

RACE PREJUDICE
as
SELF REJECTION

AN INQUIRY into the PSYCHOLOGICAL and
SPIRITUAL ASPECTS of GROUP CONFLICTS

LAURENS VAN DER POST

THE WORKSHOP FOR CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

Compiled and edited from his speeches in New York, December 1956, by

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INTRODUCTION

Early in December, 1956, the Workshop for Cultural Democracy brought together at the Carnegie Endowment International Center in New York City forty men and women for an all-day Seminar on the overall subject "The Psychological and Spiritual Aspects of Group Conflict." The group, composed of leaders selected for their strategic importance and interest in the field of human relations, was convened to give these leaders, lay and professional, an opportunity to consider the sub-surface issues involved in race and religious prejudice. The Workshop was also concerned that the Seminar take cognizance of the challenge by southern states to people in other sections of the United States, that they examine their own practices and attitudes in regard to discrimination and segregation.

Through a stroke of good fortune, the holding of the Seminar coincided with the first visit to this country by Laurens van der Post, noted authority on the race problems of Africa. His books on this subject are read throughout the English-speaking world, and have been translated into a number of foreign languages.

Through the good offices of Dr. Martha Jaeger, Vice-Chairman of the board of directors of the Workshop, and Chairman of the Friends Conference on Religion and Psychology, Col. van der Post was secured to lead our Seminar. He also spoke at a public meeting held at the Community Church of New York under the joint auspices of the Friends Conference and the Workshop.

This publication is a consolidation of his lectures at the public meeting and the Seminar, taken from tape recordings.

The burden of Col. van der Post's approach to the crucial issue of race prejudice is that racism is a projection of our own self-rejection. Before we can help others in this fundamental area of human relationships, we must turn into ourselves to find the solution to this most crucial of problems facing mankind today -- this rejection in ourselves, in society, in civilization. In some way, we must come to terms with the rejected aspects of our lives, or the result will be another disaster. Unless we do this, we will continue to project our own self-rejection onto the life around us. We will continue to blame other persons, societies, nations and races for that in ourselves which we fear. This projected animosity, multiplied among us, leads to the strife that ends in hate, violence and, eventually, to war.

The Workshop for Cultural Democracy believes that Col. van der Post articulates, in terms of the individual and of society, the growing awareness of the depth of man's psychological state, showing both the dangers and the vast resources he may find in his subconscious as he labors to achieve freedom of heart and mind. With Mr. Justice William O. Douglas, of the United States Supreme Court, we believe that Laurens van der Post details "the undertones and overtones which herald the vast disaster confronting mankind if the white and dark continents of the world do not resolve their basic conflicts." We believe that our Judeo-Christian heritage and its sense of the journey increasingly will lead us into explorations of our emotional quicksands, as well as explorations of our deeper psychological and spiritual resources.

Born a half-century ago in Africa, the thirteenth child of Dutch parents, Laurens van der Post is best known as a writer, soldier, explorer, and government administrator. His first outstanding book, *Venture to the Interior*, issued in 1951 by William Morrow and Co. (who have published all of his works in this country) has become a modern classic. His *A Bar of Shadow* is the story of the two and a half years he spent as a prisoner of war of the Japanese. *The Dark Eye in Africa* develops his approach to the common emotional problems of the white and black man. He also has three novels: *In A Province*, *Flamingo Feather*, now being made into a moving picture in Africa; and *The Face Beside the Fire*, which depicts the inner struggle of the sensitive individual who feels the opposing psychological forces which are coming nearer to awareness in our conflicted world today.

In presenting this pamphlet, the Workshop for Cultural Democracy is convinced that in the responsible leadership in the field of intergroup relations are the resources for a new and creative approach to the problem of race prejudice which torments the conscience of all people who believe in the dignity of man and the sacredness of his person.

NATHAN SHERMAN
Chairman, Committee on Seminars

October 15, 1957

Race Prejudice as Self Rejection

LAURENS VAN DER POST

I have always wanted to come to America, and this is my very first time here. I have wanted to come because I have felt that if I came we would be able to talk together in a way in which I could not talk in Europe. I felt that here, as in my own great continent of Africa, you have what was in the beginning a transplanted European community, which started with people who had been persecuted, who had suffered for their convictions, and who had come to a great natural country with a great primitive content of its own, and had tried to make a new way of life here. This is precisely, in a sense, what three hundred years ago my ancestors did when they left Holland to settle at the Cape of Good Hope. And somehow I felt that if we came together there ought, to take place some kind of exchange which would be of immense value.

In Europe I used to wander about a good deal. I went to the picture galleries, looked at the portraits of people throughout the ages, and I suddenly realized that in modern portraits there is a new kind of face that had never been in the world before. As I looked at some of the portraits of the people who had lived before the Reformation, I was struck by the fact that all those people had an extraordinary kind of look on their faces which they all shared, a look which you do not see in the modern face. It is a strange kind of look, a look and half smile that you see on the face of the Mona Lisa.

It is the face of the pre-Reformation, or forgotten man. It is the face in which you read very plainly one human being saying to another, "I know, you know, we all know." There seems to be a kind of knowing which human beings had then, which we have lost.

Africa has made me deeply aware of the "knowing" that we have lost. I hope I can convey this awareness to you.

As I walked about Africa I realized one day that what we are having in Africa is the most dramatic presentation of a world situation. It is almost as if what is going on in Africa is a kind of Greek drama in which you see two apparent opposites in conflict. As in the Greek theater, the actors in the drama are always dressed in the classical colors of fate, in black and in white. And I think it is because the situation in Africa represents the world situation that it is of such interest to the world.

Now what is that situation? I think the situation is that because of the lack of the awareness which I have mentioned, modern man is a deeply and profoundly displaced person. We all live in an age of essentially displaced people. We are all people who have lost this "I know, you know, we know" look. We have lost the inner sense of belonging because we have been so extremely one-sided in our development. We have lost it because we have thought that through the physical objects of life, through the material, through the very matter of life we can solve all our problems. All the prevailing philosophies are philosophies

of mechanism. All the political solutions for the problems of life are mechanical solutions. We say, "If the thing is wrong it is because the system is wrong. Let us change the system and have a better system." In other words, let us have a better social machine and things will go right. The essential human being behind this machine, with all his needs, with all his perplexities, is continually being ignored.

In Africa you get this problem of displacement in its most dramatic form. We call it detribalization there, and I speak to you now as one who is perhaps more detribalized than most.

Detribalization is the phenomenon in the modern world which is at once one of the most hateful, and one of the most depressing of all human phenomena. It is known by all of us who have become aware of modern life as it is. We feel that our communities as we know them, our traditions and our conventions, good as they are, somehow are not good enough.

This, I think, is the prevailing word in the minds and spirits of most people who are at all aware at this time. We all feel that there is something in ourselves that needs expression and changing, and our communities somehow do not express this changing thing in us.

I think the reason why our communities are failing to express that is because we have completely lost track of the natural person inside ourselves. We have completely lost track of what I call the dark person inside ourselves. The black person in Africa, whom we persecute, is the natural, the spontaneous, the instinctive person. We are in a state of profound civil war, and one of the most terrible things to me, as I look back upon the history of Africa and the world, is that I see that this spiritual damage which we have done to ourselves is a spiritual damage that we have also done to Africa. One of the greatest mistakes that we made was to think that the natural man is not a spiritual man.

Actually, the natural man in Africa is a truly spiritual man. He has so much of the spiritual that he is overflowing with it. He has so much of it that he gets entangled with the outside world. He sees it in things that really cannot contain it. He sees it in the trees, he sees it in all the objects which surround him. The tragedy is that we walked into this immense primitive spiritual world of Africa and treated it as if it had no spirit at all. I do not want to take things out of their context, out of their time context, but the things that we have done in Africa, the harm that we have done and the harm that we continue to do, is essentially a spiritual harm. Materially, Africa is better off every day. The roads get better, the hospitals get better, the medical services get better. But the spiritual injury to the man, the first man of Africa, remains. It never occurred to my ancestors, or to anyone, that this person had a natural first spirit of his own. It never for one minute occurred to them that here already was a sense of religion on to which our own sense of religion could be grafted. The early missionaries, the Jesuits first, followed by the Protestant missionaries, all wrote off the natural beliefs of man in Africa as pure superstition. They all laughed at them, and they scorned the whole lot of them.

The administrator did exactly the same thing. I could give you many instances of it. I remember a tribe I knew extremely well in Africa. When a man in the tribe died, people brought his favorite cow to look at him as he lay dead before they buried him. And after that,

that cow was the possession of the gods, of the spirit, and was not allowed to be touched. Yet, I have seen people who did not speak the language, tax collectors, go in and say "We must have this cow to sell." This is against all the religious feelings of the tribe. I have seen riots develop and people murdered because of that kind of thing, because it was in a sense, a matter of honor, of the spirit, to those people. This enormous unknowingness has led to an utter and complete incomprehension of the man of Africa.

The result is tragic. I do not want to go into the politics of it here. I do not want to deal with the historical causes, those aspects of it which you can read about in a thousand books. I just would like you to see it as essentially a problem of the world and of our time, a deeply spiritual problem.

An old hunter I knew as a boy said to me: "This conflict that you have in Africa is caused by only one thing, and that is that the natural man of Africa, the primitive man, *is*, and the white, the European man, *has*." Those are the two things that are at war in the modern world today. It is this problem of having and this problem of being. It is the having which is fighting the being in Africa.

I will not now go into the question of why color adds such a particular point to it, because important as it is, it is not important for the general realization that this is the problem of the modern man. He is in a state of civil war. We are in a state of war against that part of ourselves which has got fastened onto this materialistic world, against that part of us which *is*.

As a boy, I was told a story which illustrates this point by one of our black servants. Her status was the lowest in the household; she was in rags and tatters. I remember this woman telling me as a child that there was a man in Africa once who had a wonderful herd of cattle, stippled black and white. Every morning he took his herd to the best grazing he could find. In the evening he brought it back, and early the next morning, as the custom is in Africa, he milked wonderful buckets full of milk from the herd. But one morning he went to the kraal and found the cattle had been milked dry. He thought, "Well, I must change the razing; it's not good enough." He changed the grazing. He brought them in that night, saw the udders were full and sleek, and thought: "Well, tomorrow morning I shall get a lot of milk." In the morning he went to the kraal. The cattle had been milked dry again. He took them out again to still better grazing the next day, and again the same thing happened. The cattle were milked dry.

Realizing that something funny was going on in the kraal, he watched, and at midnight he saw a cord coming down from the sky. Down this cord, hand over hand, came some women of the people of the sky. They were extraordinarily beautiful, and they were young and gay and laughing. They stole into his kraal, and started milking his cattle. Then he could bear it no longer.

He jumped out and caught one of them before they could disappear into the sky again. He married this woman and they lived very happily together, and prospered. Only one thing worried them. When he caught her, she had a basket with a lid that fitted very firmly into the basket, and she said to him from the

start, "The one thing you must never do is look inside this basket, because if you do something awful might happen to us."

He did not look into the basket for many months. One day, however, he was alone in the but, saw the basket, and thought, "Well, this nonsense has gone on long enough." He pulled off the lid, looked inside, saw nothing at all in the basket, and burst out laughing. He thought "Really, what a silly woman. How like a woman to make such a fuss about a basket which has nothing in it at all."

Some hours later the woman came back and the moment she saw him she knew he had looked in the basket. And she said to him, "You've looked into the basket." He said, "Yes, and why have you made such a fuss about it, when there is nothing in the basket at all?" She said, "Nothing?" He said, "No, nothing."

She turned her back on him and walked straight into the sunset and vanished forever.

The, black woman who was telling me this story said to me, "You see, young master, it didn't matter so much that he looked into the basket. What mattered was that having looked in the basket, he couldn't see in that basket the wonderful things that she had brought from the sky for them to share."

Now that again, it seems to me, is the situation of the modern human being. Here is a primitive person, this primitive aspect of our spirit, standing in rags and tatters and telling us that the one thing you must never do is to look in the basket and see nothing inside. And that is precisely what we do in Africa to the black people. We look into the basket of their spirit and see nothing inside, whereas it is filled with things that we need for our common happiness on this earth. We have rejected them all along the line.

The natural man of Africa, whatever losses he has suffered in the past, instinctively has never been displaced in his spirit. The most wonderful thing about the primitive man is that wherever he goes in life he feels, "I am known." *We only feel we know, we never feel we are known.* We have reversed St. Paul who said, "Then shall I know even as also I have been known." We say we know. It never occurs to us that we might be known. Because we are not known, we are not in touch with that aspect of ourselves in which we are known. That is why we are profoundly displaced in Africa, in the world today.

One of the greatest illustrations of this sense of displacement of the modern man is found in Dostoevski. Although he has been dead many years, he is truly contemporary, because he was himself a profoundly displaced person. He was a person who was at war, in a sense, with his own community.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, he tells the story of Mitya, who is accused of murder. Mitya is not technically guilty of the crime, but because he thought of committing the murder, he feels he is guilty, and is asked to sign a confession. At this junction, he falls asleep and has a strange dream, utterly out of keeping with his place and time.

He was driving in the steppes, where he had been stationed long ago, and a peasant was driving him in a cart with a pair of horses through snow and sleet. Not far off was a village of black huts, half of which were burnt down, with only the charred beams showing upright. As they drove in, a row of peasant women were drawn up along the road. All were thin and wan, their faces a brownish color. He especially noticed one woman tall and bony, who looked forty but might have been only twenty, holding a crying baby in her arms.

And the child cried and cried, and held out its bare arms, blue from cold. And Mitya asked, "Why are they crying? Why are they crying?" as the driver wanted to dash gaily by.

"It's the babe," answered the driver, "the babe is weeping." And Mitya was struck by his saying in this peasant way -- the "babe"; he liked the peasant calling it the babe. There seemed more pity in it.

"But why is it weeping?" he persisted stupidly. "Why are its arms bare? Why don't they wrap it up?" And the driver said, "They are poor people, burnt out. They've no wood. They're begging because they're burnt out."

"No, no," said Mitya, not understanding. "Tell me why it is they stand there. Why are people poor? Why is it necessary for people to be poor? Why is the babe poor? Why is the steppe barren? Why don't they hug and kiss? Why don't they sing songs of joy? Why are they so dark from black misery? Why don't they feed the babe?" He felt that his questions were unreasonable and senseless, yet he wanted to ask just that, and he had to ask it in just that way.

And he felt a passion of pity such as he had never known before rising in his heart so strong that he wanted to cry, that he wanted to do something for them all so that the babe should weep no more, so that the dark-faced dried-up mother should not weep; that no one should shed tears again from that moment. And he wanted to do it at once regardless of all obstacles, with all the restlessness within him. His heart flowed and he travelled forward toward the light and he longed to live on and on, to go towards the new beckoning light and to hasten, hasten, hasten now at once.

Then he wakes up, and he finds himself faced with the judges, and he says to them: "All right gentlemen, I'll sign the confession, because I've had a good dream."

To me this image of the woman standing there unable to feed the child, this image of people burnt out, this is the spiritual image of our time. Like the primitive woman in rags and tatters, this woman, this spirit, is in us an unnourished woman. The babe is the new attitude of the displaced person in a new community which still has to come, underfed and crying for nourishment. This is the situation in which we live to this day. But I think myself that the dream is in existence at this moment. It is only a question of living it.

We in Africa have to live it by coming to terms, as soon as possible, with the dark

people in our society, and we can only do it, I think, by coming to terms first with the spirit in ourselves, with this natural person in ourselves. I do not think there is any escape. We have to take on the situation in which we live, first upon ourselves as individuals. The whole world must take on the question of displacement, and go to the place inside ourselves where we truly belong.

It seems to me that the most important matter before us at this moment is to find a way of fighting against evil in such a manner that we do not become just another aspect of the thing we are fighting against, which seems to be going on all over the world. I have seen this happen so much in my own lifetime. I have seen people fight against what they call colonialism and imperialism and get their way, merely to become another form of the colonialism and the imperialism they are fighting against. The problem is to fight against evil in such a way that we do not become the evil itself. There is a very old French proverb, and a very wise one, which says that all human beings tend to become the things they oppose. To avoid this, we must accept full responsibility for our actions. If we do that we must also expect that others will accept full responsibility for their *reactions*. Those are the two halves that make the whole. We are not going to get out of these grave racialisms and other problems if we do not accept these two ends of the problem. The reaction must also be right. No matter how badly one person behaves, it does not absolve the other person from reacting in the right way. That is our immense dilemma at the moment. I think that the only answer is to turn to these spiritual sources in our natural selves, to turn to the source where we find the dream, a good dream. The primitive people of Africa say that there is a dream dreaming us. It is a good dream. The only trouble is we live it badly.

You can find the dream in the natural part of yourself. If you turn to it you will find that in it there is no sense of displacement. That is where you belong. If you can somehow transcend the kind of civil war from which we are all suffering, the war between our natural selves and our so-called civilized selves, you will lose your sense of displacement. Above all is the very fact that we can share our sense of displacement. The minute you realize that you are not the only one, you realize that you are not displaced, because you belong to something which in a sense does not yet exist. You belong to a community which is coming. At once you are at home. To me the most exciting thing in the world today is that the moment one speaks of these matters, one finds that he really is not alone.

Everywhere in the world I find people who feel as I do. The letters I get, sometimes in response to my books, from strangers, in Japan, China, Turkey, Africa, everywhere, show that there are people who are on the same road and feel the same way. They are already a little model of the community to come.

How do we reconcile the various aspects of ourselves, at a time when we are so dreadfully divided against ourselves ?

I think it is the prevailing decline, the decadence of the spirit and intellect of our age, that the doers do not think and the thinkers don't do.

What is the split, the fateful split? People will not see that at some point the spirit becomes thinking, thinking becomes behavior, behavior becomes action. Again, it is because

there is this gap between the natural instinctive person and the extremely cold, calculating, materialistic person we have made of ourselves. It is of the utmost importance that the gap be closed. But, the moment you close that gap the chances are you will be in a state of profound revolution, not in the Marxist sense, but in the New Testament sense. You will be a revolutionary example and you will be utterly at home, because you will have that feeling of belonging.

The great need of our time is somehow to get rid of the pretence, this awful secrecy in life, where people profess to be one thing and live another. Somehow that has to be brought out in the open, so that we will stop pushing the natural part of ourselves into a corner. We have slums in the spirit just as we have them in cities. We have the despised black person in ourselves just as we have despised black people in Africa. That is where it starts, I am firmly convinced. It starts because we resent this dark person in ourselves, and then we get it mixed up with the dark person in society. The way to put it right is to see, for instance, the black man in Africa for what he really is. He does not feel himself to be black. He feels just as light as we are, just as full of light as any of us.

The thing that I can never get people in Africa to see is that black people have exactly the same values about black and white as we have. When the Zulus talk about a man who is a great tyrant and extremely unpleasant, they say he has a black heart. In other words, he is different from the ordinary Zulu because he has a black heart. And I think this is the way we have to start and the way to start is to think about ourselves in a new way; to get rid of the ideas and things that are not proper to our experience. We want to turn from dogma and doctrine to our own living experience; to the dream which is behind all experience. Here we will find a sense of belonging, a sense of meaning, and a sense of direction.

There is an immense meaning, a meaningful activity, in all of us which transcends words, and even transcends action. That activity is presented to us in terms of images. And these images are always greater and more powerful than the use to which we can put them, and the expression which we can give to them. I think that is absolutely basic. There is this immense world of images that comes up and there is this image of the shadow. And a human being is not truly real unless he has a shadow. When human beings acknowledge that, they see it instinctively. If only we could come back to this natural side of ourselves, to see meaning instinctively as well as intellectually! The old Chinese recognized it. Their way of greeting another person was to say, "May your shadow never get less." Because if you are real, you throw a shadow. The Zulus -- all the Bantu people I know -- say "You throw a shadow," if they want to pay you a compliment. That is the sign of personality, of human being.

We are made up in such a way in this world of images that we are always less than the image, less than the basic imagery of life. We are always less than the vast cosmic activity which is in us, and we can only select certain aspects of it from moment to moment, and reject others. And the shadow is the image of the ones we reject.

I think that in this inevitable rejection, in this process of selection and rejection, is the price we pay for consciousness. It is not easy to be conscious; it is a serious battle to be a conscious, aware human being, one's own human being is really being in the fire. In the

process of selection in which we are inevitably involved, we are also involved in a process of rejection.

What is it in our time, in our age, that we particularly reject? What is this aspect of the shadow that we have, this darkness? Well, it happens to be everything that the natural man stands for at this moment in time. The things we have rejected are the things which the dark man, the black man, implicitly accepts as basic. In Africa, and in the world, we have produced an extraordinary kind of hatred and a kind of love for this dark image in the human mind. (To me it is striking that the world-wide movement for the abolition of slavery, which was a recognition of the wrongness of that rejection, started at the same time as the idea of the "noble savage," that came out of the mind of Rousseau.)

I am certain that in my own country it is not black people as such that we are legislating against. It is not the black man as he is in our society that we are legislating against. It is a projection of this rejection inside ourselves of the natural man. That is what we are doing in my country; I am absolutely convinced of it.

Our whole way of living is so much a rejection of the natural, the feeling, the warm, the human being, that we keep nature in a little box of its own. And we confuse this shadow that we throw with the black man without. We see confusion with the image in our own minds, and until one comes to that point and to that realization, we are not really free of what I call color prejudice. Once you have seen it, once you have realized it, the whole thing goes up in smoke. Immediately you become free, free to like the person who is likeable, whatever his color, and to dislike the person who is dislikeable, whatever his color. This is the real freedom.

But we must face up first of all to what it is *in ourselves* that we reject that makes us reject a person who mirrors our own rejection in the outer world. This to my mind is the real problem in this kind of race relationship, because it is not like other race relationships. We must face up to it because it contains the color element. It is not like the problem we have with the Russians, for instance. It is not at all like it. There we have a race problem too, or if you like, a national problem. You had it in Germany with the Jews. Darkness was tragically mixed up in the German mind. The problem was and today is the acceptance of the image of the dark, of the darkness, of the darkness in ourselves.

But we fight against it as bad, even though we are secretly attracted to it. And since the dark-skinned man has it more than we do, we fight against him and what he represents. And we let our inner image of black as the symbol of the devil, the unknown, and evil in general, project itself in hatred on to the "black" races.

Secretly, my countrymen hate or are afraid of the black man in Africa because we could like him too much. In a sense we love his indifference to our values. In a sense he does threaten us, because he provokes the natural in us, and we are terrified of the natural. We are terrified of going black in the spiritual sense, not in the physical sense. When we say we are afraid we will all go dark, and must preserve white civilization, what we really mean is we are afraid of going dark spiritually, going into our own shadow, taking up this thing that we have rejected, and to which we owe so much. And that *is* what happens.

There comes a moment in the history of the world when you have to come to terms with yourself in order to be a complete person, to be a complete society, to be an integrated society. You have to come to terms with what you've rejected. You have to bring that up and take it in. And that is why we are frightened -- the day of reckoning must come. We are frightened because we might feel too free. Heaven knows what we are going to do next when we let life in on that scale. We might even stop going into Parliament! One might just like to sit in the sun all day. One might become so natural he might love everybody. It would be disastrous. So we push it, we fight it, we push it away all the time.

For me it is one of the things I love. I get so tired of being in Europe because I could be killed by it. I always think of the Zulu servants we had at home. Every six months they would come and say, "Well, we must go back to Zululand now," and I knew why they went back. For we were great friends, and we loved them, but they found it too tiring to be in our company all the time. They find it too exhausting to be in this extraordinarily tense, puritanical, selective state in which we live. And they go back for six months.

The color problem is a complete misuse of an idea that contains within it the greatest richness for mankind. The Stone Age man, the Bushman of the Kalahari Desert of British West Africa, has it that the color of the animals and the plants and the trees was put there by this first Great Spirit with honey. And honey is the oldest symbol for wisdom. It is wisdom that brought color. It is a divine dispensation; Stone Age man knows this. If we can get down to the basic images and can understand this, we are out of the woods. We don't hate or ignore color. We understand and appreciate it. And it is that which makes the richness and joy of life. It is being free to divorce the color from the symbol, to get away from this irrational, symbolic background.

The interesting thing is that this imagery works very clearly in the minds of the black people of Africa. They have the same image of darkness we have. When they feel threatened by the unknown, it is dark, it is black. They do not feel dark at all. They feel just as light as anyone else in the world. Some of them are more full of light than any of us. When they speak of Chaka, the great Zulu tyrant, they say, "Ach, be had a black heart." And when the "black" man sees the "white" man as his enemy, he sees him as very black. In the mythology of Africa the children of the Spirit are white. And that is where the mixup came. We white men started with a very unfair mythological advantage, when we went into Africa, going there in this image of whiteness.

If black and white do not get together and meet inwardly and outwardly on friendly terms, there may occur an event on a world scale symbolized by the story of the white and the black knights in King Arthur's Court:

There were two brothers, the Black Knight and the White Knight and they set off on a quest, each on his own, one going north and one south. After many years they met in a dark wood and did not recognize each other. They immediately assumed they were enemies and when both were lying bleeding to death on the grass, they undid their helmets and recognized they were brothers. God grant that our own act of recognition comes before the contest, and not after.

This legend, I feel, illustrates in its deepest sense the problem of rejection -- a rejection in ourselves, in society, and in civilization. Perhaps the mythological aspects of this machinery of rejection will help further to illuminate the situation.

I think perhaps the best myth I can take is our own myth. I find it so tragic and ironical that the age in which we live should regard the word "myth" and "illusion" as synonymous, in view of the fact that the myth is the real history, is the real event of the spirit. It is this immense world of meaning with which the image links us. The myth is the tremendous activity that goes on in humanity all the time, without which no society has hope or direction, and no personal life has a meaning. We all live a myth whether we know it or not. We live it by fair means or we live it by foul. Or we live it by a process or a combination of both. We have a myth that we live badly. The Christian myth is a myth in the real sense of the word.

At the beginning of all this mythological activity, at the beginning of everything always, there is the image of a journey. In fact, I think the whole of the religious approach to life is the awakening of the sense of the journey in the human being. And right at the beginning, immediately when man sees himself on the earth and separated from God, he finds himself on the first step of the journey, the Journey of the Garden, the garden to which he can never go back because over the gate stands an angel with a flaming sword in his hands. We cannot go back, once life presupposes a going on.

And as the myth develops, we really get into the finding of self. There is the terrific journey out of Egypt, this journey out of the land of civilization, culture, and plenty, which has become a land of bondage. It is interesting that in the myth there is bondage in civilization. There is a certain kind of imprisonment out of which the people who live the myth, have to move. Here is the very moving, awakening, necessity of the journey first of all in the heart of one individual who is terrified and afraid; the child who is found in a river among the bulrushes, is called to perform the journey and shirks it; he runs away from it, and is terrified, thinking that he will never have the power to do this, that it is an impossible thing. And yet he does it, and so it all starts. Beginning with one individual, the whole thing moves, moves as this immense journey pours into a wasteland, into a desert, wandering about in instability and isolation. In the end is the Promised Land.

And this journey, of course, this great journey in the physical world, is now as it was in the ancient days for the first man on earth. That is how it is to the Stone Age men of Africa to this day. I have seen, as I have lived with them, the great importance of the physical journey to them, for to primitive man it is, of course, never just a physical journey. It is a deep spiritual event. If you stop the sense of the journey in them, they die: die for no other reason except that this sense of the journey, which is so vital, has been brought to an end.

It is vital to all of us, this sense of the journey. When you go through Africa, up and down in the bush, where I have walked very often, you have all the wonderful footpaths that have been made by the naked feet of vanished and forgotten men, running up and down through the bush like the lines on the palm of one's hand. As you walk up and down these footpaths, you feel the importance -- not only the physical but the spiritual importance -- of the sense of journey, of the sense of direction.

In fact, as I have walked like that, I have often felt that I knew what a person like Livingstone felt when he had to walk and tramp up and down in Africa, because in a sense this was not a purely physical journey. He identified this journey with the search for God. I do not want to underrate this physical sense of the journey. It is so important it stands in all mythology, a journey not merely in the physical world, but a journey into the spirit. It is a journey from a place inside oneself to a place with oneself where one has not been before. It is a journey of becoming. That is what the journey represents. It is a journey of the spirit, of the human personality, moving towards a greater and more complete expression of man, to a greater and more contemporary expression of what is the first spirit in him.

The sense of a journey must always be expressed in the most contemporary way in the material, in the circumstances of one's life, in what is first and oldest in the human spirit. This is beautifully told in the opening phrase of our own Judeo-Christian myth. In the Bible, the opening journey is concerned with the first great discovery, the discovery of laws: with the lawfulness of life. Then you get a period where the people try to stand still in that lawfulness. They forget that knowledge, culture, and civilization are not standing-still structures, that they are only camping sites on the way of this journey. One has to move on, and one sees here that one has the trials and the tribulations, the disasters, that overtook this flesh and blood because it would not continue the venture.

Then comes the second phase in the myth, where God comes down to the world to become a human being. He is no longer aloof. He is no longer separated. He has actually become flesh and blood. It is interesting that this coming down is immediately concerned with rejection. God coming down, is deep in the myth from the beginning.

I say what I am going to say now very reverently. I hope it won't shock any of you because it is the truth that I am trying to present to you. It may be an unorthodox approach, but this is how I see it, and I say it with the greatest reverence possible. It is concerned with rejection from the start. Consider what Christ was from the little history that we have of the event. The myth starts straight away with rejection. He was born outside the law. It is an image that he was born in sin, the people of his period considered it to be a sin; and this is how the new aspect, the God, reveals himself to humanity.

Again, profoundly important, is the fact that this myth moves on -- there is the return to Egypt. That is the flight to Egypt. That is the land of bondage. It is a return to the very beginning of the myth, as it were, in order to make it reality. It goes right back to Egypt. There is the mysterious disappearance into Egypt before it re-emerges and there we have to deal with the God who has become law, the rejected aspect of that society. And what is this rejection? It brings something which the law, important as it was, has ignored: the discovery of love. It is the discovery of forgiveness, the mechanism inside the myth, inside the human being. Life could not move on because it could not forgive itself. It stood still in this law. It was pinned down, and the human mind, the human spirit, could not move on until there was this discovery of the reality of forgiveness.

This forgiveness is not a cerebral, soft or sentimental thing. It is not a kiss against the sunset. The new, immensely heroic reality which is God's Son brings a sword. But it has this extraordinary basis: the capacity of forgiveness. And this, in a world drunk and obsessed with law. It is the Roman might and power

which this rejected being, this rejected God, discovers as He makes a wonderful remark already prophesied in the Psalm which He refers to when He says, "The stone which the builders have rejected shall be the cornerstone of the building to come." Thus there is a resumption of the journey, and the resumption starts with the acceptance of the rejected aspect of society.

From that time, 2,000 years ago, until now we have refused to go on with the journey. We have not, in a sense, many of us, even come as far as this mechanism of forgiveness. Spiritually and intellectually, we have tried to limit that myth to a particular event. In the meantime, another kind of rejection was piling up because this great discovery of the new, Christian reality has also brought about the rejection of the natural, primitive, instinctive man. The imperative of our time is that the journey must go on again. We have to strike our tents and be on the march and come to a new aspect of ourselves. We have to deal with this new kind of rejection.

I feel there has also been a third great discovery in the mechanism of man. It links closely with what is implied in the process of man becoming God. This discovery owes an enormous amount to Carl Gustav Jung. He has found that by delving into dreams and into the rejected aspects of the psyche there is found the godlike mythological activity in the human being, a sort of master image which, if you can get hold of it, can deal with the mechanism of rejection.

In each of us there is a transcendent image that can reconcile these opposites; bring them together and make it possible for us to move on again. This is the phase at which we stand today. This is the opening, and I think it is a turning point in the history of the human mind. This is the facing up to the mechanism of rejection in ourselves, the realization that the thing we reject in order to become what we are, unless we meet it as a friend, comes one day knife in hand, demanding to sacrifice that which sacrificed it. That is an absolute law. That is how it works, whether we like it or not. That is how it works in us, how it works in groups, how it works in the world. We have had disastrous illustrations of it from time to time, particularly in this generation in which we live. Twice already have we seen the sacrificed aspects coming knife in hand, being dealt with by foul means because we would not deal with by fair means.

Until we transcend this darkness in ourselves, we shall never be able to deal with it in our societies. *It is an axiomatic law that no human can take an institution or a situation or another individual farther than he has travelled himself, inside himself.* And here we have a fact of tremendous religious importance. But it is not being dealt with in our religious life if we allow dogma and doctrine to destroy the sense of journey in human beings, this sense of becoming, this sense of travelling from the state in which we have been born, into the new country of our soul.

This is what we should be doing all the time. It is a basis of becoming.

If we look into ourselves, we find mirrored in our society the vagaries of our lives. We have slums in our minds before we have slums in our streets. We have these prejudices inside our minds before we have them in our societies. Nor will we use properly the advanced technical accomplishments we have unless we

start again the journey of our basic myth.

This is what the natural people of Africa do. They attach great importance to their own myth, through which they know their shadow. They live their myth, which is the natural language of the spirit; a myth I feel we can learn if we can get back to the images, rather than to words alone.

That is difficult for us to do; besides, it is very dangerous to give up a concept -- to break it down and build it up again. Yet it is a necessary task to be done at all times. The Bushman's saga is told in images, and illustrates how among the earliest human beings the god himself had to be renewed always. That is, the image we have of God has to be renewed from time to time in true contemporary terms. It cannot be pinned down indefinitely. If it is not renewed, we do not have the power to move forward as individuals, even as the Bushman does in his saga.

Here I come to my story. It is concerned with the god of the West African Bushmen, the praying Mantis. How wonderful it is, this instinct in natural man, to find a true image of the god in the insect. This is a very humble, yet a very wonderful thing to do. Many people, deceived by appearances, would have found Him in great and spectacular things.

But this little Stone Age man found God in an insect. He found God in the beginning. That is the importance of this insect. He found it in the Praying Mantis because he saw this insect start as an egg in the sand, a tiny, almost invisible egg. The egg changes into a worm which creeps and crawls on the earth. Then comes the change from a creeping and crawling thing into this fabulous insect with wings, that call fly; this insect that sits there in an attitude of extreme reverence and contemplation, in an attitude of prayer, with his head slightly turned to one side. To me it is very wonderful that they found it.

This image, this Mantis, is not only the Bushman's God, but also his God-hero. Mantis is the God come to earth. He is there in all the myths and legends, always provoking, always enticing people to new aspects of themselves. He entices people to see themselves as something more than the animal. Then he gets them to see themselves not only as a kind of human herd, but as a kind of herd with a social feeling, with a social consciousness. In the midst of this social life, he prevails on them to see themselves as individuals. But there comes a moment when all these things having been done, Mantis feels that he also is not sufficient. He too must be renewed. And he sits there in the vast wasteland, in the desert, in the wilderness -- this infinitely heroic, insect sits there. He has an extraordinary assembly of people with him. One is his son, Kwammanga, who lives in the rainbow. How wonderful! Kwammanga is not a person so much as he is the element that lives in the rainbow. He is a symbol to the Bushman of the conscious differentiating element in the human spirit, plays the same role as the rainbow did in the Old Testament, a sign and a covenant from God there will not be another flood. The rainbow is a symbol of consciousness. Consciousness is there forever and man will be protected against ever being flooded again by the unconscious; and never again will there be cares.

This element is there with Mantis. His son is there. This conscious aspect of Mantis, if you like, sits there in the desert with him. Beside him, also is a rock rabbit. This is an extremely primitive feminine aspect of himself. If there ever was an animal that has its feet firmly on the earth, it is the African rock rabbit. It is an animal which is an extremely busy little housewife who knows that her place is only in the kitchen. She is extremely fussy. In the language of dialectical materialism, the rock rabbit is the most uncompromising kind of social realist that you can get in the animal world. She is there too, sitting with him and Kwammanga. There is his adopted daughter, Porcupine. Now why a porcupine? You are right to smile, but don't smile too long because in the presence of Porcupine you are in the presence of Ariadne. You are in the presence of the Beatrice of the Stone Age Dante, because porcupine is a symbol. She is his adopted daughter. She is a symbol of the soul, of the spiritual aspect of Mantis. And she plays a very important role in the story.

Mantis, in Stone Age language, is ill. He says to the people round about him, "I can't eat my food any more. I've got a lump, a swelling here in my throat. I'm tired of this diet. I'm not well." In other words, he cries in Stone Age language, "My state of being, my state!" You see, primitive man is never physically ill. Illness is to him a spiritual event. Mantis is spiritually ill. He is sitting there. He is ill. Then he does an extraordinary thing. He says to Porcupine, "I want you to go to your father and ask him to come and eat with me."

Now the father of Porcupine is called the All-Devourer, and Porcupine, this Ariadne, is horrified. She says, "But Mantis, you mustn't do such a thing. You know that he eats up everything. He will eat you up. He will eat us all up." What Mantis is doing, of course, is taking himself to pieces, because he too feels himself not sufficient. He says, "No, Porcupine. I've got this lump in my throat. I'm tired of eating zebra meat."

The zebra is interesting because the zebra is the donkey, as it were, of the African world, and what primitive man eats he becomes. Mantis is tired of being this kind of roaming, feckless animal of the plains. He wants to eat something else. He says, "I can't eat this anymore. I'm tired of it. Go and fetch the All-Devourer and ask him to come and eat with me."

He then tells his son-in-law Pramana, "Go and bring in all the sheep that you can find. Bring all the sheep in and we will eat them when the All-Devourer comes." It is very interesting, his sending for the sheep, for the sheep is the animal of acceptance. Even at the point of death, even when you have the knife at the sheep's throat, he does not struggle. He accepts. He lies there and allows you to cut his throat.

Mantis says, "We must eat. We must become. We must accept. This food of acceptance is what we must have." His son-in-law brings in all the sheep. Meanwhile Porcupine very sadly prepares to go. But before she goes, she takes a little store of her own, a little meat, which she hides away, because there must be some aspect of being, a special protection, from which they can start again when

the All-Devourer has come. Then she goes right out across the desert on this journey. She finds the All-Devourer and says, "Mantis wants you to come and eat with him." With that she starts back as fast as she can because she knows the All-Devourer will now come very rapidly.

She returns to Mantis and says, "Mantis, the All-Devourer is coming. You see the tree on the horizon. When you see the shadow falling on that tree, when you see that tree growing dark, and suddenly in the darkness you see a flash of fire, you will know that the All-Devourer is coming." She goes very sadly to busy herself with the little store of food she has kept for the moment of crisis.

Suddenly Mantis is sitting there, and the whole sky goes black. A giant shadow falls over him. Then he does what the gods in mythology always have done. It is the most moving moment in all mythology. It is the moment destruction is upon the gods.

Mantis sits there and the huge shadow falls on him. He says, "Why is it so dark, when the sun should be shining? Why in the middle of the day, is it so dark?" As if he does not know, as if this is the last thing which he had wished himself, as if this is a complete surprise to him! It is the moment when Christ said, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

In this extraordinary moment, Mantis feels as if he himself were forsaken. And there it is, the shadow. He is in the shadow. He is to deal with the shadow. It is the moment that Job knew on his ash heap. It is the moment on Calvary. It is the moment that we have known twice in our generation when we have called in the All-Devourer in two World Wars, and called him apparently in vain.

This is the advent of the All-Devourer. It is a moment our modern poets also know well. This is the moment of which T. S. Eliot speaks when he says "Between the idea and the reality, between the motion and the action, falls the Shadow; between the conception and the creation, between the emotion and the response, falls the Shadow; between the desire and the spasm, between the potency and the existence, between the ascent and the descent, falls the Shadow."

So the All-Devourer comes and sits down with Mantis. And very quickly he has eaten up all the sheep. Then he eats up all the huts, all the bushes. And then he eats Mantis; he eats up his rainbow element of discrimination. He eats up everybody. He eats up the uncompromising social realist. He eats them all up. Everything is eaten up except Porcupine, who has removed herself to a distance with the two young boys of the establishment, the two new aspects, as it were, of the future.

Everything is eaten up. Here Porcupine finds her true heroic role. She takes these two boys, and she heats a spear in the fire, and by force and by fire she tests them.

She burns, first of all. Presses the spear into their ears, and tests their

understanding with fire. She presses the spear up their noses, testing their intuition, their intuitive grasp of the situation, by fire. She burns them on the temple, testing their intelligence and their reason, by fire. One boy gets tears in his eyes, and she says, "Hm, what a mild person." She turns to the other and his eyes get brighter and dryer, and she says "Ah, a fierce man is he. So like his father." You see, even anger has its proper place, its proper proportion in the soul at that moment.

She arms the boys each with a spear and seats them on either side of the All-Devourer. They cut him open, they free Mantis. With Mantis come his rainbow element and the uncompromising social realist. They come out dazed and bewildered, and Porcupine, the soul, takes them and presents them with this aspect of meat -- of being, which she has preserved. She feeds them and says, "Get up immediately and let us go from this place." They go immediately from that place, and after travelling a long distance, come to a new place where they continue to live happily.

And so, continuing their own journey they have gone to another state of themselves. Here in Stone Age language is pointed up the necessity to do what we have to do today to deal with the shadow, to deal with the All-Devourer and to move to a new, a truly contemporary statement of ourselves. Because that is what is lacking -- there are no modern people in the world today. There is no truly contemporary expression of all these old, old things in our nature.

We, too, need to have access again to these spiritual well-springs. We need to come again, as we once did as children into the wonderment of this mythological process that we have been educated out of, so to speak. We must find its meaning and express it through our lives.

Our great technological advances need not be a barrier to this aspect of our being, particularly as science itself, at the moment, has taken a significant turn. Modern physics has altered the whole approach of the scientist who once attached so much importance to the object, the extreme object. He has now gone *into* the object so deeply he has found that that which is so solid, at the other end of his electronic microscope vanishes and he is again faced with stars and moons and with atoms and particles that behave mythologically. The deeper he goes the less lawful becomes the behavior of the matter that he is dealing with. These objects that are so solid, on deeper examination are such stuff as dreams are made of. They vanish at the outer edge. So the scientist stands in the presence again of a great and wonderful mystery, as do all men.

We are lucky that in Africa we have this fine, preserved mirror of the past in primitive man, to show us how the spirit was felt in the beginning. Can we take hold of it and carry it forward and give these things a contemporary expression? Must we hide behind our histories? Whenever people produce history they use it as an argument for a contemporary action. That is an evasion, I assure you.

The time has come to say that history must really be history, and now must be now. And this we can only do through a renewal of our relationship, our feeling and our

experience of what once was called God.

Although this organization no longer exists, the entirety of this booklet is reproduced here for completeness, as well as to remind people today of those who came before who also understood the utter necessity of renewing our sense of participation in the mystery of life and to find out what the nature of being human means to our individual experience of existence and consciousness, and belonging to the world we are part of by right of birth.

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THE WORKSHOP FOR CULTURAL DEMOCRACY
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THE WORKSHOP FOR CULTURAL DEMOCRACY was incorporated in 1945 as a non-profit, tax-exempt agency for service and leadership in the field of human relations and intercultural education. Its action-research program is based on the recognition that the individual is central to the human community:

All of us want and can be helped to a new or renewed sense of individual worth. We need help to achieve the self-understanding and insight from which come acceptance of ourselves, and of others. We need the strengths inherent in working creatively in and with groups of people in order to make our full contribution to the human community, even as that community supports and reinforces each of us.

In its philosophy of cultural democracy, the Workshop is dedicated to the concept that the very diversity of America's people, in race, creed, and ethnic origin, creates the widest opportunity for the development and growth of the individual. Accordingly, in its program, the Workshop emphasizes the working out and utilization of ways of bringing people together so that they can proceed to their common task of building a better community.

Group Conversation, a unique development of the Workshop for Cultural Democracy, is widely recognized as a particularly effective way of achieving rapport in a group, and preparing its members for discussion, decision, and united action. This social technique helps develop a sense of trust among participants, and assists the individual in deepening his feeling of "belonging" and human worth.

In its Leadership Training Program, the Workshop for Cultural Democracy works with professional and lay leaders of community and national agencies, religious organizations, school-parent groups, and teacher-education and group-work training institutions.