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Our Task in Africa A Realistic Approach

After the joyous enthusiasm of the Ghana Seminar has settled, do we need a cold realistic re-appraisal of the whole leadership situation in Africa? In the following lines I am trying to set out some reflections based on information received: a highly competent University layman in Africa.

The present Catholic African Leaders in the areas I know seem to exert little or no moral leadership. There are exceptions but you know well the number of West African prominent men who maintain a sort of "semi-Catholic" affiliation, whose morals are questionable, who show no Catholic solidarity in their public life. For example, in Kenya, Tom Mboya is an outstanding man but he seems to have left the ranks of Catholic formation when he went to Oxford. As with others, his Catholic school training did not give him enough impetus to carry him over the "gap" to public prominence. We have in Legislative Councils other Catholics, still practising, but theirs is a weak, tepid, secondary school attitude devoid of intellectual formation.

What training in Catholic leadership is given now? It is obvious that, given the poor environment, the "bush" character of primary and intermediate schools, and the cloistered nature of secondary school life with its low academic target, we must look for our leaders in the universities and colleges. Every African graduate, whether he is capable or not, will bear a burden of responsibility for social leadership.

Again taking the territories, the British universities, with the exception of Fourah Bay, are tied academically to London University (not an institution which is renowned for Christian leadership!), while Fourah Bay, affiliated to Durham, still carries on to some extent the sterile C.M.S. tradition of the Durham Theological School. *

The Technical Colleges which are of growing importance suffer from a major fault---any technical or professional training in Africa without academic discipline of the university type is just producing technical efficiency in a cultural vacuum, a vacuum which can so easily be filled by anti-Christian ideas.

We must face the fact that the boy from a Catholic secondary school is not equipped to face the big world of the radical university. He must leap a gap, environmental and intellectual. African boys have nothing like the old English grammar school or the Continental gymnasium. The conclusion is that a heavy responsibility falls on the university chaplain --- and the obvious question is whether our Catholic chaplains are men of the right type capable by temperament to deal sympathetically with the problems of the young educated African. Which brings us back again to the Church and the secondary school.

The Church in British territories is in the hands of Missions, largely Irish, whose Fathers are by education and temperament ideally suited for their main job --- the propagation of the Faith. And make no mistake, in this aim they are making great progress; the Mission Fathers are building new * C.M.S. is the Christian Missionary Society

Churches and primary schools everyweek; every month there is the formal opening, a great stone church somewhere in Kenya, thronged with thousands of converts from paganism. The Holy Ghost Fathers are driving through ex-mau-mau Kikuyu country with all the enthusiasm, fervour and courage of an Irish football team! (It is significant that the recent re-appearance of Kikuyu secret societies, oath-taking and violence has been in Protestant areas).

From primary schools the Fathers went on to set up "intermediate" schools and teacher-training colleges, and in recent years have established several secondary schools which offer studies only up to Cambridge School Certificate level. The nuns with their hospitals and primary schools, have likewise progressed to intermediate and secondary schools of a rather lower academic level (you know the special problems of education of girls).

BUT until recently the education system has been a closed circuit --- primary school, secondary school, and teacher training college, the end-product turning back to teaching in primary school. Now Africans are advancing to higher levels of activity and social responsibility in political representation, Government service, and, to a lesser but growing extent, in business (the appearance of Africans in senior managerial posts is the next situation we have to face). This new progress is, for Catholics, outside this "closed circuit". You have therefore a moral and low-level intellectual formation turning back on itself and NOT reaching up to indoctrinate these new levels of responsibility. It might be argued that the situation in the Protestant churches is far worse --- but that is not the problem discussed in these pages.

Let us be realistic. The Bishops are not likely to favour any schemes of leadership training which will divert their energy from what is their real vocation, the work of conversion...work which will eventually make West, Central, and East Africa predominately Catholic.

BUT are we in danger of creating a Catholic proletariat? Will it be possible soon for Africans to say "workers and peasant farmers are Catholic, the big men at the top are lapsed Catholics or Freemasons."?

What Leadership Training is needed? It is becoming obvious that we need not only formation but also a strengthening of the moral and intellectual bases of formation. It is not practicable to do more in the secondary school yet---later perhaps when the schools are able to proceed to post-school certificate work.

For a long time the critical point for the inculcation of these strengthened ideas in formation and leadership must be during the first two years of university education (intermediate stage). Even the good practising Catholic boy, equipped with only a poor school certificate, and a parrot-like knowledge of the Catechism, is likely to get lost in the big world of the university. The rather weaker boy is wide open to the "New Wisdom" (disguised, as Marxist ideas are these days, in attractive wrappings with innocuous labels!)



There is a serious educational content to be considered. One sees a need for Catholic Doctrine and Philosophy, the real historical significance of Christian civilisation (Africans are weak in history); there must be a fundamental appraisal of the new economic world, and an understanding of Catholic attitudes to economic and social problems, the place of law and politics, and democracy and "socialism", and the significance of the new technologies. Students are surprised to learn that there is a Catholic attitude to wage problems, profit, trade unionism, and business management ("We did not learn this at school" they say.)

Then there are new ideas on responsibility to be sown; that education and position involve responsibility and duty, that a profession in teaching, law or medicine is a vocation and not just a remunerative job, that the business manager bears wide responsibilities inside and outside his organisation, and that politics should not be a profitable "racket" but a field for selfless leadership.

Finally our students need practical training in organisation and committee work, in the technique of getting things done --- by their own effort without the help of Europeans.

HOW IS THIS LEADERSHIP FORMATION TO BE IMPROVED?

It is when we come to consider practical methods that we run up against the old problem of finance, and our suggestions must necessarily fall into two groups, the more practicable requiring some money, and the more remote ideals requiring a lot of money.

The Chaplains. The best starting point would be an improvement in the type of chaplain working in our colleges. The ideal would be the youngish priest 30-40, coming from wide contact in the outside world, preferably recruited as a member of the teaching staff, with academic qualifications above the ordinary, and with a good understanding of social and economic questions, and the type of man who will treat the African student naturally as a younger brother---if he is a good football coach, so much the better! He must create confidence. Such a chaplain would exert a real influence in every faculty, establish extra-faculty courses in our "leadership subjects", strengthen the college's objectives in discipline, and reach out beyond the college in informal contacts and participation in extr-mural classes for civil servants, trades union leaders, and senior managers, etc.

But Church attitudes would be difficult. The Missions are understaffed and overstrained. Are the Bishops likely to assist a Pax Romana scheme for training courses for chaplains? Could good University chaplains from Europe be sent to African universities?

News Letter. A good African newsletter will provide contact and promote formation---but the intellectual strengthening of formation would require a first-class journal for Africa, published monthly, through which African leaders, actual or potential, could be informed, taught and guided. COST?

Professional Societies. Would the establishment of professional and post-graduate societies help our purpose? Remember Odinkemelu tried that in Nigeria. Perhaps something like the Catenian Circles in England? Personally I feel that adequate formation must come at a much earlier stage.

A Manual for Catholic African Leaders. The preparation of a book summarising Catholic attitudes in all those fields of difficulty facing the African student and graduate. A problem of TIME and COST.

Short Training Courses for Africans. Something might be done by organising short vacation courses at one or more centres in Africa. STAFF? COST?

Travel Grants for Africans. It would be useful if we could bring a student every year to our headquarters to work with us for a year. Apart from that two month tours for African students in Europe might be very welcome, if well prepared.

A Catholic Intermediate College? Coming now to ideas of more remote possibility, a fundamental---and immensely expensive---project would be the establishment of an autonomous Catholic college for selected African students, offering a two-year course from school-leaving and before entry to University. This is not impracticable from an academic point of view; in the British territories the universities spend much time on pre-matriculation and pre-intermediate work because the secondary schools do not take pupils beyond School Certificate level. Such a Catholic college giving a diploma, accepted as a qualification for entry to African or European universities would have immense influence.

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A Catholic Junior University? There are some, following a school of realistic thought, who would extend the project of an Intermediate College to one for an institution rather like a Junior American College, offering a three-year course starting from School Certificate level and going rather beyond English university intermediate level, and offering a pass-degree or diploma in a general curriculum (an enlargement of cultural background and training in thinking)...an ideal entry qualification for entry to a university of the European type, and one that would fill the cultural vacuum of the technological college. Such entrants would dominate African universities and give them new purpose. Needless to say, the idea of such an American-type college preparing students for entry to professional studies is heresy to English Colonial Educationalists!

Looking with a still broader vision, one might see such a college designed to serve the pre-entry needs of the coloured peoples of all the territories of the Atlantic area. True, the African problems of transition from tribal subsistence are rather different from those of emergence from poverty of the Caribbean and Central America---but are not the requirements of leadership the same?

No Closed Circuit. Whatever our formation for intellectual leadership, it must not be a closed circuit. It must not fold back upon itself, but exert centrifugal influence upon the whole social and economic life of the territory.



The Laity. It must be accepted that for a long time the African will need the help of the non-African in his reach for leadership ability. Assuming that the Church can spare little effort for this task then the bulk of the responsibility falls on the non-African laity---a frightening thought, the sort of thought which prompted the writing of this letter.

Ludwik Dembinski* is thinking on these lines and he left me with the feeling that European teaching staff should do more, but how many well-trained Catholics are there in the Universities, and again how much time do they have for this sort of work? What is needed is a team of Catholic staff people in one University.

Conclusion. This lengthy outburst, this rather grim analysis of the African situation, may shock you and perhaps disturb the optimism of Pax Romana attitudes, but the time has come for hard thinking and big thinking. Time is against us; unless something can be done quickly on an adequate scale, we shall see Pax Romana in an impotent role doing nothing more than dropping spots of oil on the African turmoil. And Africa is changing faster than we can talk about it.

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