

## OUR TASKS

The papers presented during this Congress mark an important milestone. As we browse through them, we realize that they draw their deep meaning from the prospect of liberation of colonized peoples.

This milestone of national independence of our peoples is still far from being achieved. And, culturally-speaking, Black people of culture will continue to play a role in initiating a greater sense of justice and love, by holding free-flowing dialogue with the West, by confronting distressing issues and situations and by creating meaningful works of art. Yet, it can also be argued that this milestone of independence has already been reached, in the sense that it is inevitable. The great powers of the world, just like the recently freed young nations, agree a little more every day with the democratic provisions of Western peoples (victims of the imperialism of their rulers) in expressing their hope that colonization and its impacts will rapidly come to an end. Thus, whilst continuing to fight racism and colonialism, we can think about the future, and about the tasks to be accomplished following independence, which need to be considered and adopted by the Africans and Black people of culture right now.

However, until this time, we should reiterate that, in the face of certain pessimism, writers of European culture, such as poets, novelists, playwrights should refrain from imagining that their work is terminated, now that we are standing on the brink of independence. Nothing could be further from the truth; and this would mean having a rather ridiculous opinion of their own work if they were to resign themselves to such perspectives. We have already mentioned the vital role of these people (many of whom have become political leaders due to their innate vocation) in our conferences this year (which will be published in our journal this winter) and we will continue to do so. Their role is to heighten their peoples' awareness to modern-day life. They also have to increase Western sensitivity to forms of beauty, to a sense of justice and solidarity that the modern-day world totally ignored. They are the very first builders of a global City, where human families encounter enough scope, enough clarification as to the immense opportunities of human adventure. We believe, in all humility, that people of culture from non-Western nations will give the nascent world incredibly rich and universalizing inspiration.

Yet, alongside these audacious pathfinders and, very frequently within their ranks, we will strive to undertake more humble tasks in a manner that is more adapted to the intimate sphere of life of our peoples. A Black-African culture, indispensable for the moral well-being of Western culture and indispensable for the vitality of our peoples, is being reborn.

As such, we wish to propose, more specifically today, to people of culture to focus on developing linguistic, spiritual, historic and scientific works.

The language of a nation is the mirror of its soul. This is not a matter of relinquishing European languages. They are essential to us at the current time as languages for working and for assimilating the conditions of modern-day life. They will also be essential to us in a more distant future as languages that, firstly, embrace our history and our works. It goes without saying, however, that new nations will develop and will temper some indigenous languages (which will have been sensibly chosen) for apprehending and for expressing modern situations and realities related to our

destinies. And secondly, it is only these languages that are likely to unveil aspects of our past, dimensions of our personalities that European languages are even less capable of reflecting given that works in French or in Portuguese are, today, not even known by a tenth of our populations. Also, serious and urgent work must be undertaken by our elites, our young people especially (as well as Africanists of all origins) so that, progressively and rationally, under the inspiration of our peoples, options begin to feature, certain languages be favoured and their teaching be organized in schools and universities. Because the language of a people is the living source of its humanism and its history.

Peoples are accustomed to trusting subtle elements of their spirituality and their humanism to familiar inflections, sounds, rhythms, the intimate laws of a language. These elements are interpolatable in practice and indispensable for fully expressing a humanism.

This humanism is spiritual. It is still alive in the people and comprises different aspects. Such as cosmogonic wisdom, mythical narratives, historical legends, theatre, poems, fables. It will not suffice to gather these resources, the people must be involved in this work and must want it and must be proud that it is admired. These tasks alone could warrant several congresses and various days of study.

Notwithstanding, in this humanism, there is a discipline which it would be advisable to privilege: history. It appears that it is from history that circumstances demand urgent development. National awareness needs to enrich the scope of its life and to reinforce its determination with legitimate passion for interpreting the past and the institutions. Here, our encounters with Western historians are of particular vital importance. And our historians are already working to redefine our relationships of the past. Yet, it is just as invaluable for our traditional concepts to be known in schools and in solid works of general culture. History is always that of a historian, of a period, of an intention. Why should we only let Western historians shed light on our past? Why can we not give back to our peoples the legitimate freedom to reconstruct their past with the very perspectives that their situation imposes?

It seems, in any case, that our peoples prize history greatly. Let us help them write their own. It means soothing their eagerness as regards assuming responsibilities.

Finally, there is a field that even in the West we occasionally set against culture: technology. For some, it is a question of preserving Africans from the harm of technology that has depersonalized human beings and has atomized the oneness of their souls. For others (more anxious about "Balkanizing" African awareness), industrialization is said to introduce the most appalling havoc and traumas into African societies (miscellaneous, juxtaposed but each intimately united).

Actually, these discussions about the harm of technology relate to situations and issues that are more akin to the West of today.

When technology is assumed and imagined by a people, it becomes part of its culture. And, it is from this point of view (and not one of technology that is imposed on us based on the imperatives of colonialism) that we need to consider the question. At a time when Russia and the USA (the most privileged in this field) are worried about not having enough technicians to guarantee their safety and prosperity – where many nations of Europe are undertaking a revolutionary conversion of their education system to produce more engineers and to cope with their modern-day obligations, the most

deprived peoples (but also the richest as regards raw materials) would be ill-advised to simply make do with poetry, dance, music and metaphysics. Technology is, henceforth, as reiterates one of our historians, the essence of modern-day life. It embeds itself in our humanity because it is through it that human beings are destined to know other human beings and to love them. We must acknowledge with respect the moving enthusiasm of these philosophers who aspire to saving human beings from technology, but it would be dangerous to try to snatch technology from people, from their senses and from their reflection.

Moreover, the resources that surround the life of our peoples and that spark off all these appetites will rapidly awaken and clarify our technological vocation. Yet, there is no reason to believe that it will be a simple replication of Europe's vocation; it is all the more urgent to encourage our scientific work and initiatives given that the West exerts on our lives a sort of cultural and spiritual dictatorship that is of no benefit whatsoever to our moral health or to the West' own moral health.

Depending on the angle from which culture is perceived, it is an authority, the expression of subjectivity, a dialogue, the expression of universal values or an approach for conquering the world. It embraces all of this. But it is as authority that we are interested in it here. Cultural life in the world is uniformly dominated by the authority of the West. Work from Europe's past, canons that are specific to Europe, the influence of Europe's historical, cultural and spiritual experiences continue to guide the evolution of nations' life.

Bodies where judgement is passed, where laws are enacted are located in the West and are embedded, until now, exclusively in Western culture. Thus, this cultural authority is linked both to political power and technical power. In such a way that we could easily draw up a geophysical study of culture. We fully appreciate the support that political authority, with its sovereignty, has given to the development and prestige of a culture. We are also aware that only political authority can set free a culture's creative inspiration. Support from the technical power is also required. After political sovereignty, this power will be our most valuable conquest. We would like to reiterate that it can only be the work of the peoples themselves.

Cultural establishments throughout the world must be progressively decentralized and the voice of new culture must be heard in cultural and spiritual organizations where values are defined and where the reflection that is enjoyed by the greatest authority is disseminated. We are thinking, for example, of Christian life around the world. We have, of course, noticed that the Fathers of churches, doctors, saints are all integrated into the one-and-only Western culture. The recommendations and decisions made in Rome and spreading all over the Christian world are formulated through the inspiration of experiences, of resources of expression specific to Europe, and are more willingly clarified against a historic backdrop that is unique to Western culture.

Do our cultures and our aspirations suffer from such a situation?

People of culture of the black world, we have a myriad of exalting tasks. By assuming them with complete lucidity and with passion means we exercise our part of responsibility in managing the world – and prepare a cultural rebirth that addresses the painful and deep aspirations of peoples for peace.

And it means enriching resource for resisting dictatorship – this real malaise of peoples – which the West was almost not prepared to conquer, as it lived for exercising its dictatorship on the other peoples.

*Présence Africaine*