

BY WALTER T. DAVIS*

Fishbowls, Foreign Devils and Authenticity: Religion and Ideology in the African Revolution

Abstract

This paper examines the role of religion and ideology in social change in contemporary Africa. Part I offers a neutral definition of ideology as a cultural system (the road map image) and distinguishes this definition from two pejorative ones, viz., the interest theory (with its battlefield image) and the strain theory (with its medical analogy of sickness/health). Part II presents an ideological description of the social process, graphically represented as a series of super-imposed fishbowls. Part III suggests an ideological analysis of the cultural process (described as cultural domination by "foreign devils") by means of reference group theory. Part IV examines Zaire's ideology of authenticity for insights into escape routes from the social and cultural impasses described in parts II and III. Whereas parts II and III are predominantly descriptive, part IV is consciously prescriptive, and suggests certain contributions of Christian theology to the African Revolution.¹

I. A Road Map Into The Future: Ideology As A Cultural System²

The December 1976 issue of *Africa Today* was entitled "Civil Religion in Africa." This title is a misnomer, the application of American categories to African realities. What is termed civil religion in the U.S.A. is unashamedly embraced as ideology in Africa, probably because in Africa the term ideology has a broader and more neutral meaning.

Historically, in sociological literature, the concept of ideology has carried pejorative connotations.³ From Marx to Mannheim through contemporary sociologists, ideology is almost a dirty word. No one appreciates being called an ideologue, for ideological thought is synonymous with bias, over-simplification, personal anxiety, emotional slogans, extremism, and if not willful mystification, then at least foolish

¹I wish to express appreciation to Ms. M. A. Oduyoye, the Rev. Dr. E.A.A. Adegbola, and to numerous members of the Nigerian Anthropological and Sociological Association for helpful comments and criticisms of an earlier draft of this paper.

²The basic argument of Part I is taken from Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," pp. 447-476 in D.E. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: The Free Press, 1964). Cited here after as Geertz.

³For two brief but comprehensive surveys of this history see R.K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1957) and P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (London: The Penguin Press, 1967).

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self-deception.⁴ The pejorative theories of ideology are of two types: interest theories and strain theories. Both theories are based on psychological and sociological concepts of motivation and function. For interest theory society is a battle field and ideas are weapons in the universal struggle for advantage. For strain theory society is in a chronic state of malintegration. Conflicting social roles and norms produce pervasive and irremovable social frictions and psychological stress. An ideology is both an illness like nail-biting, alcoholism and psychosomatic disorders, as well as an attempted cure. It provides cathartic release, moral sustenance, and group solidarity plus a call for change.

These two theories are complementary and do elucidate some of the sources or determinants of ideology. However, both have defects. "The main defects of the interest theory are that its psychology is too anemic and its sociology too muscular."⁵ Its concept of motivation is too Machiavellian and its understanding of social process too conflictual. The latent functions and dysfunctions described by strain theory may be real, but they are trival, almost accidental bi-products unrelated to their causes. This is because interest and strain theories neglect the cultural functions.

The link between the causes of ideology and its effects seems adventitious because the connecting element—the autonomous process of symbolic formulation—is passed over in virtual silence. Both interest theory and strain theory go directly from source analysis to consequence analysis without ever seriously examining ideologies as systems of interacting symbols, as patterns of interworking meanings.⁶

Because many sociologists neglect symbolic meaning, they oppose ideology to science and condemn it as irrational, biased, and simplistic. The resulting pejorative connotation serves to mask the ideological elements of all social thought, even that of science itself. That [ideology] might in fact draw its power from its capacity to grasp, formulate and communicate social realities that elude the tempered language of science . . . is not even considered."⁷

If, on the other hand, ideology is compared with metaphor; if it is understood as a system of cultural symbols which use analogy, ambiguity, hyperbole, paradox, pun, satire, and all the other qualities of poetic communication; and if it is understood as embodying cognitive perceptions as well as emotive attitudes toward social realities, then an avenue is opened up for a neutral definition of ideology. Moreover, not only the pervasiveness and power of ideology can be understood, but also its role in social change. From this perspective an ideology is a full-blown social ethic, an image of society, a model for ordering "relevant" data related not only to social and psychological interests and strains, but to cultural ones as well.

⁴For a short, typically pejorative treatment of ideology—one might say an ideological treatment of ideology—see the article "Ideology" by E. Shils in *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.

⁵Geertz, p. 53.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 58.

Seen as a cultural system, an ideology is more like a blueprint or a road map for charting a path in unfamiliar territory. In stable societies ordered by time-honoured custom, ideological thought is diffuse and vague; but in situations of rapid change where new situations call for new norms, relationships, and patterns of behaviour, the stage is set for the rise of systematic ideologies.⁸ "Whatever else ideologies may be—projections of unacknowledged fears, disguises for ulterior motives, phatic expressions of group solidarity—they are, most distinctly, maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience."⁹ Like science, ideologies describe the social world; unlike science they embody a commitment to the world, either of preservation or transformation.¹⁰ Whereas theoretically the critical attitude may be separated from the apologetic, in practice they are rarely separated. "Though science and ideology are different enterprises, they are not unrelated ones. Ideologies do make empirical claims about the condition and direction of society, which it is the business of science [and where scientific knowledge is lacking, common sense] to assess."¹¹ But unlike science, ideology sets out ideal social goals and relationships. Thus it has affinities with religion (although its social programme is generally more concrete) in that it offers meaning and purpose to life and implicitly posits a conception of human nature.

On the basis of this understanding of ideology, we shall examine three components of an ideology of change. The first two (FISHBOWLS and FOREIGN DEVILS) are analytic and descriptive, although an attitude of commitment to change is captured by these two images. The claim is made that much contemporary alienation and oppression can be conceptualized and existentially understood with the aid of these metaphors. The fishbowls describe the social structure; the term "foreign devils" which originated in Chinese ethnocentrism and revulsion to Western imperialism depicts the cultural frame of reference. The third component, *authenticity*, is the slogan used in Zaire's cultural revolution. It is descriptive in the sense that it portrays deeply-felt psychological needs and repressed sentiments; but its chief value lies in its yearning for a creative prescription for cultural and social change.

II. Fishbowls: Enrichment and Impoverishment

We are now quite accustomed to the truism, "the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer." We understand intuitively what Luis Echeverria,

⁸In Nigeria there has been a noticeable rise in the past two years in the clamor for ideological change. The issues have been clouded recently in the arguments over the new constitution. Those favouring a change to socialism call for a new ideology, whereas their opponents seem to ignore the presence of ideological elements in the current political economy. See C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), for a treatment of this ideology. Cited hereafter as Macpherson.

⁹Geertz, p. 64.

¹⁰Even science, however, in spite of its cultivation of a disinterested attitude, is based upon cognitive and emotive symbols involving order, trust and even hope.

¹¹Geertz, p. 72.

ex-president of Mexico, meant when he declared that Third World countries suffer not only from neo-colonialism but from internal colonialism as well. In fact, few informed sociologists would disagree with Olatunbosun's conclusion which could be extended to cover many Third World countries: "There exists a striking similarity between the colonial policy that exploited the resources of the colonial territory to develop the metropolis and the Nigerian national policy that now exploits the resources of the countryside to develop the urban cities. Essentially, the development policy in Nigeria is still colonial in character."¹² Chinua Achebe dramatized this reality over a decade ago in his novel *A Man for the People*. What we frequently do not understand are the intricate mechanisms of enrichment and impoverishment.

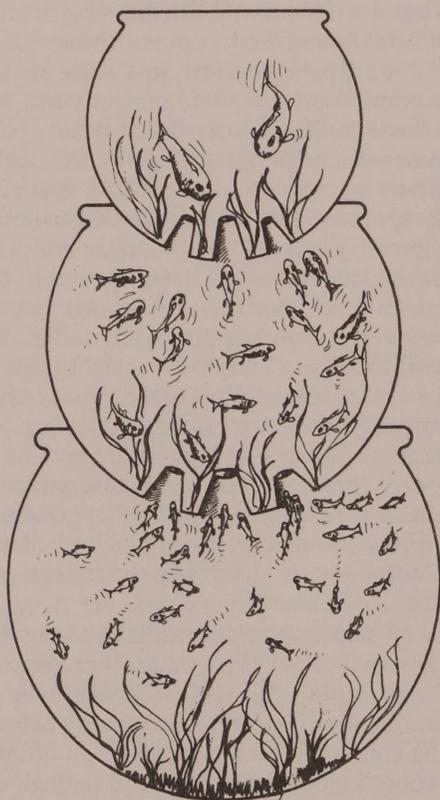
Charles Elliott, an Anglican priest, professor of economics and former director of the joint World Council of Churches and Vatican Council Committee on Society, Development and Peace, has provided us with a series of images or models for perceiving how the big fish eat the little fish. His book, *Patterns of Poverty in the Third World*,¹³ is the result of a long-term study sponsored by the World Council of Churches on causes and patterns of poverty in ten African and three Asian countries. For the past three years my students and I have learned to examine poverty and wealth, oppression and liberation, from the perspective of Elliott's fishbowls, a perspective which applies in so-called rich countries as well. Learning to see through the lenses of the fishbowls, we have discovered realities which were invisible to us before. The fishbowls provide *eyes to see*—to see not only the state of poverty, but more especially the processes of impoverishment and enrichment. The pay-off is considerable: the fishbowls provide a systems analysis which illuminates the structures, processes, roles and values of oppression. Furthermore, this perspective clarifies the mechanisms which elicit public confidence in oppressive systems, and in so doing delineates possible avenues for undermining this confidence.

The first set of superimposed fishbowls (Figure 1) illustrates the stratification of society and the routes for upward mobility.¹⁴ These "access cones" which link the various bowls have several features: 1) Some are perpendicular so that a fish swimming below can easily measure the length of the cone and the feasibility of an attempted ascent; others are set on the convex side of the bowl and may give the illusion of easy entry into the bowl above. 2) Because the smaller fish are numerous and the cones are few, there is intense competition concentrated at the mouth

¹²Dupe Olatunbosun, *Nigeria's Neglected Rural Majority* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 69. Cited hereafter as Olatunbosun.

¹³Charles Elliott, *Patterns of Poverty in the Third World* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975). In 1977 the World Council of Churches published a popular and much abridged version of this study entitled *The Poverty Makers* by David Millwood. Cited hereafter as Elliott.

¹⁴One value of the fishbowl image is that it transcends the stalemated argument that class-analysis is inappropriate because there are no clearly-defined classes in Africa. This image describes stratified interest groups whose members nevertheless retain ties with those in other strata.

(i) The Access System

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Figure 1

Source: David Millwood, *The Poverty Makers* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977).
Reprinted by permission of the World Council of Churches.

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2. THE CIRCULATION OF NUTRIENTS

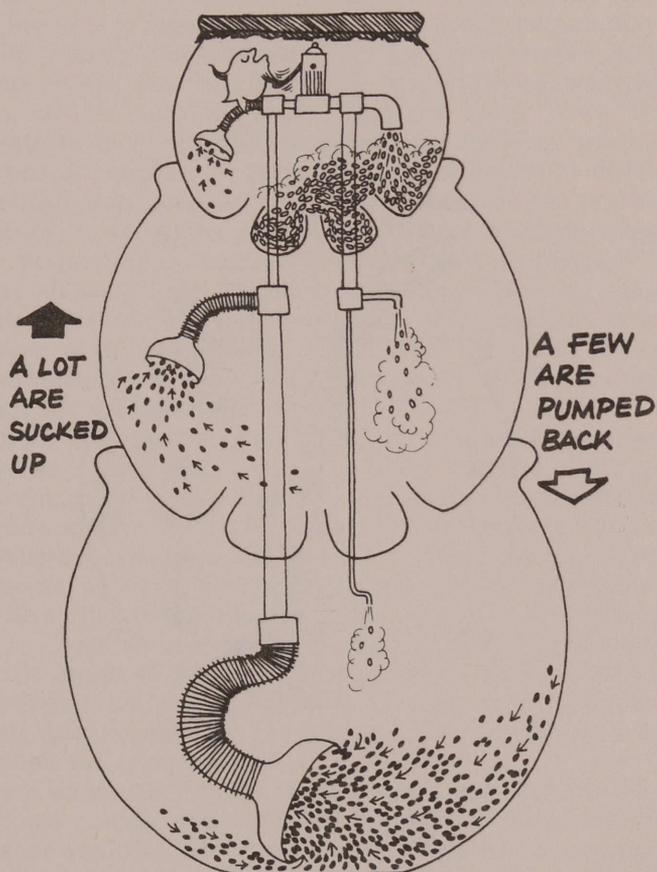
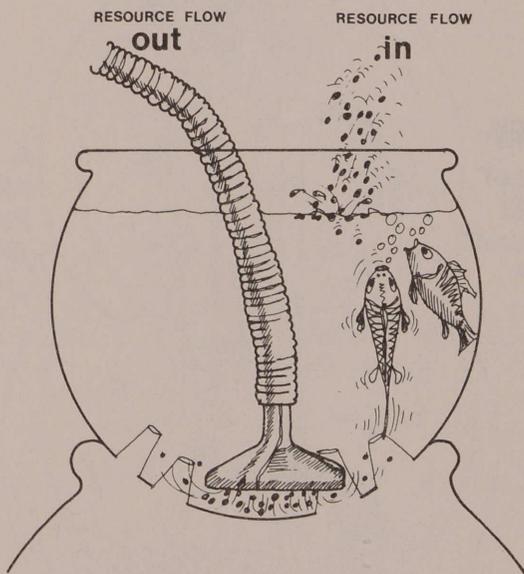


Figure 2

Source: David Millwood, *The Poverty Makers* (Geneva: The World Council of Churches, 1977). Reprinted by permission of the World Council of Churches.

(iii) The Relations with
the Outside World



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Figure 3

Source: *Patterns of Poverty in The Third World: A Study of Social Economic Stratification* by Charles Elliott assisted by Francoise de Morsier. Copyright © 1975 by Praeger Publishers, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

and inside of the cones. Of the multitudes who attempt ascent, only a few are successful. 3) The cones can change over a period of time, and some (e.g. politics) may even be temporarily closed. 4) The conical shape of the cones is such that descent is rare, for once a small fish reaches the more nutritious environment of a higher bowl, he grows too large to retrace his path. A few examples of access cones are education, ownership of productive land and property, business acumen, politics, the military, relatives and friends, as well as crime.

The circulation of nutrients (Figure 2) is controlled by the fish in the top bowl and, to various degrees, by external economic, political, and cultural forces (see Figure 3). Nutrients are produced naturally in each bowl. The primary source of supply for the lower bowls is produced in those same bowls. The basic flow, however, is upward, whereby the big fish suck up far more nutrients from the lower bowls than they redistribute to them. Budgetary allocations, taxation, price controls, market board "surpluses", services and infrastructural development, credit policies, import-export tariffs and policies, the type and placement of industries, as well as the priorities in national development plans and various special favours (e.g. civil servants' access to credit, land or property) all contribute to this upward flow. Poverty, then, is the underside of wealth. The impoverishment of most people is due to the enrichment of a few people. "We take the view that poverty, impoverishment, is the result of a causal process of which enrichment is a major but not exclusive component."¹⁵

One of the most graphic illustrations is the disproportionate amount of resources and personnel devoted to elitist curative medicine at the expense of mass-oriented preventative medicine. (It is reported that 80% of Nigeria's modern medical personnel is concentrated in Lagos and Ibadan where only 4-5% of the population lives.) Another illustration is the deliberate policy of the marketing boards to squeeze the farmer and transfer his surplus to the cities. Olatunbosun reports that "the marketing boards . . . became instruments for impoverishing the farmers . . ." "Generally, up to 40 per cent of the potential income of the farmer is taken away from him in the form of export duties, produce sales taxes and marketing board surplus."¹⁶ Thus the privileged impose their needs and priorities on the community as a whole.

Figure 3 shows the linkage between the domestic fishbowls and the international system, for the domestic big fish maintain close ties with big fish in other countries. The domestic big fish have access to other sets of bowls (the brain-drain), and external big fish have access to the circulation of nutrients within the domestic fishbowls. The outflow of nutrients takes the form of biased terms of trade, repatriation of profits and so forth. The inflow of nutrients, usually in some form of "aid", is scattered on the topmost bowl where the big fish devour it.

If the fundamental process is so clearly exploitative, one is compelled

¹⁵Elliott, p. 10.

¹⁶Olatunbosun, pp. 54, 86.

to ask why the fish in the lower bowls accept the system. Of course some do not, but try instead to wreck it. These are quickly isolated, and if they cannot be "bought off", they are eaten by the big fish. Occasionally small groups of the captive fish boycott the access cones or even attack individual fish in the higher bowls, but in general the largest fish, in cooperation with those in the middle bowl, will go to any length to legitimate the system by giving it an appearance of fairness. The access cones and the distribution of nutrients are manipulated in such a way that the vast majority of fish regard the system as competitive but acceptable. Thus the various access cones serve as "confidence-mechanisms" (con-mechs) which sustain confidence in intra-group competition and the legitimacy of the system, but which mask the selective biases of enrichment and impoverishment. ("If their son can make it, maybe ours can, too.") The big fish may control other confidence-mechanisms in addition to the access cones, like the communications media, religion, and political diversions, all of which hide the exploitative nature of the system. Because the details of the system are extremely adaptable, the deprived retain an impression of fairness. However, in its exploitative nature, the system is wholly unadaptable.¹⁷ As the grossest colonial differentials disappear, the system becomes more rigid and it is progressively more difficult to reduce the differentials still further.

One could use numerous examples to illustrate this process of enrichment and impoverishment. But what needs to be emphasized is that the vast majority of public and private policies and institutional practices are biased in favour of the few and against the many. It is so much a part of daily life that we tend to take it for granted. Every week my wife buys imported chilled beef at a highly subsidized price. Since the majority of the population cannot afford to eat beef even at a subsidized price, imported meat represents public expenditures on goods destined for wealthy consumption. It is a subsidy of wealth. But the same applies to health services, urban amenities, and the provision of many other goods and services.

Social statuses and roles require corresponding attitudes, norms, and patterns of behavior. Thus, the structure of this social process explains in part the existence of ideologies to sustain it. Development theories originating in the West have provided a justification for perpetuating a system which serves the interests both of the domestic big fish as well as all but the bottommost fish in Western countries. This dualistic "bridge-head" strategy sees development "as a matter of creating, then gradually

¹⁷Basil Davidson, in his book, *Can Africa Survive?* (London: Heinemann, 1974, p. 146), expresses the same belief when he says that reformist nationalism is a palliative. "The modification or reform of what exists will not be enough. What exists, by and large, supposes an attempt at the impossible: at the building of indigenous capitalist systems in a world where no such new systems can any longer see the light of day. . . . The most [the African states] can hope to do, in that direction is build weak subbranches of great commanding systems, overseas, whose monopolies of power they could never challenge, and whose removal of their wealth they could never stop. In that direction they would be able to argue more effectively about the crumbs, but not about the cake." Cited hereafter as Davidson.

expanding, a bridgehead of 'modernity' within a basically traditional society—as if one were reclaiming a swamp, creating a bridgehead of solid land and gradually enlarging it until the whole swamp is filled in."¹⁸ History has shown, however, that the swamp is not giving way to the bridgehead, for indeed the bridgehead ideology (masked in scientific terms and tones) is itself a confidence mechanism which strengthens the system. But we are getting ahead of ourselves for the bridgehead ideology is part of the cultural process to which we now turn.

III. Foreign Devils

"*To be is to be like*".¹⁹ Thus, two questions arise: 1) What does one want to be like? What are the predominant images which shape the attitudes and aspirations, the norms and behavior of a people? 2) What are the psycho-sociological processes which form these images?

An answer to the second question is offered by the concept of reference groups.²⁰ According to this theory, the individual has a mental image of numerous real or imaginary reference groups (and reference individuals) who serve as foils for self-appraisal and who provide cues for conformity. These are the comparative and normative reference groups. The social location of one's reference groups is related to both the degree and the desired rate of social mobility. For an individual who is relatively stationary and satisfied, the normative and comparative groups may be those to which he belongs. For a person who is frustrated by his gradual rate of ascent (or more especially by his descent), the normative and comparative groups may both be located in the strata above him. One who is pleased about his recent arrival at a higher status is likely to compare himself with those below him and take his cues from the groups to which he now belongs. Thus, there are a variety of possible combinations.

Since individuals have multiple social roles, a given individual may have a high status in one role and a low one in another. This complicates the concept of reference groups because he may have different degrees of aspiration/satisfaction for the different statuses.

There is another complicating factor. The individual measures himself and takes his cues not only from other people and groups. If that were the case all social action would be "other-directed" in response to signals picked up on the individual's radar screen. The individual is also guided by cultural traditions (ideals, beliefs, customs) which are not always

¹⁸R. P. Dore, "The Future of Formal Education in Developing Countries," in *The International Development Review*, 1975:2, 8.

¹⁹Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), p. 33. Cited hereafter as Freire.

²⁰David Reisman, et al. (*The Lonely Crowd*, New York: Doubleday, 1955) employed a somewhat similar concept. However, their understanding of "social character" as the result of tradition-directed, inner-directed and other-directed images concentrates too much on the end product and not enough on the process of character formation. Reference group theory is a complement to and improvement upon that used by Reisman. See H. H. Hyman, "Reference Groups," in *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* and Merton, *Op. cit.*, for a treatment of reference group theory.

clearly personified either in real or imaginary reference individuals or groups. These traditions are combined with family idiosyncracies which are internalized by the individual through the socialization process, and which function as a psychological gyroscope for the individual.²¹ These three influences are always present in combined form. We may conceive of the individual as being *pulled* by reference groups (other-direction) and *pushed* by internalized cultural traditions (inner-direction). In many cases the push and the pull coincide and move in the same direction, but in other situations they oppose one another. The more prestigious the group, the more pull power it exerts. In a situation of rapid social change the pull power of change-oriented reference groups is likely to exert much more influence than the push power of change-resistant reference groups. This phenomenon is illustrated by the familiar "revolution of rising expectations."

Now, since the process of socialization is continuous, at least for most people until old age sets in, reference groups exert constant pressure for an alteration of the internalized gyroscope. Thus, there is a tendency toward harmonization or equilibrium between the external pull and the internal push. Moreover, in spite of his multiple statuses and social roles, a healthy individual usually develops a certain consistency in his normative images. This more or less consistent pattern we frequently refer to as a "life-style".

Now that we have discussed the process of life-style formation, we are able to return to the first question: what are the predominant images which shape life-styles in Africa today? The answer is, those images provided by the "foreign devils."²² Some months ago I came across a political cartoon which captures this theme. A child is gazing into the future, deciding what he should do. Imbedded in the back of his mind is an image of a fat, smirking, debauched European or American capitalist. This is the image Freire evokes when he says that for the oppressed "*to be like is to be like the oppressor.*"²³ If the fishbowls are a metaphorical description of the social process, the bewildered boy possessed by a "foreign devil" is a metaphorical description of the cultural process in many Third World countries. The latin Americans are perhaps the most vociferous critics of this cultural imperialism, which they term *malinchisma*, after Cortez's mistress Malinche who believed everything foreign to be superior. The big fish who form the most prestigious reference group take their cues from the "foreign devils" (the so-called "demonstration-effect") and this influence reverberates down like a sound wave to the lower strata.

These forces of "modernization" and "westernization" are certainly not the only ones, but they are the predominant ones, the motor of the

²¹For a discussion of character types which are tradition-directed, inner-directed (the gyroscope metaphor) and other-directed (the radar metaphor) see Reisman, Chapter 1.

²²The metaphorical character of this term should not be overlooked. It refers not to any evil intentions or machinations of foreigners, but to the pernicious influence of foreign culture and models of normative reality.

²³Freire, p. 33.

cultural system. They include foreign values, ideas, technology, and institutions as well as foreign language itself which is the vehicle of culture. Their pernicious influence is not due entirely to their foreign character, for in certain circumstances foreign culture can stimulate indigenous creativity. Rather, their destructiveness lies in the inability of these forces to solve local problems, for they originated under different conditions and for different needs. They provide models for the solution of foreign not local problems, and their predominance stifles the creation of indigenous models. Rather than provide solutions, these pressures to imitate Europe and America only compound the problems. In fact, it is the disease of catch-up-itus that is the basic obstacle to genuine development and self-reliance. As the Brazilian economist Celso Furtado has noted, it is the formation of Third World elites with foreign consumption patterns which guarantees the continuation of underdevelopment and dependency.²⁴ Recurrent government programmes and policies and national development plans based on "catching up with the West"—that oft-repeated promise that appears almost weekly in the speeches of government officials—merely mask and perpetuate such dependency. Ms. M.A. Oduyoye, a Ghanaian theologian, underlines a fundamental theme of the political philosophy of President Nyerere of Tanzania when she writes:

To my mind the principal cause of poverty in Africa is the fallacy that development means becoming like western Europe. This is the myth that needs to be broken. Once this cultural dependency is accepted everything follows. This CON-MECH is central to the whole system. The enrichment of the rich becomes the major factor in the impoverishment of the poor. To keep the rich in the Third World on the standards and models of European culture and style of life is bound to keep the lower bowls expanding to accommodate more small fish. The sweat of the cocoa farmer buys the Mercedes Benz for the university lecturer . . .²⁵

It is at this point that we encounter the dilemma of social and cultural change: an exploitative social process can only be changed by a new cultural awareness, but a new cultural awareness requires a new social process. Social conditions shape human beings and their consciousness; but in order to change these conditions they must first change their consciousness. "How can the debasing society be changed by those who have themselves been debased by it?"²⁶

The exploitative fishbowls can be overturned only by a cultural revolution that exorcises the foreign devils; but how can the big fish be expected to perform this feat which flies in the face of their interests and their most powerful internalized normative images? History reveals that when the contradictions of a society become too great, when the old order is pregnant with the new, charismatic leaders arise who formulate new cultural images or ideologies. A struggle ensues until finally new political

²⁴Celso Furtado, "The Concept of External Dependence in the Study of Underdevelopment," in C.K. Wilber (ed.), *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment* (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 118ff.

²⁵This quotation is taken from page 6 of the typescript of Ms. Oduyoye's criticism of *The Poverty Makers* which is included as an appendix to the text by David Millwood.

²⁶Macpherson, p. 19.

leaders succeed in translating these visions into social movements and programmes of action which transform both the social and the cultural process at the same time, or at least in close dialectical sequence. But this usually only occurs when it becomes clear to certain big fish that prudence and principle, interest and idea, coincide. China's cultural revolution began among the elite during Mao's "Long March"; it produced a social revolution, but in order to succeed the social revolution required a cultural revolution of the masses. This is so because character structure is even more tenacious than social structure. Thus both the westernizers (followers of Chiang Kai-shek who remained on the mainland) and the traditionalists (Confucian peasants and feudal lords) had to undergo a cultural revolution.

The transfer of a new culture from the few to the many is the hardest and most daunting task of all, but as Amical Cabral has said, "without it nothing can be done."²⁷ Cultural development is "the development of people as distinct from the growth of things." It calls for a new socio-cultural vision, and new

objectives which do not lie within the reach of the inherited situation, but which turn away in new directions. To draw the rural millions into new methods and relations of production, and into far more intimate forms of social and political participation; to bring purposive because self-imposed order into the confusion of ideas and attitudes which now animate the newly urbanized multitude; to raise structures which can revolutionize the social consciousness of all these peoples; while exploiting the technology and skills of science, co-operation, and manufacture; to resolve the contradictions between ethnic separatism, however valid or valuable, and regional or even continental forms of unity, functional unity, such as can alone establish a solid basis for overall socio-economic expansion; and to do this by a synthesis in which constituent parts and totality may be composed in a sufficient harmony: these are the kind of objectives which, more clearly now with every year that passes, begin to be seen as essential to human development here.²⁸

Cultural development is ideological development, new metaphors, images and road maps to forge ahead through uncharted territory, to win a new sense of individual dignity and social purpose as well as new patterns of social relations. Ideological development, therefore, is the key to initiating meaningful social change. It is not a sufficient condition—many other fortuitous circumstances can either facilitate or impede ideological forces—but it is a necessary condition.²⁹ Let us turn, then, to an examination of the ideology of authenticity espoused by Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko and promoted by his *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (MPR), and suggest how Christian theology can contribute to an authentic African revolution.

²⁷Cited by Davidson, p. 169, note 17.

²⁸Davidson, p. 154.

²⁹Ideology alone is insufficient. "It will take administrative skill, technical knowledge, personal courage and resolution, endless patience and tolerance, enormous self-sacrifice, a virtually incorruptible public conscience, and a very great deal of sheer . . . good luck . . . Ideological formulation, no matter how elegant, can substitute for none of these elements; and, in fact, in their absence, it degenerates . . . into a smokescreen for failure, a diversion to stave off despair, a mask to conceal reality rather than a portrait to reveal it." Geertz, p. 70.

IV. Authenticity: Self-Reliance and the Exorcism of Foreign Devils:

The ideology of *authenticity* can only be understood against the background of Zaire's history. Belgian colonialism was the most paternalistic of any on the continent of Africa, and the tenacles of the colonial trinity (administration, extracting companies, and missions) reached into the intimate lives of every villager. Based on ethnocentric racism, the "mission civilisatrice" was consciously designed to eradicate "pagan" traditional African culture and replace it with "Christian" European culture. Forced change in the form of intervention in chieftaincy selection, the relocation of forest villages on roadways, direct taxation and production quotas, mandatory sanitation and inspections, etc. was official policy. Under the *corvée* system every adult male villager laboured 60 days a year (later 45) for the state. Advancement required schooling which demanded Christianization and westernization. Only the most remote, centrally organized, and tenacious tribes such as the Bakuba of central Zaire were able to preserve any resemblance of their former culture.

However, the system contained an inherent contradiction, for whereas the old culture was destroyed, only a few Zairois were permitted access into the lower echelons of government, business and the mission, thus preventing genuine assimilation. Acculturation was required in order to be regarded as "civilized", but the social system blocked genuine acculturation, resulting in a cultural vacuum and personal anxiety. Severed from rootage in their heritage and denied full access into the new, Zaire floundered both before and after independence. After a tumultuous beginning, Mobutu seized power in 1965 and set out to reunite the country. By 1970 he was firmly in power, having centralized the government, expelled the mercenaries, eliminated his rivals, come to terms with imperialistic economic and political forces, controlled the media, founded a single political party, and established for himself almost absolute power and authority. With the preliminary tasks behind him he was ready to turn his full attention to the problems of economic development. However, there was one powerful institution in society which he had not yet tamed, namely the Catholic Church. Periodically the princes of the church criticized his policies either in sermons or in church journals, and Cardinal Malula even dared voice his criticisms at holiday religious ceremonies where Mobutu was present.

A sizeable group of Zairois elite resented the power and influence of the clergy, as well as the continued Western bias of Christianity with its disdain for African culture. Many of the elite had been educated in major seminaries during the colonial era, personally experiencing but never willingly consenting to the destruction of cultural pride. Already in the early 1960's Mabika Kalanda had written a book entitled *La remise en question: Base de la décolonisation mentale*, but the problems of mental alienation attracted low priority during most of the 1960s. Gradually the perception formed that the clergy were not only a political impediment, but also a constant reminder of cultural alienation. Thus, the stage was set

for authenticity, which served not only to counter clerical influence and combat alienation, but also provided a much needed ideology for cultural and political development.

When the official campaign for authenticity got underway in late 1971, the clerical hierarchy perceived the nature of the threat not only to their brand of Christianity, but also to their political and cultural influence. In the ensuing dispute Cardinal Malula was expelled from his residence and obliged to take exile in Rome for a time. Branches of the youth division of the MPR were forcibly installed in all major seminaries (and all other educational institutions as well), Christian journals and radio programs were suppressed, and various other measures were taken to secularize the state. The Catholic clergy had always maintained a close but critical relationship with the state. In their effort to resist the introduction of political units into the seminaries they stated that the clergy should not identify too closely with any political party but rather be "all things to all people". Mobutu interpreted this to mean "those who are not for me are against me."

Perhaps the most dramatic episode in this drama was the law of February 1972 requiring that all Zairois drop their European names. Although foreign names had been under fire for sometime, the actual decree was provoked by a Belgian reporter who goaded Mobutu about his own name, Joseph Désiré. He abruptly changed his name, the MPR issued the new law, and thus almost unconsciously infused authenticity with a radical seriousness which it had not possessed up to that time. Let us now seek to evaluate this ideology. In the early days of the campaign the phrase "retours à l'authenticité" (return to authenticity) had been used, giving the impression that Zaire would turn its back on the modern world. Mobutu quickly corrected this to "recours à l'authenticité", implying that in the forward-looking task of nation-building traditional values of the past would be drawn upon. Being a rather pragmatic leader himself and in a client relationship to powerful imperialistic interests in the West, Mobutu has been hesitant to fill the slogan with content. It remains a vague but powerful emotional slogan. This vagueness permits skillful manipulation as when Mobutu says that his word is law because in traditional society a chief's word is final. He passes over in silence the fact that traditional chiefs issued ultimata only after consultation; that they depended on consensus because their militia consisted of fellow villagers; that decisions were made in the light of commonly known facts (i.e. without the manipulation of propaganda); and that an unpopular chief could be ousted by the people. In short, he uses authenticity to justify inauthentic absolute power, and suppresses public discussion of how the authentic traditional restraints on power might be contextualized in a large-scale nation-state.

Kenneth Adelman has described authenticity as a civil religion with a belief system, sacred rituals, a code of ethical norms, a "church" (the MPR), and a messianic leader. There is a sense in which he is correct, for "mobutisme" has many characteristics of a political religion. Relying on Emile Durkheim's analysis of religion as social glue, Adelman believes

that authenticity functions as " 'the cement which holds the structure together' in Zaire."³⁰ This is undoubtedly Mobutu's intention, but it is military force, not religious consensus, that holds Zairian society together.

In spite of this, we should not overlook the significance of authenticity. Among francophone African leaders it has wide-spread appeal and is in some ways comparable to "black is beautiful" in the U.S.A. In fact, authenticity carries forward a number of themes from the earlier Négritude movement, and may be considered the philosophical framework of FESTAC (The Second World Black and African Arts Festival, held in Lagos in January 1977).

Moreover, authenticity contains a number of potentially important values. First, its very vagueness means that all questions are in principle open for examination by the people, and not determined in advance by ideological rigidity. This openness provides an incentive for self-reliance and popular participation. Mobutu tries to use it to justify authoritarian rule and mask his ruthless elimination of opposition, but few Zairois are taken in by his propaganda. In fact, many judge him by his own standards and find him wanting, declaring that his style of life, his separation from the people, and his resort to coercion are genuinely inauthentic.

Second, authenticity is an ideology which combines the new with the old, something which neither capitalist entrepreneurs nor socialist revolutionaries are able to do. Both capitalist and socialist programmes of development relegate the tradition to the dustbin of outmoded superstitions, and differ not so much on basic goals of material prosperity but on methods to achieve them. In this respect authenticity reflects a major concern of African theologians, namely the desire to hold together both the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of salvation. That is, African theology stresses both the goodness of this world and God's revelation in African culture, as well as the need to transform African culture and society.

What authenticity thus far lacks is economic content, both in terms of goals and blueprints to reach them. These are available in the United Nations' "basic needs" strategy of development, which directs programmes toward the needs of the masses rather than the wants of the elite. What is lacking therefore is popular pressure to force a change of priorities. This is where Christian theology might play a major role, and there are indications that theologians in Zaire are becoming aware of this. The various liberation theologies insist that priority must be accorded to those with the greatest needs, and several brands of mass-oriented populist/socialist strategies are now gaining more and more credibility throughout Africa. What has yet to be challenged in Zaire and elsewhere is the basic image of development as imitation of Western life-styles and patterns of consumption. In other words, authenticity is not yet authentic. In spite of a change of names and local forms of dress, for

³⁰Kenneth Adelman, "The Zairian Political Party as Religious Surrogate," in *Africa Today*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (October-December 1976), 51.

Mobutu to be is still to be like, and to be like is still to be like the oppressor.

For Christian theology the disease of catch-up-itus, this desire "to be like the nations", must be regarded as a form of blindness like idolatry. An idol is that which is less than, and other than the good. It stands in the way of and circumvents the good; it is a false hope—an illusion—a form of blindness with power neither to save nor satisfy. In the end it leads to destruction.

Of course, the rich Western nations are both the source and the perpetrators of this idolatry, for they fashioned it and continue to sell it to the Third World in the form of development theories, aid programmes and consumer products.

Shortly after independence, many churches in Africa sought to serve the people, strengthen their institutional base and improve their public image by wholeheartedly embracing programmes of national development. A biblical basis was discovered in the phrase "The Abundant Life" ("I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly", John 10:10), and scores of sermons castigated former generations for their other-worldly theology. Thus the new theology reflected the rising socio-economic expectations of the new ecclesiastical leaders and the middle class which they represented, expectations that at last Africa was on the threshold of an industrial revolution that would banish scarcity and render unnecessary the traditional restraints on possession and consumption. It was a theology reflecting a veritable outburst of appetites.

This optimistic theology failed to take into account three factors: exploitative structures (fishbowls), resource limitations, and the fatal disease of catch-up-itus. It overlooked the persistence of institutional structures which facilitate the enrichment of the few by means of the impoverishment of the many, all in the name of "catching up with the 'advanced' countries." The advocates of an abundant life were correct in saying that man does not live *without* bread; but instead of linking this idea with mass-oriented strategies for the poor, this slogan became the justification for unlimited accumulation and luxurious life-styles for the rich, life-styles that were derived not from the productivity of the rich but from the exploitation of surplus produced by the poor. Today theologians are discovering the need to redress this emphasis, to recapture the biblical stress upon production and consumption in community, which is also reflected in traditional African societies. The biblical economic ethic stresses the need for sufficiency without superfluity; the necessity to tame the insatiable human appetites; the recognition that we do not live without bread nor by bread alone; and the indissoluble interdependence of the human family.

By challenging the national idols—the life-styles of the affluent both at home and abroad; by questioning the very goals of industrial society—wealth for wealth's sake and growth for growth's sake; by denying that the highest human good is to consume more and more with greater and greater ease; by building Christian communities and styles of

leadership with a low profile instead of a triumphalist image; and by projecting a national vision of genuine authenticity, Christian theology can make a vital contribution to the ongoing African revolution. Such authenticity would facilitate a leveling up by a leveling down, thus reversing the push/pull forces of reference groups. National integration would be fostered as the various groups cease chasing one another and turn to re-embrace one another. President Kaunda's theme song captures an element of this image. "*Tiyende pa Modzi*," Zambians sing: "Let's walk together." Only a reorientation of culture and a national ideology of community which transforms the images of what people want to be and which reverses the push/pull forces of reference groups will be sufficient to transform the exploitative social system and give birth to a new society. Christian theology can contribute both to the vision and to the motivation necessary to bring the vision into reality.