

The people here they always ask me questions about America

Our Unification Church Missionary in North Africa

October 1976

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Marabout the Muslim Holy Man

Whenever I talk with the people here they always ask me questions about America. By and large the people here are anti-American, but even so they hold her in a sort of awe and are always asking questions. Racism is one of the big ones. Naturally they think that it is much worse than it is, so I try to show them how it is not so bad in reality. But the other night I had to eat my words. I was telling them how racism was on the decline in America, especially with the youth. Only the very next day when I found a *US News and World Report* magazine at the embassy did I realize my mistake. There was an article about how in places like Chicago when blacks start moving into neighborhoods the whites all move out and there are riots and difficulties. There were pictures of young Americans demonstrating against the blacks. I felt really ashamed to have to tell that to the people here. When they accuse me and ask me, I have to sort of bow my head and say that unfortunately it is true.

It is also true that racism in the U.S. is nothing like it is here. Here, even between different tribes of people who look just about the same in color and features, there is still bitter rivalry and discrimination. But for that to still exist in a nation like America in which there is supposed to be such a strong guiding spirit of Christianity

is absurd. Even in the family sometimes I have seen it. Naturally it is not so bad, but still it is the acknowledgment of the fact that there is difference. Even in that way, though there may not be discrimination or any conflict still the situation is not genuine. It is stiff and artificial. I am not saying that any one side is to blame. In many cases the blacks are just as much to blame as the whites, but something has to be done and fast. There is no way we can even hope to accomplish real unity among people until the notion of "different" is erased. Not so much the fact that there are differences, because between races there are different characteristics, but not to judge those differences in the light of our own way. Instead, try to see the uniqueness and the beauty of each. Idealistic, sure, but nonetheless necessary.

There is a thing here, a custom intermingled with Islam, that I have failed to mention in the past. It stems from the ancient spiritual beliefs of the cultures before Islam was ever heard of. Now it has sort of mixed in to the Islam culture here. When you look at the people here you will see them all wearing little talismans. Usually they are little squares of leather that contain everything from pages of the Koran to horse hair, bat's parts, teeth, pieces of bones or other things. Their powers are many. Called Gridy-Grid,

they are supposed to be intensely spiritual.

They are given, or rather sold, by the Marabouts which are the Muslim holy men. They put their spell on them for various purposes-to protect one's life from evil, sickness, accidents, etc. Or the special ones to cure disease in much the same way voodoo causes evil, of if you are a soldier you can get them so that bullets won't hit you, knife blades won't penetrate, and there are even special ones to make you invisible to your enemies. The people believe intensely in them, and you will see almost everyone with several. They will wear them on their arms or they might have a belt with all sorts of them on. Naturally the Marabouts run a big enterprise, and get incredible amounts of money for them. The holy men here are also the biggest entrepreneurs. And the ones with the most power have the most money. But it is such a deep part of the lives of these people and of their security, that it will take a long time to get them to understand. They may sometimes feel ashamed of them around white people, but one comes to find out that the same guy who says they are worthless will secretly have them out of fear for what will happen to him if he doesn't carry them. I don't really know how much of an effect that they have, but one thing is sure, they affect the daily lives of people here in a profound way.

We are all healthy and happy. It is truly summer now. That means that it is nice and hot. It usually goes down to about 90 degrees at night so with a slight breeze it's not so bad. With summer come food shortages here. There is no meat, a few eggs and everything else is in short supply and getting more expensive all the time.

We were invited to the beach the other evening for dinner. I had never been to the beach here in the evening. It was sort of a cloudy night, so the darkness seemed to sort of close in around you. We were on the sand dunes that run along the beach, and were nestled down among them so we really didn't notice anything until it was completely dark. We then were finished with dinner and got up to walk down to the beach. When we got on top of the dune to look at the water we didn't see what we had expected. In the intense blackness of the night we saw the waves come in but they broke causing a blast of phosphorescent green light. At first one couldn't be sure if it wasn't just reflection, but there was no light to reflect. We ran down to the water only to be amazed by the intensity of the light in the dense darkness. The waves would come in and crash in a flurry of light. The beach was speckled with flecks of light that turned out to be a form of plankton. We went into the surf and were really enchanted. The plankton seem to light when they are rustled, like when the wave breaks and when there is anything in the water for them to hit. Standing in knee-deep water one's legs are alight with a swirl of light as they whirlpool around. Going in deeper it just gets more intense. In shoulder-deep and the wave sort of explodes over your head and you are in a bath of light. Coming out of the water they stick to you so for a few moments you look like a speckled form emerging out of the blackness of the deep.

We were all literally enchanted by the time there. I never cease to be amazed at the beauty and at the same time the efficient utility and cooperation one finds in God's creation. Plankton that light up, it seems to me, must be like a McDonald's in the middle of the night for some hungry fish. In any case it served to give us humans a very enjoyable and relaxing evening.