

CHALLENGE

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"All that is necessary for the forces of evil to triumph in the world is for enough good men to do nothing."*

About two months ago the Ethiopian Foreign Minister remarked to a Boston group of Ethiopian students that "we (Ethiopians) live and operate in a vicious circle, and the question is how to get out of it." This is indeed a recognition of Ethiopia's most basic problem. But to this famous truism of the vicious circle within which we are apparently condemned to operate, we add another truism, namely, that, having immersed themselves into this and several other sins, it is usual for some people to adjust themselves to such a circle. What cannot be overlooked, however, is the fact that forbearance towards evil and reconciliation with it is itself a greater evil which no statement of a "predicament" can excuse. The mere statement of this "predicament" merely avoids the real issues. Indeed, it becomes an attempt to pass this avoidance off as a virtue.

So we bluntly ask ourselves: Can't the Ethiopian youth help break the vicious circle? If we are not to assume that Ethiopia will go on existing by the grace of the pathetic image she so admirably displays to the outside world, why can't we release ourselves, and by the same token, the entire population from the present passive and dormant state? How can we direct our potentialities along a more dynamic and constructive course without which no social progress is possible? In a world where the constituents of civilization are literacy rates, per capita income, life expectancy, etc., can we simply hope that our three thousand-years old civilization will someday suddenly of its own convert itself into a twentieth-century civilization?

These questions touch the very core of the vicious circle. However, Ethiopia's educated youth, unlike those of other countries, has consistently failed to address itself to them. Its history is not one of real concern for Ethiopia but a record of extreme individualistic egoism, opportunism and despair. It is a disunited and uninspiring body; its identity is its excessive concern for and shrewdness in court intrigues. It is not known for an awareness of genuine nationalism like the youth of its generation elsewhere. In a society that is so badly left behind by the

*Edmund Burke.

times, it has not yet proven itself as not constituting one of the retrogressive elements that hinder progress. It is not yet Ethiopian, but Tigre, Galla and Amhara serving those whose interest cannot flourish without accentuating the differences implied by these labels. It has not yet recognized that the real issues of Ethiopia are absolutely different from (or opposed to) the practices of high-class marriages and an unending series of bureaucratic titles.

This state of affairs cannot go on indefinitely. It might not be too long before the silent millions begin to demand a share in the better life we are so selfishly monopolizing. If we believe that someday all Ethiopians have to attain the dignity and justice due to them as men, it is high time we recognize the challenge.

The effort that is being put into raising funds for the National Literacy Campaign is a positive manifestation of this recognition. To be sure, many of us have not yet given our full attention to it. Both on individual and collective bases, depending on our location, we have yet much to do to familiarize the problem to our friends and to solicit their help in different ways. Its success has a special significance for it is the first genuine attempt to introduce ourselves as a collective body to the predominant majority of our people.

At the outset, however, one point should be made clear. One would expect that anyone who retains the faintest spark of humanity would champion those efforts trying to lift all men — the vast majority — out of the bitter ignorance now oppressing them. One does not necessarily have to be an Ethiopian (and least of all an Ethiopian whose enlightenment was made possible by such an illiterate mass) to sympathize with this cause. So, even if we attain a limited success in our efforts for the Literacy Campaign, we should not regard our achievement as involving undue sacrifice on our part. Neither should it be regarded as a reduction in the size of our responsibilities.

We believe that literacy is a most powerful weapon of human emancipation. And precisely because of its basic importance, we do not want to be misguided by a belief that we can emancipate 90% of Ethiopia's 23 million people through the charity of well-meaning individuals. It is in this context that we consider the campaign and the very organization of ESANA as only beginnings or rather primary stages toward attacking the more fundamental issues.

In conclusion we say this: Many of us as usual will discard the questions we briefly tried to raise as simple idealist jargon. At least until, as too many of yesterday's students predict, we succumb to the totally ephemeral posts in the hierarchy of the established order, we maintain that the real issue is not between theory and practice. We rather prefer to believe that the issue involves a choice between the welfare of the deprived majority of Ethiopians and the welfare of a small minority, between ourselves becoming additional problems and our identifying and solving the already existing plethora of problems, between a desire to save one's soul by finding a place within the vicious circle and a desire to break the circle. If by idealism is also meant having ideas, we believe it is more rational to have ideas than not.

Land Reform: Plus ça change ?

By HAGOS GABRE YESUS

I

Endless and backbreaking struggle with nature's soil comprises the major portion of the biography of the world's peasantry. This struggle is unequal in its very fundamentals, for the elementary difficulties involved in forcing the land to yield a consistently adequate crop are too often compounded by the added furies of the environment: floods, droughts, insects, blights, and so forth. Little wonder that the specter of hunger has ever stalked the fields where peasants toiled from morning until night in solemn imitation of their fathers and grandfathers. Little wonder that in two thousand years of Chinese history there were eighteen hundred *recorded* famines!

And yet, if the natural environment had constituted the only obstacle to an adequate standard of living for those who work the land, one suspects that the historical record would yield far fewer tragedies, both individual and collective, than are in fact found therein. One could deplore the slowness of scientific advances, the peasantry's reliance on astrology rather than meteorology — but one could hardly call these conditions *unjust*. The contest between man and nature tells only half the story; of much greater significance is the contest between man and man

which has bloodied history's pages from the very beginning. The fact that the peasant works not for *himself*, but for an *other*; the fact that this *other* appropriates (essentially by force) everything above what is required for bare subsistence; and the fact that the wealth so appropriated is used not to lay the foundations for a more productive economy but rather to provide a luxurious standard of living for a tiny minority — in these factors lies the injustice of the peasant's condition. Not the meanness of nature, but cruel oppression by his fellow man, accounts for the peasant's plight.

This view is fully corroborated by history. From the time when the peasant in Western Europe emerged from a condition of utter dependency — at the end of the Middle Ages — his protests have been directed primarily against the structure of the social order, not against his natural environment. This is true of the first great peasant uprisings, those following the Black Death in the fourteenth century; of the struggle against enclosures in England and of the Peasants' War in Germany, both in the sixteenth century; of the French peasant in 1789, who burned the manorial records which preserved his feudal obligations; of the Russian peasant in 1917, who burned not only the manorial records, but the manors as well. The many successful land reform programs of the twentieth century have all begun with an understanding of this tradition.

It might be objected that we are belabouring the obvious in insisting upon the point that the issue of land reform is fundamentally *political* in nature. But are we not over-run these days by legions of half-educated and perhaps well-meaning "reformers" who insist that they can improve the peasant's lot by means of technical and legal measures? The scientific advice of agricultural experts and the promulgation of modern codes of law, we are assured, will produce great changes in the peasants' centuries-old way of life. One suspects that the peasants themselves might respond to this by citing the famous French proverb, "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose.*"

II

Ethiopia has not been ignored by these mercenaries of the intellect. Both varieties of "experts," home-grown and foreign-bred, have been induced by the promptings of conscience (and, we might add, by quite lucrative salaries) to descend upon the countryside, to study with rigorous detachment the problems of the people, and to offer recommendations for improvements to a deeply-concerned government. Their productions

might be compared to a land recently devastated by locusts: both are equally devoid of value. An excellent example is the 1960 Civil Code, a work based on considerable research and careful preparation. What does this bag of legal jargon accomplish but the preservation (in modern dress) of the ancient slave-master relationships?

Every single historic inequity is now enshrined in the law of the nation, which means that the full power of the modern centralized government will now guarantee to support the local authorities in adjudging "disputes" between landlords and peasants. But, it is objected, the adoption of a uniform code of law is a great step forward, for it abolishes the inequalities of local custom and clearly outlines the rights and duties of all citizens, whatever their social position. We shall take up this objection in detail later on. One example must suffice for now: the Code expressly provides — with great clarity and with due threats of punishment in case of violation — that the rent in kind of a tenant shall in no cases exceed 75% of the crop! Bravo! Ethiopia is now a land of law! Yet we maintain that the frenzied applause of the Court sycophants is drowned by the groans of the oppressed and exploited peasantry, who have only increased their misery by devouring the crumbs of false hope scattered by the reformers.

Another production contributed by the hired servants of bureaucratic despotism is a paper entitled, "Tenancy Reform in Ethiopia," submitted to the government late in 1963. This paper contains an "analysis" of landlord-tenant relationships and a set of recommendations for improving the same. To anyone familiar with the Ethiopian situation these proposals will appear wildly utopian, requiring the efforts of generations to implement; but a closer look will reveal the sinister side of the matter. A salve applied to the peasant's wounds may cause him to be less aware of the chains which cause the abrasions: yet does this not impart added urgency to the attempt to strike off those chains once and for all?

III

We would like to comment at some length on "Tenancy Reform in Ethiopia" in order to expose the absurdities which are necessarily inherent in "official" recommendations even when they assume a utopian character.

The authors of this paper, who identify themselves as "Rural In-

stitutions Officers," begin with a most significant observation: available information on the subject of landlord-tenant relations is "extremely meager." "Nothing is known," they tell us, "of the number of tenant farmers in the country, . . . of the size of tenant holdings, . . . of the conditions of tenancy, particularly conditions relating to the amount of rent, the manner of payment, and the services other than payment of rent which are still demanded from tenants by some landlords." In other words, nothing at all of any significance is known about landlord-tenant relationships in Ethiopia! This is a rather shocking admission; for if it is true, then why do these imported "experts" and their native collaborators presume to offer recommendations for detailed reforms based on "scientific" observations? In what does their expertise then consist? Precisely in constructing smokescreens out of the dense fog which shrouds their hired brains, in order to conceal the true situation.

Our experts do not even pause to inquire *why* nothing is known about landlord-tenant relationships. Had they done so, they might have discovered that there are excellent reasons for this all-pervasive ignorance. In every historical period suppression of knowledge is one of the outstanding characteristics of oppressive social institutions; conversely, knowledge and correct analysis are always the indispensable prelude to action which results in progress. Ignorance is the mainstay of the *status quo*: to know both what is and what should be is to demand change in the direction of more just and more humane institutions. Those who benefit from the established institutions are fully aware of this: if our experts made a determined effort to learn all there is to know about tenancy conditions in Ethiopia, they would soon discover that they were involved in "political" questions. A widespread dissemination of such information would cause a general outcry and a demand for change.

Who benefits from the lack of information? Consider another instance mentioned in this paper of the experts: "No separate returns are made of court cases involving tenancy disputes; it is impossible therefore to obtain an accurate idea of the amount of litigation arising from tenancy disputes, of the type of litigation, or of the effect, if any, of certain existing provisions of the Civil Code . . ." Again, *nothing is known* about judicial litigation. If adequate information were available more people might know, for example, that it is not uncommon for a tenant to begin litigation at age twenty which is still "pending" in the courts when he reaches his eightieth birthday. They might learn that there are thousands of such destitute and starving persons whose cases have been "pending"

in the courts during their entire lifetime. In the absence of adequate court records the law becomes a mockery, since it can be flaunted by lawyers and judges without fear of retribution. Given *this* information, would we call for revisions in the Code or for a thorough housecleaning in the palaces of injustice?

Obviously, however, the people themselves suffer far more from lack of land than from lack of information. Even our experts, who assume a problem is solved as soon as an imperial decree appears (as if the appearance of clouds always signifies rain), have not failed to notice this elementary fact. They point out that no degree of improvement in landlord-tenant relationships will "provide the same incentives to increased production and care of the land as will a system of ownership of the land by the people who farm it." (They fail to mention that even under present conditions the land receives far more care and attention than do the people who farm it.) Their opinion in this matter is supported by the highest authority, namely, a speech by His Imperial Majesty, delivered November 2, 1961. The rather startling sentiments contained in this speech deserve to be quoted here:

The fundamental obstacle to the realization of the full measure of Ethiopia's agricultural potential has been, simply stated, lack of security in the land. The fruits of the farmer's labor must be enjoyed by him whose toil has produced the crop. The essence of land reform is, while fully respecting the principle of private ownership, that landless people must have the opportunity to possess their own land, . . . It is Our aim that every Ethiopian own his own land.

It is not inappropriate, we think, to mention here that this speech followed by one year the attempted *coup d'etat* of December, 1960 and that it might have been intended to lull the people back into their primeval sleep, from which they had been momentarily awakened by the abortive coup. But whatever the motivations which prompted it, the imperial speech raises some decisive questions.

"It is Our aim that every Ethiopian own his own land." Where is this land to be found? Does the government (or His Majesty, which is the same thing) intend to volunteer its citizens for the American space flights, in order to colonize the moon with its serfs? Has the government discovered a means of manufacturing plots of land in factories? Or does it plan more mundane undertakings, such as war against its neighbors

for *Lebensraum*, on the model of Germany? Barring these "solutions" to his dilemma (which we hereby offer to the authorities for their consideration), how is His Majesty's announced goal of land reform to be achieved? The elimination of the possibilities suggested above leaves but one alternative — the land must be taken from those who now own it. This program would seem to face insuperable obstacles, since His Majesty's plan for expropriating the landlords also intends to fully respect the "principle" of private ownership. We would suggest that the *fact* of private ownership will be a much harder nut to crack than will the *principle* of private ownership.

The authors of "Tenancy Reform in Ethiopia" note that a start has been made by the Emperor, who has granted some lands by decree and has announced that "tenants on some of his lands may acquire ownership of their holdings." We hope that this example of benevolence soon spreads from the greatest landlord to the lesser landlords (with the proviso that it include compensation to the *tenant* for past labour and services rendered). However, voluntary charity is undoubtedly the slowest means of effecting social change, and it is likely that another three thousand years of history would elapse before any substantial progress would be made. We do not think that the Ethiopian peasants care to wait that long. The way in which the land reform is being implemented at present reveals its farcical nature. The experts point out that the land distributed by decrees goes to persons possessing neither the means nor the intention of farming the land — that is, absentee landlords!

The crucial element in the land reform program has not yet been mentioned. If every Ethiopian is to "own his own land," then no one will be available to work on any other plot of land. This means that the present landlords, who have never done a day's work in their lives, must begin learning the farmer's trade if they are not to perish from starvation! We urge the government to set up special schools for this purpose: they will find an adequate supply of instructors among the Ethiopian peasantry.

The present land reform program is caught in a hopeless contradiction: That same government which bases its power upon the wealth of landlords undertakes its hypocritical obeisance to world public opinion by pretending to aim at abolishing landlords. The veil is too thin to shield this fraud from even the weakest eye.

IV

We may safely conclude from the foregoing that the peasantry has neither the information nor the land and is not likely to get them under present circumstances. Two, ten, or a hundred "Five-Year Development Plans" will leave the peasantry in their age-old conditions of misery and subservience as long as these "plans" are formulated and administered by those who benefit from the peasant's labour. The incidence of suicide among individuals is rare enough; but history has not yet seen a single example of a social class legislating itself out of existence.

There are many who, freed from worry about the present by fortunate circumstances, prefer to compensate for this deficiency by trembling all their lives in fear of what the future will bring. They will object that we are proposing drastic, even *radical* changes; that such changes are full of danger; and that, having accomplished these changes, we might find that life is much worse than it was before. No, they say, it is far better to progress by slow and gradual means, advancing one step at a time, devouring with joy each choice morsel of reform which falls from the heaven of politics at the nod of a benevolent government.

Our reply to this criticism is that we already have had one such morsel — the Civil Code — and that we should base our expectations for this and similar undertakings on the basis of our experience with the Code. What exactly has been accomplished in the matter of landlord-tenant relationships, for example, since the Code was promulgated in 1960?

The Rural Institutions Officers are quite frank in facing this question. Their answer is: Nothing! Almost five years later the Civil Code can still be described as (in their words) "sterile legislation." Our question is: How long must we wait for it to give birth? They note further, "It is highly unlikely that either landlords or tenants are as yet generally aware of their rights and obligations under the Code." We think that the landlords are *most certainly aware* of their rights, under, above, and around the Code and that their obligations (if one can call them by that name) encompass only those elementary precautions necessary for ensuring that their serfs are alive to produce next year's crop. Conversely, the peasant certainly does not need a Civil Code to be informed of his obligations: the economic whips of his master remind him daily of them. And *informing* the peasant of his *rights* is like telling him he is free to go to heaven if he so chooses — in neither case is he apprised of the

means by which those blessings might be realized.

The paper points out, quite correctly, that "the Code tends to regard an agricultural tenancy as a contract between parties similar to any other kind of contract." This is not only absurd, but fraudulent as well. The very notion of a contract presupposes a certain equality between the contracting parties — namely, that both must be "free" persons in the sense that they are able to accept or reject the contract without suffering unduly harsh consequences thereby. This means in the first instance that both parties must be "free" to reject the contract (if they do not approve of the *terms* of the contract) without jeopardizing life and limb — more precisely, without facing immediate starvation. Yet certainly this stipulation does not apply to tenancy in Ethiopia (or elsewhere, for that matter), which is the relationship between slave and master, serf and landlord. Tenancy is a "contract" only in a very limited sense, and this point remains true even if the conditions of the contract were to be regulated by the government. By rejecting the contract "offered" to him the peasant is free only to starve — i.e., to commit suicide. As far as we know no one has yet proposed that suicide be included in the roll-call of human freedoms.

The paper then remarks that "a number of important provisions of the Code are limited in their effect by being made subject to any custom to the contrary." These provisions are especially pernicious, for the codification of customs destroys whatever minimal value the Civil Code might have possessed. Law is in its fundamentals opposed to custom: law is general, custom is particular; law is rational, custom is traditional. Thus any modern Code of law which negates its own provisions by excepting the dictates of local custom from its purview is *prima facie* absurd. Furthermore, it is enlightening to note precisely *what* custom is codified: the harshest local customs, those most advantageous to the landlord and most detrimental to the peasant. Here the Code strips itself of all humane pretenses and reveals the class interests which it was designed to protect. What shame to read in a "modern" legal code that rent may not exceed 75% of the crop (article 2991)! How generous are the legal savants to impose a ceiling on the rapacity of the landlords! Otherwise — who knows? perhaps the rent might be 100%, or even 125%, of the crop. The peasant and his family, wallowing in the luxuries supplied by their 25% of the crop, should pause in their festivities to thank the codifiers for their munificence!

V

This is the system that is supposed to be "reformed," as if the condition of a man with a gangrenous leg could be improved by cutting off one of his toes. The Rural Institutions Officers insist that the two most necessary reforms to be achieved are as follows: (1) change from unwritten to written and registered tenancies; (2) change from share tenancies (rent a fixed percentage of crop) to fixed rental tenancies (fixed sum of money or produce).

We should notice immediately that changes which were accomplished by the European peasantry many centuries ago are here being proposed as "progressive" measures for twentieth-century Ethiopia! Of course any society above the level of barbarism relies on written documents to preserve agreements among its citizens. And the peasants in Europe began to commute their feudal obligations into fixed money payments at the end of the Middle Ages. Ethiopia's attachment to the discredited institutions of a distant past is in curious contrast to its government's pretences at playing a leading role in the affairs of modern Africa.

But is it even true that these proposed changes would improve, however slightly, the lot of the peasantry? Presumably the central government would implement these proposals through article 2976 of the Code, which empowers the Minister of Agriculture to draw up a uniform model contract for all tenancies (which the Minister has not yet done: undoubtedly the pressure of other problems has distracted him). This would lend the added force of the modern centralized government and its functionaries to the traditional power of the local landlord, thus increasing the instruments of compulsion. Would this not harden the system, make it more permanent, rather than providing a basis for changing it?

How can the authors of "Tenancy Reform in Ethiopia" claim that written agreements would "provide for an increased measure of security for tenants"? How is the peasant to enforce the agreement? We have already remarked on the condition of the courts. When the entire government represents the interests and outlook of the landlords, of what use to the peasant is a model contract enforced by that same government? Is it not merely a model form of oppression?

We think that the Ethiopian peasants should expect more from those who pretend to be interested in their plight than a recommenda-

tion to supply the peasant with written confirmations of his oppression. The same is true of the proposal for changing share tenancies to fixed rental tenancies. The imported Court-flatterers whose report we have been quoting outdo themselves here. They write: "Share tenancy is a system of tenancy found in many parts of the world. By its nature it requires a close and harmonious relationship between landlord and tenant, and where such a relationship exists the system works tolerably well." Such is the wisdom of "experts"! A system wherein the peasant contributes three-quarters of his labour to his landlord works "tolerably well"! Could we not say the same of the slave system in the ancient world? of the system of child labour in Western Europe during the Industrial Revolution? of the forced labour of millions of Africans in the mines of South Africa and Angola as well as in the imperial gold domains of Adola today? Are not all of these examples of systems which work (or worked) tolerably well? The only question is, for whom? The system did not work so well for the slaves, or the children, or the mineworkers; nor does it work so well for the Ethiopian peasant. But all of them worked and still work quite well for that small minority who control the necessities of life. Between these groups — slave and master, owner and worker, landlord and peasant — there is nothing in common except the inhuman relationship which degrades both.

The experts even have the effrontery to remark that share tenancy is disadvantageous for the landlord also, because he must constantly spy on his serfs to ensure that he receives his "proper share" of the crop. Poor landlord, who must stir from the brothels and Court festivities of Addis Ababa to check his lands! We are surprised that the experts did not recommend the appointing of public overseers to relieve the landlords of this onerous burden. Perhaps these public officials could also supply the experts with much of the information which they are unable to gather for themselves: like the landlords, the experts find it difficult to drag themselves away from the Cafés in the capital and to see the conditions of the countryside with their own eyes. This constant appeal to ignorance on their part is an obvious device to avoid the mention of unpleasant truths which offend their employer (the landlord-government). It is much easier to spin fantasies in the perfumed and sumptuous hotel lounges of the cities.

Where is the value in this proliferation of studies, reports, recommendations, memoranda, and so forth? The report we have been discussing announces that the "distribution of people to the land is uneven."

Surely the distribution of land to the people is far more uneven! Why do they not say so, clearly and distinctly? The reason that these reports and memoranda are so disappointing is to be found in the very nature of the problems with which they are concerned. When one desires to cut down a tree, one does not usually request the tree to supply the axe. The brutal facts concerning land ownership and the peasants' life in Ethiopia confront the cerebrations of the experts with the massive strength of long-established social institutions. Consider these examples:

- (1) The Civil Code supposedly regulates the conditions for terminating tenancies. It provides that the landlord may terminate the agreement (i.e., deprive the peasant and his family of their livelihood) if he cannot exact 75% of the crop or if ownership of the land changes (from one landlord to another); the peasant is allowed to terminate it if he is too ill to work, if he gives four years' notice, or if he dies. The peasant is thus assured that the landlord will not pursue his soul into the Beyond!
- (2) The government has declared its goal to be ownership of the land by those who farm it. Yet this aim clashes rather severely with the reality, as noted by the Rural Institutions Officers: "Ethiopia's present tenancy legislation contains no specific provisions to facilitate the acquisition of ownership by tenants of the land they now cultivate." Perhaps the government will recommend that the peasants sell their children into slavery in order to raise the funds necessary for purchasing land. Certainly the present authorities, who have behind them the unequalled merits of half-a-century's experience in procrastinations and misgovernment, are not likely to set up today the credit facilities recommended by the experts for this purpose.
- (3) Services other than rent are still required by many landlords in present-day Ethiopia: free labour on the farm and for herding cattle, free transport for the landlord's crops, free firewood and free domestic service for the landlord. The Civil Code has not outlawed these feudalistic practices. How long will it be before our "progressive" legislators understand that we are in the twentieth century, not the thirteenth?

The report on "Tenancy Reform in Ethiopia" points out (and we agree) that the problems of land reform and landlord-tenant relationships can only be solved in conjunction with progress in other areas, including literacy and the activity of the market. All of these problems are entirely within the sphere of government. But the government cannot act in the public interest if it does not represent the public: a landlord-government can only produce, after fifty years of unhampered squandering, such things as the judicial abomination of 1960 (known as the Civil Code). The nature of the government affects the activity of its functionaries, too. The hoarding of millions of dollars by government officials — from top to bottom — in foreign banks is partially responsible for the economic stagnation of Ethiopia.

Land reform must be preceded by reform of the government. Putting the cart before the horse is as illogical in politics as it is in transportation.

Unveiling the Paradox

By BELAY KASSA*

In the context of modernization, one may list a host of institutions in Ethiopia which may require special attention and honest analysis. One of these institutions is the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with its unique position amidst the complex of pseudo-modernity of the new front. One of the authoritative Ethiopic scholars, Ullendorff, has the following to say about the Ethiopian Church:

"In its peculiar indigenized form, impregnated with strong Hebraic and archaic Semetic elements as well as pagan residuals, Abyssinian Christianity had long become the store-house of the cultural, political and social life of the people."**

*The author was born and brought up in an Orthodox family and is an adherent of that sect of Christianity.

**Ullendorff, Edward: *The Ethiopians. An Introduction to Country and People*, Oxford University Press, London, 1962.

Throughout its long history, in an attempt to preserve cultural heritage, national identity and above all its dogma against external invasion, the Ethiopian Church, hand in glove with the Crown, has waged extremely gallant and victorious wars. Indeed history and posterity will be greatly indebted to the Church for those heritages worthy of war and pain. So far, the Church has won all its causes at best with a minimal doctrinal compromise and at worst by veiling the masses with fear, suspicion and ignorance, and subsequently with a substantial loss of potential adherents.

Regarding the role of the Church in the process of modernizing the country, one may raise several pertinent questions. Will the Church remain aloof and detached from the mainstream of modernity? Will it enter the race of progress? How long can it hold its followers and the young clergy within its sphere of influence? How fast can the Government move the masses without the help of the Church? The reader may have many divergent views as to the nature of these questions and others. Putting aside the doctrinal elements, if one concentrates on the question of economic progress, one soon faces a complex of cultural and traditional norms. To illustrate this point let us take some aspects of the life of an average Orthodox farmer, who is seemingly free, but traditionally finds himself entangled in social and cultural norms that work against increasing agricultural productivity. The farmer is allowed to work only for about two hundred days a year on the average. The rest of the year is comprised of Saints' days, religious feasts, and Sabbaths. Under this situation, the ordinary farmer produces at most, a bare minimum of subsistence for his family.

Another anomaly of such a traditional norm is that the farmer on the average has to fast at least for a hundred and sixty days a year. Of course, the maximum number of fasting days is about two hundred a year! Such taboos interact with the ever-present nutritional deficiency and hamper the physical vitality of the individual, and consequently labour productivity operates at an exceedingly sub-optimal level even within the framework of the existing technology.

Due to the many expensive traditional Church feasts that are demanded of the farmer, his family is led to live on a very meager budget year in and year out. Sometimes he is forced to borrow seeds for the next planting. It is not uncommon that many live and die in debt.

In addition to its vast land holdings, presently the Church seems

to be moving out into new spheres of money-making. Many of the towering office and apartment buildings that are multiplying themselves in the capitol city belong to this financial tycoon. It is unfortunate that an institution meant to serve the will of God and preach the Gospel has developed such a tremendous taste for material wealth. The contradiction becomes even more glaring when one considers that this oldest of churches to this day lives in the midst of paganism and animism. It has substituted dollar collecting for this challenge. True, money is essential for the operation of an organization; but if it is not properly administered and utilized for a rational accomplishment of goals, as it is most definitely the case with the Ethiopian Church, then the existence of the institution would prove no more than what it actually is: a partner of oppression.

The Church is currently finding itself unable to keep its young and progressive clergy in line within its sphere of influence. Many young and educated clergymen and theologians who could help reform and organize either the doctrinal elements or the administrative set-up of the Ethiopian Church are deserting the Church. It is understandable that these people could see no future in a church where stagnation and intrigue are the rule rather than the exception. But is this the solution to the problem? Is it the Ethiopian version of nationalism, devotion and love of one's country? Or is it the popular philosophy of "I don't care"? Or is it due to disillusionment with the undue sophistication of the clergy? Whatever the reasons may be, the crux of the matter is that the bulk of Ethiopia's problems remain undone. It is the author's belief that an educated theologian is as great an asset to Ethiopia at this time as is the topnotch economist or engineer if this society is meant to progress. The former faces the tremendous challenge of reorienting both the clergy and the masses towards a "real" philosophy.

Although economically strong, the Church, thus, still remains organizationally infantile, operationally inefficient, administratively unimaginative and fanatically conservative. Besides, the social and the cultural values of at least 45% of the nation are so deeply entangled with the conservative features of its dogma that the same torturous bureaucracy prevails in the national administration. This seems to be due to the fact that most of the present breed of administrators are *ex officio* members of the Church aristocracy whose value of time and efficiency has no place in the modern world. Therefore, the philosophy of the administration remains at best a revised extension and at worst an in-

decisive replica of the ecclesiastical cult. This can be clearly seen in the very nature of the undue conservatism, autocratic bureaucracy and the old game of intrigues amongst government officials and civil servants.

Those few individuals who may perhaps be labeled "progressive" are usually buried under the avalanche of red tape. This is partly the reason why the general body of the Ethiopian elite has found conformity to the full dictates of the status quo to be the quickest means of climbing the ladder of office. That a good percentage of the elite belongs to the already privileged class accentuates the trend. Some of us worship and revere the mere name and vanity of being a director, assistant minister or minister. We regard salaries rather than the responsible execution of duties as the main concern. Ours is a society of profane vanity where the ultimate motives are for selfish ends.

Is this to be the answer to the demand for effective and efficient personnel? Is this the Ethiopian way of paying the debt to the masses whose investment each one of us shares? Or is it up to *tomorrow* to miraculously build the Ethiopian society? The answer is NO, for there can never be such a course if the society is meant to change and Ethiopia is meant to progress. Let us not fool ourselves but face the fact that time has no wish to lag with the languid. Personal ambitions, selfish motives and fear must be replaced by a sense of duty, sacrifice and nationalism.

However, one must not be blinded by youthful emotions and wild imagination but proceed with great skill, caution, moral restraint, deep understanding of the unique Ethiopian cultural heritage, and recognition of the stage of political maturity of the masses.

Other religious customs of Ethiopians also have elements detrimental to progress. They, too, require an extensive and effective overhaul and reorientation to free the adherents to adjust to a world demanding change. There are elements in Islam, for instance, which are also uncondusive to a modern society. Islam advocates one of the most weakening varieties of fasts and a expensive form of marriage. President Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, who recognized the deleterious nature of the unnecessary and demanding religious mores, has said:

"We must keep a sense of proportion . . . At a time when we are fighting against poverty and drawing up programmes and plans to remedy our underdevelopment, when we contemplate calling to account those who do not produce enough, and re-

stricting individual freedom when the recovery of the Moslem nation depends on strenuous work . . . I urge you to make use of a dispensation which is based on a sound conception of religious law."*

The Ethiopian Church, a real enigma, enjoys an exclusive right and privilege under the guardianship of the Crown. After all, history shows that one is the accomplice of the other. Church and Crown must work together to bring about the inevitable religious reform in the country. Otherwise, the Church will not be able to accommodate the demands of the new generation and will be faced with the loss of a tremendous number of adherents. Eventual domination by foreign culture is predictable. Hence, a nation of one of the oldest cultures and traditions may be forced to succumb to one of the most shameful forms of domination: cultural imperialism!

*Sigmund, Paul: (ed.) *The Ideologies of the Developing Nations*, Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, New York, 1963.

Art Betrayed

By DESSALEGN RAHMATO

It is perhaps as good a truism as any to say that a nation's pride is embodied, among other things, in its works of art — paintings, music, sculpture and literature. These and similar valued works of art define its peculiar cultural heritage and partly validate its historical existence as a social entity to the degree to which they have contributed or failed to contribute to its material and moral progress. In this context, the creativity of our Ethiopian ancestors is evident in the famed obelisks of Axum, in the rock-hewn churches of Lalibella, in the hymns and melodies of Yared and in the numerous historic paintings, some of which unfortunately adorn the walls of European museums.

Present-day Ethiopia, untrue to this heritage, has produced no such works of art. The reasons are not far to seek: an oppressive atmosphere, an environment that stunts intellectual growth, a political machinery that utilizes intelligence for the methodical inculcation of an out-dated myth

which inhibits the blossoming of creative talents. In the absence of intellectual freedom, art, like anything else, becomes a tool for the self-aggrandizement of a ruling clique. This is why the modern Ethiopian culture is sterile, denuded of any artistic activity, and has become a prisoner of an anachronistic mythology.

Of course such a society has its own opportunist pseudo-intellectuals and degenerate artists. Ato Afework Tekle, this self-styled Ethiopian "artist," is among such.

On December 5 the Ethiopian students in the Boston area were "fortunate" enough to have Ato Afework Tekle expound his version of art and show his artistic productions. We say fortunate because for us this opportunity to meet opportunism in all its glory was a unique experience by itself — an experience that once again vividly brought home to us the extreme hardships that we shall have to face, and the unswerving dedication that is required of every worthy Ethiopian in order that oppression, exploitation and opportunism are rooted out from the Ethiopian scene.

For nearly two hours the Ethiopians and their friends assembled in Phillips Brooks House, Harvard University, were subjected to a barrage of false interpretations of traditional Ethiopian art (that which, Ato Afework said, "inspired" him), a naive but socially harmful exposition of the role of the artist in society, and an immodest enumeration of his "monumental works." Ato Afework dared to propose that the artist close his eyes to that which daily confronts the society of which he is a part, that same society by whose toil and sweat he, like all of us, is maintained and schooled. He suggested that the painter should not concern himself with the suffering of his fellow human beings until and unless, in his own words, "politics becomes an art." What was perhaps most painful for us listeners was that our "artist" was not only speaking for himself but in the name of Ethiopian and African artists.

According to him, the responsibility of the artist is only to paint. On our part, we believe that an artist is not just he who paints. Technically speaking, to paint is to splash colors on canvas. By this definition an artist is no better than a monkey, for a monkey can also be trained to splash paints on canvas and produce an organization of forms and colors. We believe, however, that a monkey could not thereby qualify as an artist.

What is art? And what is the role of the artist in society? To do justice to these questions requires more space than we have here. But perhaps to enlighten Ato Afework we will attempt to briefly touch upon creativity and the social responsibility of the creator. Art is a medium of protest for progress; it is an attempt to grasp and visualize reality, *i.e.* to put into actuality that which is denied by the established order. And because it aspires to actualize the non-actual, because it transcends the given and apprehends the "ought-to-be," art negates the actual. In this sense the artist is basically a social critic. But in order to negate, the artist must clearly visualize that which he negates, confront and contrast it with that which "ought-to-be". The moment the artist apprehends and depicts the given, the contradiction vis-a-vis the potentially-real is exposed. As Albert Camus says, ". . . the (artist) must be fully aware of the dramas of his time and he must take sides every time he can or knows how to do so . . . Every work presupposes a content of reality and a creator who shapes the container. Consequently the artist, if he must share the misfortunes of his time, must also tear himself away in order to consider that misfortune and give it form. This continual shuttling, this tension that gradually becomes increasingly dangerous, is the task of the Artist today."

What are the "dramas of his time" or the "misfortune" that the artist has to share? In the Ethiopian context this misfortune is the suffering of the people. It is the face of the gaunt farmer, the abject terror of the woman-in-labour groaning by the corner of the street. The Ethiopian drama manifests itself in the naked and emaciated child, in the gaping wounds of the beggar, in the condemnably degenerate state of affairs now existing. But what is this drama if not politics, for politics in its widest sense is the totality of human life. To regard politics, as Ato Afework does, as the specific pastime of an organ of government is to deceive oneself and others. Politics is concerned with the social, economic and cultural aspects of life prevalent in a society.

Art is a human activity and precisely because it is so it can never be divorced from societal activity. The raw material, as it were, of art is the drama and tragedy of social life. Art is man's creative and cognitive ability, and therefore art for its own sake smacks of splendid naivete, if not of naked reaction. In an out-moded society, art, if it is truthful, must also reflect the outmodedness. And unless it wants to break faith with its social function, art must show society as changeable and thereby help to change it. "In order for Life to become the art of

living, Art must lose itself and find itself in Life" — this is how another French writer, Lefevre, succinctly relates creativity to social existence.

True art does not accept the dictates and decrees of a dominant taste; nor does it function in a vacuum. Its ultimate commission lies in the whole society whose objective ideals rarely coincide with that of a particular social institution. A work of art does not have to be liked and approved only by those who claim to have the monopoly of privilege. "It is not the function of art to break down open doors but rather to open locked ones." The artist then discovers new realities not only for himself but also for others, for all those who want to know what sort of environment they live in, where they come from and where they are heading. He produces for the whole community.

Ato Afework, hiding his true colors by claiming "non-involvement in politics," has refused to see the reality that is Ethiopia. The opportunist character of our "artist" is made clear in his commissioned paintings, in his distortions, or rather, in his complete disregard of the Ethiopian scene, in his attempt to perpetuate a time-worn myth. None of his works depict the true nature of the Ethiopian environment with all its poverty, disease and illiteracy. Listening to Ato Afework is to be reminded of the era of Louis XIV and his descendants when, while the poor were starving to death, opportunist painters were sweating to straighten the king's nose on canvas.

Ato Afework brazenly informed us that he is a dress designer, too. Yes, Ato Afework reminds one of France just before the Revolution. When thousands of Ethiopians cry out for justice, when every starving beggar "predicts the ruin of the state," our artist amuses himself by designing evening dresses and suits for, in his own words, "the socialites, for gala and festive occasions."

But perhaps we should not be too harsh on Ato Afework. Truth hurts! One has to suffer to live by or to apprehend the good and the true. We agree that one cannot see the agony of the starving Ethiopian worker without feeling remorse; we, the non-artists, know that it is painful to realize the despicable condition of the peasant woman turned prostitute. We can very well imagine how acutely unbearable it must be for the artist to live among poverty, suffering and terror. We therefore understand why Ato Afework chooses to escape into a fanciful, frivolous

and childishly innocent world. Yes, Ato Afework's world is peopled with fluffy flowers, exquisite "Catalonian" faces, bright and multi-colored costumes, in a word, everything but the real Ethiopia.

We do understand the motives for escape. However, to understand does not mean to refrain from criticizing. It is nothing more than pointing out that, both as an artist and as one of the privileged few who has had the opportunity to be educated, one has to live up to the dictates of one's conscience and to the principles of creativity. Suffering is the *sine qua non* of every artist; pain and anguish are inherent in the dialectics of creation. Hence to escape into fantasy, to live in an ivory tower of unreality and self-deception is not only a mutilation of conscience, but a betrayal of art itself.

Literacy Campaign

The Editor,
The Journal of The Ethiopian Students Association in North America

Dear Editor,

For the benefit of our students, I am sending you the following information to report the progress and development of the Literacy Campaign.

Positive results have been obtained from the following groups or individuals:

Abebech Bekele of Syracuse University has made a contribution of \$80.00. She raised this donation by giving a dinner for American friends.

The Boston branch of ESANA, with the help of their American friends, raised approximately \$1,000, not including expenses.

One of our hardest-working students, Tsegaye Hailu of Honolulu, Hawaii, raised some money through the ISA in Honolulu,

the amount of which the ISA will soon write to us.

We understand that students in Los Angeles have raised some money, and we hope to hear from them soon.

As you know, the Literacy Campaign is a project of the students, and they must work hard to make the Campaign successful. As of now, I am sorry to say that not all the students have supported the Campaign. We hope that by the end of the spring, each student will have made an individual effort to support the Campaign.

One of our hopes is that educated American students will respond to our Campaign. So far, I am glad to say that Harvard's Combined Charities voted to include us as a recipient of this year's fund-raising campaign. Though we do not know the exact amount as yet, we expect to receive approximately \$2,000.

We know that American friends and business enterprises are interested in Ethiopia, if they are informed of our needs. So far, we have received \$100.00 from Trans World Airlines and a personal contribution of \$50.00 from Mr. Saba Habachy of American Arabian Oil Company.

Our experience has taught us that it is not very easy to raise funds. The problems we face are numerous. Among them, I would mention these:

Ethiopia is a very little known country in America. We desperately need publicity to elicit the understanding and sympathy of American people.

There are technical and legal problems such as tax exemption. We have been working on this since September, and are still waiting for a reply.

It requires a good deal of cooperation and hard work on the part of every Ethiopian student to make the Campaign a success. As you know, if we all cooperate, we shall reach our objectives.

Our present plans are at this stage:

We need the endorsement of respected citizens of the United

States. So far, we have met with cooperation, and are still approaching other dedicated Americans for their statements in support of our project.

In order to get the support of American business, we need tax-exemption status, and we are still working on this.

It is not enough to obtain the support of Americans by endorsement. We also need their active cooperation. To do this, many respected advisors have suggested that we create a board of American friends of Ethiopia. We are working on this, and hope to have finished with it soon.

We may need a full-time fund-raiser. We are looking into the possibility of proceeding in that fashion.

As you can see, wherever we have pressed our efforts, we have achieved results. We are convinced that if we continue to cooperate in working on this project, we will be successful. There are problems, but they can be overcome by a unified effort.

I especially want to underline that no one is going to help us if we do not help ourselves. This sounds very simple, but it is difficult to do. We know from experience that not only groups, but even where single Ethiopian students have been involved, concrete results have followed. For instance, Abebech and Tsegaye must be mentioned as examples. Their work is exemplary, and each of them should be congratulated on such dedication. But this is not enough. We must imitate them. Finally, I close by saying that each Ethiopian must do something to make the Campaign successful. We appeal to each Ethiopian to act.

Sincerely yours,

Ephraim Isaac, Chairman
Committee for Ethiopian
Literacy Campaign

Notes from the Editors

During the last five months, several Ethiopian dignitaries have been in Boston for various purposes. At the request of the Boston group of ESANA members, they gave us the rare privilege of exchanging views about problems which we thought are of a common concern to all Ethiopians. For the benefit of the rest of ESANA members, we are briefly reporting the main points of these discussions. The story of the Ethiopian ship HMS Ethiopia, at Boston Shipyard is also briefly reported.

I

L.S. Habte Mariam Workneh, Ecclesiastical Advisor in the Emperor's Private Cabinet, dealt primarily with the institution of the Ethiopian Church. He pointed out the difficulties faced by the reform-minded members of the church officials in their attempt to direct the resources and the conduct of the church towards both the spiritual and material development of the country. The intrigue that exists especially at the top levels of church and government hierarchy — and he agreed that both to a large extent overlap — prohibit the initiation and execution of any progressive policy. He, however, optimistically informed us that the church has started to actively cooperate with the National Literacy Campaign.

The point over which we most violently disagreed with him concerned the extent to which the church still enforces fasting regulations, observations of Saint days, etc. He said that the church no longer tells the people to strictly subscribe to them but the people of their own accord adhere to them. If the church no longer cares, it must indeed be up-to-date news which has escaped our ears. Besides, it seems totally unjust to hold our illiterate masses responsible for refusing to give up what has been hammered into all spheres of their life over hundreds of years.

We found Abba Habet Mariam a very sympathetic and patient listener to our questions. The discussion on the whole was very frank. We must also add that he made a most insightful criticism of the practices of the educated Ethiopians both in the conduct of their duties and in their social life.

II

Ato Afework Tekle came to the United States through an invita-

During the five-month stay of the ship at the Boston Naval Shipyard, we had the largest Ethiopian contingent ever to be in Boston at one time. We frequently visited the ship and had several get-togethers. The group was almost a miniature Ethiopia. Their presence also contributed to the success of the "Ethiopian Evening" held in Cambridge to raise money for our Literacy Campaign. Their departure brought to our memory the emotional upheaval we all underwent when we boarded a plane from Ethiopia to come to the United States.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

It is traditional that most issues of ESANA Journal should complain of the lack of articles. We are not yet convinced as to why we should part with this tradition.

According to our original plan, this issue should have come out by December. It did not because by then we did not have a single article. This unduly delayed issue contains all the articles we have so far obtained.

We urge everybody to be concerned about the future of the Journal and we seriously request articles for the subsequent issues. We believe we have not yet exhausted all the topics one could write about. Send us your articles as early as possible so that we could make up for lost time.

We also welcome letters to the editor, comments, etc. about the Journal itself and about the articles appearing in this issue. This applies not only to ESANA members here in the United States but to anybody at home and abroad who is interested in doing so.