must be that which among others as true, as good and as beautiful as itself, best satisfies a specific need felt by us, a specific void in our cultural life.

But if this noble enterprise is to be made, not marred, we must follow a clearly delineated policy, we must respect definite rules and principles, which rules and principles call for specific methods and procedures.

This Culture must be African

The first principle, of which we must never lose sight, is that this culture, to be created from elements so different in their origin, must be African in its essence : the soil from which it springs, from which it draws its nourishment, must be African ; African must be the stem into which the Franco-British borrowings should be grafted so that the sap that runs through the organism, from the root to the flower, and gives life and unity to the whole, should be African.

If this is to be, two things are absolutely necessary : firstly, African values should be studied anew, should be purified, rehabilitated and charged with new dynamism ; secondly, it is of primordial importance that this African renewal and the examination and choice of the foreign elements to be grafted thereon should be done by Africans.

Any institution, however excellent, foreign in initiative and creation, offered to us ready-made on a platter of gold can in no way be said to be African. If such institutions multiplied among us, they would only serve to perpetuate the myth that Africans are over-grown children.

The Practical Application

As a general rule, therefore, whenever there is question of the creation or the adoption and adaptation of an institution or a use of national cultural importance, no foreign intervention should be

called in until African brains have exhausted themselves on the problem.

In its development, from the state of idea to that of thing, a policy normally passes through the following stages : first, someone conceives it, next it is examined, deliberated upon, elaborated, then it is adopted and finally applied.

At the stages of conception, deliberation and choice, Africans must never call for help until it is certain, beyond doubt, that the problem is above their capacity. Lack of trained personnel makes it absolutely necessary for us to rely on the stranger. Yet, except it cannot be helped, let him be called in only at the stage of application or execution ; and, even then, his work should be subject to careful superintendence.

As a rule, whenever it is necessary, at any stage, to use the foreigner's help, it must be certain that he is really a specialist in that specific field. Furthermore, and this is of supreme importance, he must be a man whose word, whose pledge, is absolutely inviolate, a man whose sincerity is transparent.

We must likewise bear in mind that the creation of a culture or the building of a nation is also a process in self-education : we learn to do by doing. That is the only way to consolidate our manhood and vindicate our maturity. We shall never cure ourselves of that cultural alienation of which we are the victims, we shall never achieve anything of sterling worth, we shall never make Africa African, if we bury our own talent, if we run to the stranger, at every turn, before we have even tried.

The Principle of Equal Participation

As I have said before, the inequality of East and West Cameroon in size, in men, in resources and in power is a self-evident fact.

Therefore, the weakness of West Cameroon and of Anglo-Saxon influence in this federation, consequent on this multiform inferiority, is a perfectly natural outcome. It would therefore be naive to fret against the fact. And yet, a man, as a man, does not lose his rights because he is diminutive in stature or because he is a valetudinarian. The two federated states of this federation, as federated states, are on the same footing of equality. Besides, in its very first article, our constitution makes English and French official languages, without qualification. In fact, if the need arose to decide which of these two cultures has the upper hand, it would be completely

misleading to judge them in the Cameroon context ; the question must be settled by ascertaining the extent and the force of their respective influences in Africa and in the world. But that is beside the question. The point to establish and ram down is that, in this federation, these two cultures stand on the same footing of equality. In fact, it is the difference in culture that justifies the separate existence of the two states. Without this difference, there would have been no excuse, whatsoever, for a country as small as ours to saddle itself with the unwieldy burden of three parliaments and three governments.

Each of these two influences, therefore, must be given an equal chance to participate effectively in the cultural development of this country.

The Practical Implications

But the inequalities of West Cameroon, as we have seen, are so many and so overwhelming that, in fact, they have tended to crowd out or drown the few points of equality. There is need, therefore, for a positive policy, for a conscious effort, for eternal vigilance, against this tendency.

As a practical rule, therefore, when there is question of making a decision of great cultural moment, when there is question of setting up an institution, of adopting a use of far-reaching, cultural importance, West Cameroon, through its experts, should be given an equal, real, and effective opportunity to make a contribution.

I said earlier that, politically, West Cameroon entered this federation as an unequal partner. But those who drew up our constitution showed proof of sound wisdom by making sure that West Cameroon should have an equal voice in the passing of the laws of this land ; making provision in article 17 that

*federal laws shall be adopted by
a simple majority of deputies,*

they went on to lay down , in the succeeding article, that, when a second reading is necessary,

*the law shall be adopted only if the
majority specified in the preceding
article comprises a majority of votes
of the deputies of each of the
federated states*

And yet when I talk of an equal opportunity for initiative and participation in this country's cultural development, I do not intend

anything as rigid and legal as this constitutional provision.

What then do I mean ?

A Concrete Illustration

A country's university, especially where there is only one, is the brains of the nation, the power-house of its intellectual life, the supplier of its skills, the moulder of its leadership, the seat of its culture. A country's university, therefore, is its highest cultural institution.

For a Cameroon university today to be really national, it must satisfy two categorical imperatives : First it must, in the main, be the creation, the brain-child, of Cameroonians themselves ; secondly, it must reflect the nature that our country has assumed in this history-making epoch of its existence, to wit, it must be, not only basically African, but also a university where French and Anglo-Saxon influences meet to blend.

But if these two exigences have to be met genuinely, West Cameroonians must be given a real and equal chance to make an effective contribution in bringing this institution into being and in bearing it through from its conception, its elaboration and its establishment to its full bloom.

To deny them this right (for a right it is, and in no way a favour — let that be clearly borne in mind) would be a gravest omission.

If we want therefore, that the emerging Cameroon culture should faithfully represent the present nature of our country, if we wish to accomplish, with insight and method and devotion and dynamism, the African mission that has devolved upon us, if we wish that this country should be the pilot African state in fact as in name, then Cameroon should resolve to exploit its bicultural talent and experience to the full, whenever there is question of the adoption and the adaptation of an important cultural use or the creation of institutions of primordial cultural worth — like the re-organisation of our law and our judiciary, our education system, our public services, the creation of a military tradition, the setting up of our institutions of higher learning.

Else, the high purpose that we claim to have set for ourselves, the noble mission that has fallen to our lot will be marred, not made, and perhaps marred beyond mending.

To avert this failure, it will be imperative, not only that East

Cameroonians should share cultural initiative and authority with their brothers from West of the Mungo ; it will be equally necessary that West Cameroonians themselves should become more conscious of the natural inequalities and disabilities under which they labour in this set-up, and strive to make up by quality what they lack in quantity.

There is no future for their identity in this federation, if they are asleep to this situation, if they are not prepared, as the expression is, to put their best foot foremost.

But as the intelligentsia, whose role is of the first importance in this enterprise, possess but skill without authority, they will not be able to give their best, if the politicians persist in their neglect to use them judiciously, if they persist in their failure to acknowledge the elementary principle that political authority, by itself alone, cannot be equated with technical know-how.

I must make the point, therefore, and drive it home that, in this matter, a very heavy responsibility lies on the shoulders of the West Cameroon leadership.

The political authorities in this country, as a whole, have the duty to seek out the country's talent, to appraise it, to give urgent and ample opportunity for its formation where it is deficient and to go every length in seeing to it that each one is employed where he is calculated to be most effective and productive, that is, at the job to which he is destined by his specialised training.

But experience, especially in West Cameroon, warns that this national mission may be ruined beyond the point of no return, unless the party in power is prepared to declare a political moratorium, to bannish factional bitterness and muster every hand to the task of national reconstruction.

The Primordial Counterpart

It is obvious that we of the present generation whose days are running out shall not be there to enjoy the bloom of this harmonized culture whose seeds we are now striving to sow. We plant for posterity.

For, although it is its external expressions like tools and machines, styles of shelter, sculpture and painting, music and literature, political institutions, judicial systems, forms of worship that are most in evidence, culture is essentially something internal, something of the mind and heart ; for all these things are but the embodiment of thought and faith and feeling.

In creating and developing culture, therefore, the essential operation is that which is carried on within ; if culture dies in man, if thought and skill and feeling and belief are not transmitted by one generation to another, the concrete counterparts of civilisation would disappear for ever from the face of the earth.

All this goes to emphasize the overwhelming importance of education as a cultural operation : it makes culture a living force, ensures its continuity, enhances its chances of renewal and enables it to fructify.

There are two things in education : the first is the matter or content, that is, the whole gamut of human learning ; the second is the form — the language in which that content is couched for transmission. In so far as the rôle of education in the process of cultural integration is concerned, certain fundamental principles need to be laid down both with regard to matter and to form.

The first of these is that, at the initial stages, at the base, that is, the content of African education should be African.

This is no morbid chauvinism, no xenophobia : it is merely respect for an historical, psychological and pedagogical necessity.

For what other cultural patrimony does a community possess to hand down to posterity than the corpus of the knowledge, the principles and the arts it has garnered and created, by itself, for itself, through the ages, in the past ? How else can such a community preserve its identity, in changing time, except by moulding its posterity in its own image and likeness and by breathing into that posterity the breath of its own life ? And with what else can this community accomplish this historical task except with its culture ?

Secondly, a principle at once elementary and cardinal in intellectual formation is to proceed from the known to the unknown. The first task of the teacher is to furnish the child with names for the images and the ideas thrown upon the screen of his mind by the world and the motion he observes about him ; and next, thanks to analogy, to make him conceive that which is unseen from that which is seen.

If we begin with things completely removed from the child's experience, the effort he expends to imagine what those things might be could be such as to do lasting harm to the tender learning faculty.

There are schools in this country where the text books used

for teaching infants, even in the very first classes, are those intended for children in France. Some may say that this is due to lack of funds and experts to prepare more suitable manuals. For my part, I do not think that is so ; for, in certain circles in this country, even among Africans, the idea is still alive that, if it is not French, it is no use.

This practice continuing after independence is not only an anachronism but a surprising contempt for elementary principles in educational psychology.

And yet the schools which sin most against this law are those which enjoy the highest prestige around here ; for it would appear that they are frequented mostly by the children of the whites and by those of the rising Cameroon bourgeoisie.

With regard to the form of education, since the child comes to school already equipped with knowledge of his environment and with the language in which that knowledge finds expression, the normal principle should be that the first language of instruction should be the indigenous language ; for learning in it would mean, not the acquisition of new knowledge, but the recognition, in print, of that which is already well in the possession of mind and tongue. Thus the earliest attempts at learning to read would not be so arduous a task. But since the native language is not the language of further instruction, this operation should not last unduly long. Nevertheless, provision should be made, in our education system, to enable those who are specially interested to pursue the study of African languages and linguistics right through school and college.

It is my considered opinion, therefore, that where a language, like Fulani, for instance, or Duala or Bulu or Ewondo, is spoken by communities considerably large, and where such a language has the added advantage of having already been reduced to writing, it should be taught in the primary schools, among its speakers, at least for the first two years.

I am of the opinion also that, in such areas, adult education would be immensely more effective, if it were carried on in the native language.

Finally, as I have argued extensively elsewhere, seeing the rôle that French and English have come to play in our national life, seeing their importance in Africa and in the world, and seeing the incontestable fact that languages are best learnt in childhood, the teaching of both English and French in this country, should be begun in the primary school.

The idea is growing upon me that this bilingual programme would be tremendously fostered, if all school readers and manuals, throughout the country, East and West, were given exactly the same content, the language only differing. Thus, if this bilingual project were tried out in an East Cameroon primary school, let us say, French could be started one year ahead of English ; the following year, when English is introduced, the children would get a pleasant surprise to find that they are using the same text book as the year before only in a different language. I am sure the learning would be definitely less arduous.

This bilingual text book scheme could be carefully brought forward, from year to year, until, one day, it covers our whole education system — why not ? — from the primary school to the university.

I would earnestly suggest that a start be made in primary school bilingualism, at least, in a few carefully selected schools, to see how it works.

It has proved successful elsewhere — I wonder, why not here ?

Dangers — from Without

At this stage in our development, the assistance of the stranger is a dire necessity ; and, therefore, any attitude, on our part, that smacks of xenophobia would be the sheerest folly.

Yet, so self-centred is man that there is always an element of personal interest even where there is the undoubted will to live for others' good. How much more, therefore, where there is no determined effort to purify motives ! It should be, thus, no matter for surprise that foreigners serving among us should be prone to seek their country's interest as naturally as water seeks its own level.

There is no such thing as unalloyed altruism.

Therefore, as there is no guarantee that the interest of their country would coincide with ours, it is not ingratitude but the merest prudence to keep a watchful eye on our foreign helpers.

It is, thus, truly meet and just, right and salutary to pause and ask ourselves what is likely to be the attitude of our principal helpers, the French and the Anglo-Saxons, to this enterprise of cultural integration in Cameroon.

This attitude, in either case, can be forecast from two indications : firstly, their past attitude to Africa, to Africans and to things

African ; secondly, heir present activities in other places where prevailing conditions are similar to ours. With facts on these to judge by, the attitude of our helpers can be predicted with a fair amount of accuracy.

First the French. In their colonial theory and practice, the French flatly rejected the existence of any African culture worthy of the name and logically held, as a consequence, that the only means for a black man to be saved, culturally, was to become a Frenchman. Hence the celebrated policy of assimilation.

A classic example of this policy was the inveterate hostility of the French towards African languages. In West Africa, with its confusion of tongues, it would have been understandable, even normal, for the colonial power to brush aside the Babel and impose its own language in the interests of unity and orderly administration.

But what about Malagasy ? What about Arabic ?

Everybody knows, for instance, that, if you count the great cultural languages of the world and count Arabic out, your list is not complete. Not only does this language enshrine one of the major religions of the world ; it was also through it, thanks to Arabic philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes, that Greek philosophy was saved for the West in the confusion that followed the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire. And yet this tremendous prestige did not save Arabic from the French cultural onslaught.

I have beside me here a document³ giving facts and figures about a veritable **hundred year's war** unleashed and waged by the French against Arabic culture in Algeria, from early in the eighteen thirties to the dawn of this present decade. The French generals who conquered Algeria reported that there were two schools in every village and that practically every Arab, at the time, could read and write. Primary instruction was given in the mosques, secondary instruction in institutions called the **zaouias** and higher education in the **medersas**. But the French banished Arabic from the schools ; and these institutions were relentlessly harried, driven underground and ruthlessly suppressed. And side by side with this persecution went the ardent crusade to implant French culture.

Not only were the French hostile towards African culture, but they showed great disrelish for other cultural influences intruding

3) **L'Arabisation culturelle de l'Algérie**, par Vincent Monteil : *Preuves*, Janvier 1964.

into their preserves. I remember, in the nineteen fifties, back in colonial days, there were on the staff of Ibadan University, not only Englishmen and Nigerians, but also Germans, Americans, Scandinavians ; in fact, at one time, the head of the department of English was a Dane. This could hardly have happened, in such an institution, in a French-governed territory. Even after independence, in former French colonies, one still notices the same irritation against the inroad of other influences, the same determination to preserve the French cultural hegemony. For all the ballyhoo about the bilingual university of Cameroon, you can take it for granted that it will be a French university, pure and simple, if the Cameroon authorities do not take this institution well in hand.

French imperialism, especially in things cultural and economic, is of the exclusive, jealous type.

Frankly speaking, therefore, I do not expect any Frenchman to glow with enthusiasm at the prospect of cultural integration in Cameroon ; rather, it would be more in line with his bent and with his past to resent the Anglo-Saxons, and even the West Cameroonians, here, as intruders. I expect him to strain every nerve to foil our national enterprise and to use his overwhelming ascendancy in this country to Frenchify us all.

If this attitude, on the part of the French, is motivated by fear for the survival of their culture in Cameroon, they are mistaken. For cultural integration, in this country, is no threat, whatsoever, against French influence. Rather it is a clarion witness to the eminent rôle that France is called upon to share in a world where her influence is far-flung and deep, a world where monopolistic jealousy is doomed, where interdependence, where co-operation among nations is daily becoming an absolute necessity.

Already the metric system is law throughout this land. And we are glad to have it ! In every secondary school West of the Mungo, pupils are now daily bending over their French lessons. And I can personally assure the French that, were it left to me, I would have the very kids in the primary schools doing in like manner.

Indeed ! far from dwindling, French influence in Cameroon is spreading.

Let the French be assured therefore. Let them shed their former narrowness. Let them exorcise their minds clean of any dog-in-the-manger spirit. And learn to share.

They must learn to share, because as surely as they strain to

have it all alone, thus so surely will they provoke bitterness and resentment against their presence here. If they do not wish to ruin, in this fashion, their splendid chance for doing good, they should be wise in time, and take heed.

What has begun in Cameroon, perhaps, may be destined, like the African revolution, to swell into a continental movement against which not even the gates of hell shall prevail.

To have helped in its making will redound to their deathless merit ; to have striven to mar it — to their limitless discredit.

Throughout this essay, I have purposely avoided speaking of the British and have preferred the more general term of Anglo-Saxon in order to include the Americans. In fact, it is only of the Americans that I intend to speak ; for although the Anglo-Saxon uses and institutions that we have inherited are British, the British themselves, to their lasting credit, on our quitting the Commonwealth, decided to pack out ; and, today, their more wealthy, more vigorous and more redoubtable cousins are swarming in, from accross the Atlantic, to take their place.

And, thus, any real danger that may threaten cultural integration in Cameroon from the Anglo-Saxon side must stem, in the main, from the Americans.

I have said above that the possible attitude of our foreign helpers to this our national enterprise can be forecast firstly, from their past attitude to Africans and secondly, from present activities in other places where the conditions prevalent are the same as here.

One can say at once that, descried from this double standpoint, the coming of the Americans, to the truly nationalist African, is calculated to arouse more of fear than hope. It is imperative, therefore, to remind the Americans, without mincing words, that, if they want their influence here to be at once effective and salutary, if they desire to win, in return, the thanks of the African, they must do three things : they must allay existing bitterness, they must dissipate suspicion ; they must hands off and let this country, let Africa, go her destined road.

What do I mean, they must assuage bitterness ? I say this precisely because any wakeful African who contemplates the attitude of the American towards the blackman, during the past four hundred years, cannot help feeling bitter. For there is not a country in the world where people of African descent have seen so much trouble as in the United States. Over this fact there is no dispute. We know of slavery, we know of the contempt, the

mockery, the insolence, the humiliations, the indignities, we know of all the gratuitous wickedness of which the blackman has been the victim, at the hands of the white American.

And yet American prosperity was literally watered by the sweat and the tears and the blood of the Negro.

Large numbers of American Negroes, desperate in this tribulation, reject their African origin. Notwithstanding, the truth still remains that whatever indignity is heaped upon them there, is, **ipso facto**, heaped upon us here.

If American influence among us is to be effective and salutary, they must follow up vigorously the initiative of the late President Kennedy and put this record right. Nothing short of complete first class citizenship for the Negro will do. Else, as we contemplate the past and hear the echoes that reach us from across the Atlantic, anti-Americanism will grow, in spite of all the dollars.

The second thing, I said, which the Americans must do, to render their influence healthy, is to dissipate suspicion. What I mean exactly will be seen from the following illustration.

The Vietnamese crisis which brought down Ngo Dinh Diem and cost him his life is a recent memory. We heard unearthly accounts of bonzes, men and women, making public holocausts of themselves to register a protest against the Diem regime. Diem countered by sending troops to seize the monks and put their temples to the sack. The world's attention was focused on the Saigon drama. From several quarters, voices rose in protest against Diem's heartless obstinacy. And the White House joined in the general indignation.

And thus it takes one's breath completely away to read of some of the things that the Americans did during that crisis.

For, **Tribune**, the British Labour Party's independent weekly, reports that the troops who raided the pagodas in Saigon were creatures of the **CIA** and that the colonel in charge of Ngo Dinh Nhu's secret police and armed thugs was receiving from this American Government outfit as much as £90,000 a month! One arm of the Government financing what another arm of the same Government was denouncing! 4

When you read things like these, and when, into the bargain, you recall the **Bay of Pigs**, you are not surprised at the frenzied

4) **Tribune**, September 13, 1963, page 12.

anti-Americanism that has seized Ghana recently. There is danger that this fever, instead of abating, may rise higher still and spread farther afield.

The urgency of the need to allay anti-American bitterness and suspicion among wakeful Africans cannot be laughed away. For the growing sinister image that names like the **CIA** and the **Pentagon** are evoking nowadays can only serve to render more hideous the stigma on the name of the U. S. A.

Thanks to the Peace Corps of lamented President Kennedy, more and more American youths are doing, in our schools and colleges, a work that deserves to be saluted ; but a work whose merit their own very country can mar. I have been a personal witness of the painful embarrassment that these generous youths can undergo to hear themselves roundly denounced in sections of the African press as tools of the CIA and the Pentagon.

There are two reasons why the Americans embark on such activities. The first is their determination to allow the **Russian Bear** no foot-hold, whatsoever, in any corner of the world, and to drive him back into his Siberian fastnesses ! For, two hates sear the history of America : the older is that for the blackman ; the second is that for Socialism.

The other reason why the Americans do these things is a natural concomitant of the first : having outsted socialism, they would use their measureless wealth to lay hold on the whole resources of the world, and thus keep within their grasp the entire human race. For it is iron logic that whoever owns your land will make your laws and control your destinies and your lives.

There is hardly any major commercial, industrial or mining concern in Central America, in South America, in the Caribbean, in Europe, in the Near East, in the Far East, in which the Americans have not got a controlling hand. In the New World especially, they own almost everything, everywhere. That is why some of the South American countries today, are seething with resentment and rising unrest. That is what creates the Castros. It should be no cause for wonder, then, that the possibility of a socialist world should be such a nightmare to the Americans. Here in Africa, thanks to our misery, they are gaining a sure and steady foothold ; they have a special eye on such choice morsels as the Congo.

Power over the world's resources and its people — this is the grand American objective for which, to them, any means, at all, are justified.

Thus we have all been witnesses of the strange phenomenon where proclaiming themselves the champions of freedom and democracy, the Americans have perpetrated, at home, some of the most illiberal things and have supported, abroad, some of the most rotten, undemocratic and detested regimes. Obviously, the more corrupt a government is, the readier will it be to prostitute itself and hand over its people's meagre interests to the monied stranger.

Here in Africa, where we do not have the private capital that enabled the western world to effect its industrial revolution, it is abundantly clear that, if the little we possess is to remain in our hands and be developed for our good, if the freedom we have won is to be genuine even to a restricted degree, if the disinherited African masses are to be shielded from the exploitation of the fat foreign monopolies, the African State, united at a continental level, must become the owner, the producer, the controller and the dispenser of the common wealth.

Furthermore, in the last analysis, cultural integration, for us, will mean the merging of the modern technical civilisation with the traditional African way of life.

But the essential characteristic of life in an authentic African community is solidarity. In fact, even sculpture, art, music and literature in traditional Africa have a primordial communal purpose. Solidarity, therefore, is the very soul of African culture. For my part, I do not see any other modern framework, in which that spirit can survive, than socialism. For us, this way of life is not only a political and economic must ; it is also a cultural necessity. Thus, for us, the choice of a major economic orientation will also be a major cultural option.

But, from what we have seen, it is certain that any African government which opts for socialism will have the wrath of America to reckon with.

Americans, today, are called upon to play a growing part in fostering cultural progress in Africa. I have said that if their contribution is to be healthy and effective, they must allay resentment and assuage suspicion in the hearts and minds of those whom they have come to help.

It is equally important that they should desist from all attempts to force Africa along a channel of their own choice. This continent has its destined way to go and, from the very nature of things, one thing is clear, at least to me, that it shall not be the **American Way.**

There are those who, reading what I have written in these passages, will jump to the conclusion that I am against the French and the Americans. That is beside the point. Concerning the things I have said on this head, the only relevant question that can be asked is the simple one, that the presiding high priest put to Saint Stephen, when this latter was hauled by the Jews before the Sanhedrin : **Are these charges true ?** ⁵

Dangers from Within

A couple of adders crawling in the undergrowth about a person's dwelling are far less dangerous to his health than the bacilli swimming merrily in his blood.

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was wont to say that the blackman is the blackman's greatest enemy. And thus it is true to assert that the deadliest dangers to cultural integration in Cameroon will be internal, not external, will be those that stem from the Cameroonians themselves. No outside forces however fierce can prevail against us, if we have lucid knowledge of what we are about, if we are firmly convinced about the urgent need for it, and are resolutely bent to bear our purpose through.

For, just as it is obvious that deep and comprehensive knowledge, a burning conviction, and a determined will, are things without which no objective of any dimensions can be made, just so is it evident that ignorance of the principles involved and indifference, especially on the part of the leaders, to the shame that awaits us should we fail, are the surest means to mar this national enterprise.

Furthermore, where two cultures have to live within the bosom of one State, there is ever present the danger of imaptience and arrogance on the part of the dominant group. Why all this insistence by the smaller partner on respect for their values, while things would be so much easier, for everybody, if the obvious culture were adopted by all ?

And as the majority can, and do, so easily seize key positions in government, in the public services, in commerce and industry, impatience tends to degenerate into overweening insolence. This has been the experience in Belgium and Canada where it has provoked seething and frustrating resentment.

5) Acts, 7, 1. — Mgr. Knox's Version.

There can be no way more infallible to ruin the Cameroon experiment than to poison feelings and relations between the two cultural groups in Cameroon, in this fashion.

It is therefore of the utmost urgency that the minority should always show proof of judgement and restraint in their demands, and that the majority, for their part, should respect very scrupulously the principles of cultural equality and equal participation, and should refrain from any attitude which smacks, even remotely, of the intention to impose their own way of doing things on the whole community.

One of the causes of the cultural strife that rends countries like Belgium and Canada is the deep emotional attachment of each community to its uses and its language. But here in Cameroon, in so far as the foreign cultures we have inherited are concerned, there is no reason, whatsoever, for any such attachment.

If a rich and harmonious cultural integration is to be achieved, it will be absolutely necessary for us to keep towards these cultures the cold and searching attitude of the scientific enquirer bent upon the truth, the disciplined nerve of the surgeon coldly plying his saving knife in spite of his compassion for the patient's agony.

But, in this country, the élite, especially, has become so imbued with these outside cultures that this emotional detachment is not to be taken for granted. There is a real danger that, called upon, in the general interest, to part with an element of the foreign culture in which we have been bred, some of us would take up arms in a blind and headstrong crusade, in the wrongheaded belief that the surrender of such a use or institution is a defeat and humiliation. In other words, if we become pseudo-Englishmen or pseudo-Frenchmen, we will surely get enmeshed in pointless, cultural wrangling ; and goodbye to all hopes for a healthy harmonization of cultures in Cameroon.

I have talked so much of the French and the Anglo-Saxon cultures that I seem to have drowned under the flood of my words the principle which, earlier in this essay, I laid down as the fundamental one in this work of cultural integration, namely, that African culture must be the stock onto which the foreign borrowings should be grafted so that the sap that enlivens the whole and confers oneness on the entire organism should be African.

Furthermore, I pointed out this other significant fact that initiative in things cultural here lies, not with the traditional masses, but with the westernised few.

Now, the greatest of the dangers, that threaten this cultural integration from within, is that this up-rooted élite, this westernised leadership may be, not just merely ignorant of, or indifferent to, African values ; worse, they may spurn them under-foot as only fit for the scrap-heap.

For the most resounding success of the colonial system is that it provoked the Negro's negrophobia, the blackman's hatred of himself.

By denying the African past, by refusing any value to any thing African, by a campaign of mockery, insult and denigration, by the deliberate inculcation of an inferiority complex, colonialism drove the blackman to despise, not only himself and the works of his mind and hand ; it also convinced him that the only salvation possible, from his savagery and barbarism, was to become a white-man.

Thus the colonised Negro's psyche is infected with a double neurosis : the flight-from-self or the flight-from-blackness, and the yearning-to-be-white. Such frivolities, among Negro women, as the straightening of hair, the rouging of lips, the bleaching of skin, such attitudes as the neglect or the refusal, on the part of some of the élite, to teach their children their own native tongue, are symptoms of this trauma, a wound that festers deep.

The worst effect of colonialism, therefore, is neither the political nor even the economic, but the cultural : because it is self-detestation, because it is debasing apery, because it is internal — the enslavement of the mind.

Thus, unless our westernised intelligentsia and leadership, endowed as they are with know-how and power for cultural advancement, are convinced of the urgent need to cure this disease, this yearning-for-whiteness, and bring back the blackman home to himself, and teach him anew to see and savour the beauty of things black ; unless it is borne in upon them that all cultural building here would be on so much sand, if it is not firmly based on the African bed-rock, there is not the slightest chance that cultural integration in Cameroon, (if achieved) will be sound and genuine, solid and authentic.

Cultural Peace or Cultural Strife

In conclusion, I would say again that of the four possible cultural policies I listed at the start of this essay, only two merit any consideration, namely, parallel development and cultural integration.

If we choose the former, it would be necessary, as I have said already, to revise our constitution drastically leaving a minimum of powers like diplomacy, defence and money, to the federal government and handing over all the rest to the federated states, so that, within this loose framework, each may walk its calm, sequestered road. But as I have pointed out, to choose this policy would be to frustrate the high hopes that fired the struggle for reunification.

Cultural integration is the only option worthy of us and, if it is to succeed, it must be guided by knowledge and principle, it must be pursued with care and method and energy.

In bringing this essay to a close, I am reminded of the Irish revolutionary who said that, in national action, **littleness** is more fatal than the **wildest rashness**, because if you want a people to give its utmost, in heroic effort, you must raise up, for their striving, a target worthy of such striving, by reason of its excellence.

This is the merit of this prospect of cultural integration in Cameroon ; for this historic mission is sure to arouse the young and the gifted, the daring and the wise, precisely because it is a challenge : a challenge that will show whether the Cameroon people are worthy of noble enterprise, whether they can rise to a heroic occasion.

Finally, we must get it borne in upon us that success in this undertaking is not merely an opportunity, for us, to deck ourselves with laurels in the eyes of the world ; for we must never forget that our very day to day well-being is at stake in this affair, because, according as we choose the right road or the wrong, according as we accept or reject healthy cultural integration, the issue, for us, shall be cultural enrichment or cultural penury, cultural harmony or cultural chaos, cultural peace or cultural war.

Now we know where we are and whither we should tend ; we are thus in a position to judge what to do and how to do it ; in a position to decide whether, in this noble, unprecedented enterprise, we shall build or ruin. A choice that should make us pause and ponder.

In this far-reaching affair, we have it full in our power to make. But should we choose instead to mar, we would be guilty of irresponsibility grave in the extreme. For, perhaps, we might never again be given the chance to mend.



Photo
Roger Lagrave