

ESSAY REVIEW

AFRICAN MARRIAGE IN ZIMBABWE

DR WEINRICH HAS attempted, in this book,¹ a synthesis of two themes which would perhaps have been better dealt with separately.

In the first place she explores the 'possibilities of cross fertilization between Marxism and Christianity', and argues that, despite a past alliance between the Church and the State and the imposition on Black Christians of the values and tenets of 'petty bourgeois' clergy and missionaries, the 'prevailing confusion of Christian ideology and Christian faith' can be arrested. Though she criticizes both past government and ecclesiastic structures, she remains confident that by going through a hermeneutic circle, the main body of Christians will present a true revolution in theology, and that the 'cross fertilization' of Marxism and Christianity in Zimbabwe is likely to result in a 'purification of the faith and a consolidation of the revolution'. Weinrich suggests (following Segundo) that 'Marx's own insights should be developed further so that theology too can be transformed from a tool in the hands of the old ruling classes into a weapon in the hands of the exploited with which they can confront compromised church leaders and challenge them to accept their more authentic interpretations of the Christian message'. I find it difficult to accept that the theological insights of the exploited will necessarily be more 'authentic' than any one else's — perhaps for the same reasons that Lenin believed that by themselves the workers could not become fully conscious of their political destiny, unaided by instruction from the radical intelligentsia.²

Weinrich pleads eloquently enough for Christians to 'inject into the masses the crisis of an authentic evangelization', the result of which will be a corrected and improved religious ideology. How far this is a remote possibility is difficult to prognosticate. On the one hand, as Lord Blake has seen in an earlier period in Zimbabwean history, it may come about that 'as so often in the past history, the conquered hesitantly, and with many reservations scarcely recognized by those who had "converted" them, accepted the creed of the conqueror'.³ It is those many reservations which may have had a greater influence on, for example, Western concepts of Christian marriage, than ethnicity, economic base (or mode of production) or religion. Ancestral religion, despite Weinrich's assertion to the contrary (p. 192) is a very real force in the spiritual life of the people, and has probably gathered in strength with the rise of nationalism and the search for a national African identity. How far an accommodation between the ancient beliefs of the people and Christianity can be achieved is probably more relevant in Zimbabwe than a cross-fertilization with Marxism. From the other side, as Archbishop Hurley has observed:

¹ A.K.H. Weinrich [Sr Mary Aquina], *African Marriage in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1983), 212 pp., Z\$9.30.

² F. Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique* (London, Tavistock Publications, 1979), 751.

³ R. Blake, *A History of Rhodesia* (London, Eyre Methuen, 1977), 160.

In regard to the Catholic reaction, the denial of God in the overall Marxist view makes it obviously incompatible with Christianity. The accepted Catholic view is that this denial necessarily implies a false view of morality. Morality, instead of having a divine origin has a human one, even a materialistic one, with the result that whatever promotes man's materialistic and social growth as interpreted by Marx is good ethics. From this implication arises the tragic irony of Marxism: that the exploitation of the poor should have inspired in him a philosophy whose ethics in Catholic eyes can condone any horror.⁴

The second theme running through the book is Weinrich's study of marriage in Zimbabwe, the research for which was carried out between 1972 and 1975, much of it ten years ago. This research supports, somewhat shakily, her theological-ideological argument. The data was collected in a response to a request from the major churches in Zimbabwe (or, as it then was, Rhodesia) which were seriously concerned with the fact that the majority of followers did not marry in church, and Weinrich was given the overall brief of determining the impact of Christianity on African married life, and the reasons for the apparent apathy to church teaching.

Her first findings were published in two volumes in mimeograph form (undated), and much of the material is included in this present volume; also included, it seems, is the material collected for her book on the Tonga.⁵ Presumably data other than that already referred to has been added in order to research the total figure of 10,900 referred to in Tables I and II (pp. xiv-xv). This figure, we are informed, refers to all men and women enumerated in the marriage survey; but it is not clear how this figure derived from the 5,662 married couples mentioned earlier (p. xi) or what has happened to the 212 couples or 424 people who have been lost or discarded along the way. We are not told either, of the sampling technique used, and as the author imputes a representational nature to her data by such statements as 'among the Shona where almost 86 per cent of the population are Christians' (p. 10) and 'over 60 generalizations must be treated with reservation if the method of sampling is not satisfactorily explained.

The sort of sampling implied in the text is sometimes referred to as 'haphazard' or 'convenience' sampling and are 'samples' only in the loosest sense of the term: 'When seriously used, they constitute an unflattering reflection on the sophistication of those who resort to, and accept such data'.⁶ Furthermore, the chi-square statistic is, of course, applicable only when samples are randomly and independently selected, and the chi-square table is valid only when each expected frequency is larger than 5-10, and this naturally precludes any category of nought. No table to which chi was applied (surely to integers, not percentages in the original working?) fulfilled these conditions, and the author's assumptions of association must be treated as invalid.

⁴D.E. Hurley, 'Catholic social teaching and ideology', in A Prior (ed.), *Catholics in Apartheid Society* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1982), 38.

⁵A.K.H. Weinrich, *The Tonga People of the Southern Shore of Lake Kariba* (Gweru, Mambo Press, Occasional Paper Socio-Economic Series 8, 1977), 56, where she refers to a total of 137 husbands and 222 wives compared with 136 husbands and 222 wives in the book under review (Tables VIII and IX, 46-7).

⁶J.H. Mueller, K.F. Schwesler and H.L. Costner, *Statistical Reasoning in Sociology* (Boston, Houghton and Mifflin, 1970), 350.

A further lack of specification lies in both the author's unsubstantiated figures (for example, the divorce and remarriage rates given at p. 172) and her sweeping statements (such as 'widow inheritance has become rare among the Shona and among the Ndebele it has died out' p. 65). This conflicts with other data (my own, for example, in a recent survey presently being analysed) which suggests that incidence is probably less than it was, but it has not died out. Close analysis of her work is continually frustrated by the absence of specification of sources. Careless interpretation of sources is also confusing to the reviewer. Weinrich says (p. 81) that a marriage contracted under the African Marriage Act of 1951 can be 'transformed into a civil or Christian marriage by obtaining an Enabling Certificate, that is a written statement by a District Commissioner with whom the marriage has been registered'. The Enabling Certificate is a requirement for all civil marriages, and precedes the normal preliminary procedures, partly to ensure that the man concerned has the capacity to enter into a monogamous marriage—that is, that he is not already married in terms of either Marriage Act. Weinrich's factual understanding of the requirements and procedures for marriage certainly leaves much to be desired, as does her understanding of other matters mentioned (particularly at p. 82) concerned with legal status. On the same page she says, rather vaguely, that 'at times some couples have been refused an Enabling Certificate until the husband paid all outstanding taxes'; accusations of such a degree of improper official conduct should surely be well substantiated.

But perhaps it is wrong to quibble over such matters. Weinrich undoubtedly provides much material which shows an intimate knowledge of her subject and provides many insights into the important institution of marriage.

However, it is difficult to credit her claim to such a very large number of interviews. She tells us that her data were collected between 1972 and 1975, and 'compromised both the administration of a long questionnaire to 5662 married couples and participant observation both by [herself] and partly by a trained research assistant'. The questionnaire, comprising some 50 questions, was administered to people living in 21 communities. In all, a total number of 10,900 people were interviewed, whether singly or in pairs is not revealed. Certainly at least some questions required an answer by both husband and wife singly. This is an average of five interviews a day (taking the maximum indicated period) every day of the week for three years, and this does not take into account travelling time, time off for leave, religious observance, illness, or anything else. And this as well as participant observation!

If her figures are correct, one can only marvel at the sheer effort involved, and the indefatigability of both the author and her assistant; particularly the former who at the same time carried out her full-time teaching responsibilities. I could only wish that she had revealed the name and whereabouts of her assistant at this time. Not only did he perform such prodigious feats of industry in interviewing but could still find time to compose incredible scenarios concerning imprudent ladies discussing their intimate affairs on a park bench in Bulawayo (pp. 132-4) and carelessly revealing both their names despite the lurking presence of a young male eavesdropper with a busy notebook, recording their conversation verbatim!

While not wishing to detract from Dr Weinrich's endeavour, one could wish that more care had been taken to check facts and sources, and that the

standards of analysis and reportage demanded by academic scholarship had been adhered to so that her interesting assertions could be seen to have more substance than is possible as it stands.

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