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COMMUNITY NOTES

READERS of the last *Chronicle* will certainly be wondering what has happened at Bede House since the spring. In Chapter at the end of June we made the decision definitely to leave, the property was put on the market in August, and in the following weeks a great many people came to have a look. We are hoping that a sale may be completed before the end of the year, but at the time of writing I am not able to say more than that. Sr Edna Monica, Sr Mary Kathleen and Fr John have kept the prayer life going throughout the summer and the work of clearing and cleaning has gone on steadily. The last public Mass in the Chapel was celebrated on Sunday, 2 November. Sr Mary Kathleen has now moved to a hermitage of the Community of the Servants of the Will of God at Crawley Down, where she continues to live as a solitary.

Sr Edna Monica is preparing to be received in the Russian Orthodox Church. She has, accordingly, asked to be released from her membership of this Community but Sister's intention is to remain faithful to her monastic and solitary vocation as it unfolds in a new context. We shall be sad indeed to lose her. Sr Edna Monica has been professed for nearly forty years and has served the Community in major responsibilities, as Company Secretary, Sister in Charge at Dudwell St Mary, Burwash, and as Prioress at Fairacres—but this is not an obituary! God grant that her life in SLG will prove a good foundation for the life of an Orthodox nun.

At Fairacres on 14 August, Sr Mary Augustine of the Sacred Heart died at the age of 93. She had joined the Community in 1954 and was a great person, big in every sense of the word, and impossible to sum up in a few words. Often our conversations since I have been Mother turned to the future of the Community, which she discussed with perspicacity and zest, and not a trace of anxiety. The key thing for those seeking to join the Community, she said, is that they have 'the Community spirit'—something she herself embodied, without losing a shred of her powerful and distinctive character. The papers she left behind—many boxes full of them—bear witness to her zeal as our librarian for many years, and to the

people and causes she remembered with unfailing interest and love and prayer. There are book reviews, newspaper cuttings on all sorts of subjects, treasured notes from long-dead Sisters (Sr Rachel, Sr Edith, Sr Jocelyn Mary), and flowers pressed by Sr Gertrude Mary. There were letters from ecumenical contacts, and from women whom she knew as novices, who subsequently left but whom she did not forget.

Someone who had confided in Sr Mary Augustine wrote her a note of thanks afterwards: 'Thank you—your Community—for loving me, for tender loving care, for listening, advice AND for prayer. Ora pro me—please.' Those few words bring Sister vividly to mind. In recent years Sr Mary Augustine came to think that those who had lived through World War II were made, through that experience, tougher and more able to go the extra mile than subsequent generations. Her own tenacity, which could be infuriating, held her through her difficult wait for death, long expected by her and long pondered. We rejoice at her homecoming, and that so many of her family were able to salute her, the last of her generation, at her funeral.

On All Saints' Day Sr Eve of the Promise of God made her Profession in Life Vows. She was given 'liberty to bind herself' to God in this particular way of life, and we gladly welcomed her into life-long fellowship with us. It is some years since we had a Profession in Life Vows and heard the long consecratory blessing of the Sister. What struck me, hearing it this time, were the breath-taking affirmations with which the prayer begins, and which form the basis of our trust and liberty:

> Almighty God, source of all holiness, we give you thanks and praise that in your great love you created all things and made us in your image. You destined us to be partakers of your divine nature and to be stewards of all creation. This loving purpose was not overcome by sin, nor has all the evil in the world power to destroy it.

Alongside that affirmation, as a commentary upon it and a glimpse of what trust and liberty in monastic life can be, here is an exuberant poem by Joe Zarantonello. It was introduced to me by Sr Eve earlier this year:

Pure joy
each moment
minus
your
opinion
of it.

Chapel was again full of visitors and many others were present in our hearts, including Sr Eve's family in USA. It was poignant to remember Sr Edna Monica as well, and Nicola Mason who made her Profession in First Vows in 1999. Sr Nicola was released from her vows, at her own request, at the beginning of September. Her life has been woven in with ours for nearly ten years and that fact will continue to colour our life as well as hers. Our prayers and our love are with her. The names of all who have ever made their Profession in SLG remain in the Profession book, and this is laid on the altar at each Profession ceremony.

Doggedly sticking to what we have promised, in faith and come what may, can be, and often is, our best expression of dependence on God alone. But the living God transcends the forms by which we seek to honour him. God knows the secrets of the heart, God knows what human beings are made of and what we are made for; God knows us better than we know ourselves and God's very faithfulness can require of us flexibility and willingness to start afresh.

It so happens that Sr Anna, who made her Profession under the protection of SLG in 1970, is a perfect example of someone who has been both dogged and flexible in following her vocation. It has been a lifelong pilgrimage and now, since the beginning of September, after more than thirty years praying and working for reconciliation in Belfast, she has returned to live at Fairacres. Sr Anna wears a black habit and visitors are more likely to mistake her for an Orthodox nun than for a member of the Community. But she does not fit neatly into any category and (before others reading this decide to apply!) her path is unique. We welcome her back to Fairacres and rejoice to have her sharing so fully in the prayer and rhythms of our life.

Within weeks of my becoming a postulant I remember Mother Mary Clare asking each of us to write her a sentence summing up what we understood by 'the great tradition'. I laboured over my sentence, which was all about life handed on between the Persons of the Trinity and laid down for others, and I was rather proud of it. I hoped Mother Mary Clare would like it; I wondered what other people had written and whether their understanding was as profound as mine! Today I would have to labour in a different way over that exercise, judged by it because I know more about what happens when it comes to that sort of handing over and letting go.

Christian writers about prayer in the great tradition speak with a single voice about dependence, in all simplicity, upon God alone. They point to a joy that loss and letting go can teach us, and which may indeed be our deepest insight into the life of God. We can find friends among the saints in all who speak of this from experience, and hence with authority. And we can draw strength from the roots that are ours within the Body of Christ. This is very much to the point as we say some goodbyes, as we find ourselves on new ground, and in a time of change and challenge in the Church as a whole.

On 5 August, at First Vespers of the Transfiguration, Debbie Davies received the habit as a Novice Oblate. Susan Mary Hudspith also became a Novice Oblate, on St Teresa's Day, on 15 October. Novice Oblate Dot made her First Promises on 3 September.

I have been asked to include in these Notes at least some mention of what Sr Edmée and I did in the summer to mark and celebrate her receiving her doctorate. By the kindness of friends and family we had a wonderful holiday in Italy. We stayed mostly in Tuscany, from whence we visited Camaldoli (where one of our Priest Associates is a monk in First Vows) and Assisi (on the day when Italy was without any electricity and, at last, it rained). Then we went north to stay with the Benedictine Community at the Abbey of Viboldone outside Milan; we had a few spectacular hours in Florence, and finally relaxed for a few days by Lago Maggiore. At every point we were refreshed by wonderful hospitality and beauty of

form, colour and light, enough to revive the driest of bones and make the whole experience as much pilgrimage as holiday.

Now, with November well on its way but the blaze and flicker of autumn still in the trees and competing with bonfires and fireworks, Advent is nearly upon us. 'Glory be to God for everything' , and may he so enlarge our hearts that we may be ready for the glory of his coming.

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Today the Virgin gives birth to Him who is above all being, and the earth offers a cave to Him whom no man can approach. Angels with shepherds give glory, and Magi journey with a star. For unto us is born a young Child, the pre-eternal God.

Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion* sung during Mattins for the Feast of Christmas.

ORTHODOX ICONS OF THE NATIVITY

PACHOMIOS PENKETT

TO THOSE of us familiar with western paintings of the Birth of Christ, Orthodox icons of the Nativity can present something of an enigma. Where, for example, is the stable? Why are Mary and Joseph separated from each other? How could both the shepherds and the Wise Men be present at the same time? Who are the women preparing to bathe the Christ Child? What are the words that trouble Joseph? The depiction of the Nativity in Orthodox iconography needs understanding in order to appreciate its significance.

Firstly, let us consider the setting. The icon, written in Novgorod during the fifteenth century, is a classic example of Orthodox iconography of the Nativity. From the earliest days Christians thought that the Nativity took place on a mountain. Daniel's words, 'Thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands' (2:45), read at Vespers for the Nativity of Christ, were interpreted in this sense. There is in fact, no mention of a stable in the gospels. Luke writes simply, 'She brought forth her firstborn Son; and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn' (2:7). In the early written tradition we find, instead of references to a stable, mention of a cave. Justin Martyr, the Christian Apologist, writes in his *Dialogue with Trypho,* 'Joseph settled himself in a cave near Bethlehem because he could not find any room in which to stay in the village'. The second-century writer of the *Protoevangelium of James,* an apocryphal infancy narrative, records, 'And he found a cave there and brought her into it'. Romanos the Melodist, in the sixth century, writes a kontakion that came to be used for Mattins of the Nativity, 'The earth offers a cave to Him whom no man can

approach'. And at Vespers for the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ we also hear the words, 'There was no room at the inn; but the cave proved a fair palace for the Queen'.

The cave itself, sometimes centrally positioned behind the Mother of God, is black, the colour of evil and of death. It was commonly believed that demons dwelt in dry places such as caves and in the desert and it is appropriate that Christ should be shown near to the mouth of such a cave, in the shadow of death. This area of blackness is found also on Orthodox icons of Christ's Descent into Hades. Words sung during Mattins for the Forefeast of the Nativity call to mind the hope of salvation made manifest at the coming of Christ: 'O Bethlehem, receive Christ: for, made flesh, He comes to dwell in thee**,** opening Eden to me'.[1] These are words that echo Isaiah's prophecy, 'O people walking in great darkness, behold a great light: ye that dwell in the region and shadow of death, a light shall shine upon you' (9:2), and emphasize the poignancy of the opening verses of the Gospel according to St John, 'In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it' (1:4-5).

Because a manger is mentioned in the New Testament, we have come to think that a stable is implied but there were many caves on the hillsides, in addition to fields (cf. Luke 2:8), around Bethlehem, where animals were herded during the night; and it was not unusual for feeding-troughs to be placed in these caves for livestock. The words sung at Compline for the Forefeast of the Nativity, 'Thou hast made Thy dwelling in the cave, using the manger as Thy throne' and, 'O happy manger! Receiving the Creator as a babe, it is made the throne of the cherubim', indicate the self-emptying of God in the Incarnation.

The mountain is not barren. In icons of the Nativity some foliage is to be seen and, as in our icon, the stump of a tree, recalling Isaiah's prophecy, 'There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a blossom shall come up from his root' (11:1).

[1] Irmos of Canticle One

The words, 'The desert flowered as a lily at Thy coming, O Lord'[2] remind us of the re-creation that took place at the birth of Christ.

In our icon of the Nativity, as in virtually all such icons from the earliest times, an ox and an ass are depicted, standing in the cave. Indeed, there are icons of the Nativity which include the two animals but neither Mary nor Joseph. The gospels of Matthew and Luke do not refer to the animals. For these references we have to turn to the Old Testament where we find the words, 'The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib,' (Isaiah 1:3) and, 'Thou shalt be known between the two living creatures' (Habakkuk 3:2). The Church Fathers also refer to the animals, for example, Ambrose in his commentary on Luke 2:7 and Prudentius in his *Cathemerinon,* a collection of lyrical poems or hymns. The words, 'Thou art wrapped in swaddling bands, O Saviour, and laid in a small cave and in a manger for dumb beasts' are sung during Compline for the Forefeast of the Nativity and may remind us of the presence of animals at the renewal of the whole of creation that took place at the Incarnation.

At the top of the icon a star, a three-rayed light, is shown. The words of the Wise Men, 'We have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him', are recorded by Matthew (2:2). According to the Old Testament the sight of a new star signified the coming of a god, a deified king, 'A star shall rise out of Jacob' (Numbers 24:17, read at Vespers for the Nativity). The division of the light into three rays indicates the participation of the Trinity in the Nativity, as Gabriel announced, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will take you under His shadow' (Luke 1:35). We are reminded of this participation by the words, 'A star guides the Magi to come and worship Him; and we sing: O Holy Trinity, save our souls'.[3]

Secondly, let us see who are depicted in this setting: Christ, together with His Mother, angels, shepherds and Wise Men are

[2] Canticle 3 of Mattins for the Forefeast of the Nativity.

[3] Tone 6 of the Third Royal Hour for Christmas Eve.

shown (although not always together) in iconography of the Nativity on fourth-century sarcophagi and fifth-century *ampullae* (flasks containing oil from lamps lit in holy places, which pilgrims carried home from the Holy Land), and all are shown in our fifteenth-century icon from Novgorod. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, wrapped in swaddling clothes prefiguring the grave clothes shown on icons of the Resurrection, lies in a manger. In appearance, the Infant Christ is not unlike the Mother of God as she is held by the risen and ascended Christ in icons of the Dormition (or Falling Asleep) of the Mother of God—the one icon signifying birth into earthly life, the other depicting birth into eternal life.

His Mother lies on a pallet, or travelling bed, immediately below the manger, a position that reminds us both of her human condition and her relationship with the divine. Some early depictions show the Virgin sitting next to the manger. From the sixth century she is shown lying down. From the tenth century Mary is sometimes shown bending over the manger, and Tone 6 of the Vespers for the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ includes the phrase, 'She, bending over Him like a handmaiden, worshipped Him'. Here, the Mother of God seems to be looking towards the three Wise Men. In other icons she looks with compassion at Joseph. At the top of the mountain are angels. Luke records, 'There was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!' (2:13-14).

On one side of the mountain is a shepherd, a representative of the ordinary Jewish people. Some icons, like ours, depict one shepherd, others depict more. 'They came with great haste and found Mary, and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger' (Luke 2:16). This shepherd holds his pipe, ready to join with the angels (from whom he is receiving a blessing) in giving glory to God for the birth of the Good Shepherd. 'Ye shepherds, make haste to cry aloud with the angels to Him who is born in a cave and in a manger: Glory to Thee.'[4]

[4] Exapostilarion of Mattins for the Forefeast of the Nativity.

On the other side of the mountain are the three Wise Men**,** 'the first-fruits of the Gentiles'. (Canticle Three of Mattins for the Nativity). Sometimes the Wise Men are shown riding horses. The words of Psalm 72:10-11, 'The kings of Tharsis, and the isles, shall bring presents: the kings of Arabia and Saba shall offer gifts. All kings shall worship Him; all the Gentiles shall serve Him', have been interpreted as a prophecy of the coming of the three Wise Men. These men are of different ages: one, with a grey beard, is old**,** the second middle-aged, whilst the third, who is beardless, is young, a reminder that God makes His revelations to people irrespective of age or experience. Matthew records, 'Wise Men from the East came to Jerusalem' (2: 1).

Where do they come from? When in Genesis 25:6 we read that, 'Abraham sent … [the sons of his concubines] ... eastward into the east country', it is clear that a place outside Israel is intended. Certainly in Orthodox iconography the Wise Men are wearing Persian dress and this is mirrored in words from Vespers for the Forefeast of the Nativity: 'The pure Virgin spoke in wonder, as she heard the Magi standing together before the cave, and she said to them: 'Whom do you seek? For I see that ye have come from a far country. Ye have the appearance, but not the thoughts, of Persians; strange has your journey been, and strange your arrival. Ye have come with zeal to worship Him who, journeying as a stranger from on high, has strangely, in ways known to Himself, come to dwell in me, granting the world great mercy.' The Gospel according to St Matthew does not mention how many Wise Men travelled to see the Infant Christ but we may infer from the gifts that there were three: 'The star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh' (2:9-11). Words we hear during Compline for the Nativity reveal the meaning of such gifts. 'By myrrh they point to Thy death, by gold to Thy royal power, by frankincense to

the pre-eminence of Thy divinity.' Already there is a prefiguring of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

In Orthodox iconography of the Nativity the presence of both shepherds and Wise Men recalls Isaiah's words, 'Peace upon peace to them that are far off, and to them that are nigh' (57:19). 'Thou wast born secretly in the cave, but heaven spoke through a star and proclaimed Thee to all, O Saviour' (Troparion, Vespers for The Nativity).

Later, two further scenes were added to Orthodox iconography of the Nativity: two women washing, or preparing to wash, the Child and Joseph being taunted by the devil.

The apocryphal *Protoevangelium of James,* dating from the second half of the second century, and the *Gospel of pseudo-Matthew,* dating from the eighth or ninth century, report that Joseph brought two midwives, Zelomi and Salomi, to Mary. The *Protoevangelium* describes Joseph's search 'for a Hebrew midwife in the region of Bethlehem' (18:1**).** The midwife returned with Joseph to the cave and saw a bright cloud overshadowing the cave. The midwife said, 'My soul is magnified today, for my eyes have seen wonderful things; for salvation is born to Israel' (19:2). The *Gospel of pseudo-Matthew* records that on the third day after the Nativity, Joseph took Mary and Christ to a stable (13:1-2). In the washing of the Infant Jesus we may perceive an anticipation of the Epiphany.

Joseph, 'wounded by sorrow' (the Ninth Royal Hour of Christmas Eve), is separated from his betrothed and is depicted in a lower corner, sitting on a rock and listening to the taunts of the devil in the guise of the shepherd Thyrsos, an old and hunchbacked man. Matthew records that an angel told Joseph, 'That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit' (1:20). The devil troubles Joseph by telling him that virgin birth is not possible. 'How shalt thou bring forth child, Calf upon whom the yoke has never come?'(The Sixth Royal Hour for Christmas Eve).

Third and finally, what is the significance of what is depicted on Orthodox icons of the Nativity? The structure is threefold. At the lowest level, we see everyday actions. The midwives are washing,

or preparing to wash, a baby. A man is being tempted by the devil. Human activities, yes, but Jesus too, fully human as a vulnerable new-born baby, is also depicted on this level. On this level too are the shepherds and the Wise men, but they are depicted ascending towards the divine and are therefore shown climbing the mountain.
On the second and intermediary level we find Mary, the Mother of God, separated from other people, in a position of central importance, emphasized by the size of her body and by the striking red colour of the bed on which she lies, dominating the scene but subordinate to her Son.

On the highest and divine level we find God the Father and the heavenly host. On our fifteenth-century Novgorod icon two of the angels, their hands covered, look upwards towards God, the source of life and light, whilst the third looks downwards towards the shepherd to whom he is bringing good tidings.

Just as God descends to us as a little baby at Christmas, so we, childlike, are invited to ascend to Him. 'Heaven and earth are united today, for Christ is born. Today, has God come upon earth, and man gone up to heaven' (Great Compline for the Nativity).

A Talk given at All Hallows' Church, London, December, 2002

MEETING THE CHURCHES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

A Talk given in June 2003 at Fairacres

MICHAEL SCOTT-JOYNT

IT IS a great pleasure for me to be here, and to talk to you about my visit to the Congo last year; and in doing so I hope to provide some context for things you and I are reading about in the newspapers day by day, and to introduce some faces of Christians of our own tradition, (and clearly there are many more Christians of other

traditions there who are also in the thick of what is happening in Bunia and Ituri) whom I was privileged to meet and talk with.

If you look at a map of Africa as a whole you can see the huge area which was Zaire and is today the Democratic Republic of Congo. There is a thin channel where the Congo River runs into the South Atlantic, and then this enormous area, about twelve hundred miles across from east to west and about the same from north to south. This vast region is bordered by nine or ten countries, so it is at the heart of a great swathe of central Africa. Round the bottom right hand corner you have Zambia, then Tanzania, then Burundi and Rwanda, then Uganda. The border at the north starts with the Central African Republic and continues with Sudan.

In the last twenty or thirty years of the nineteenth century, this vast area was a kind of fiefdom of King Leopold of the Belgians. His rule was one of the most appalling cruelty and exploitation, which is the background to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and has been chronicled in a terrifying and good book, *King Leopold's Ghost,* by Adam Hochschild. After Leopold, it became a Belgian colony and it was hardly any better governed. There was a French Congo on the west side of the river, and there were German and British as well as Belgian colonies to the east and in Rwanda and Burundi. The Belgians granted independence to the Congo in 1959-60, at a point when there were exactly nineteen graduates in the country. Disaster struck almost immediately. When I opened a short debate on the issue in the House of Lords on 3 April, an old lady who is a life peer described how she had been the British Chargé d'Affaires in French and Belgian Congo when, three days after independence, a group of the brand new ministers came to see her at night and said they would really like to join the Commonwealth. She told them that as they had just become independent, it would be impossible for them to join the Commonwealth. So, that was one of those might-have-beens of history. Very soon terrible things began to happpen. Patrice Lumumba, the elected President, was killed, if not by the CIA almost certainly with CIA collusion. Mobutu came to power, surviving into the early nineties with strong backing from the West.

His sumptuous lifestyle in various countries was supported in much the same way as the West was supporting Saddam Hussein through much of the same period. In the early nineties he lost that support and finally lost control of a country which had already deteriorated to the point of absolute ruin, its infrastructure—such as it was—destroyed, vast quantities of its wealth removed, Mobutu, with gangsters like himself, ravaging every region of the country.

That situation was already breaking up when the Rwandan genocide came in 1994. The ethnic groups, as everywhere else in Africa, criss-cross the national borders. These borders are a contemporary reality but they have been imposed on Africa by European powers. So on both sides of that border with what was once a single colony, Rwanda-Burundi, there were people of different ethnic groups, Hutu and Tutsi, and a number of others. After the genocide of the Tutsi by the Hutu majority, survivors fled in every possible direction. You may remember that very large numbers including many of the Hutu themselves escaped over the border into Goma, which is only two kilometres from the Rwanda border along the top of Lake Kivu. That was the beginning of a new kind of chaos in the Congo. The refugees escaped mainly into the hills and made common cause with a range of dispossessed groups. There were Rwandan and Ugandan incursions into Congo and then in 1997 came the rebellion by Laurent Kabila, who ousted Mobutu and eventually took over the country, right up to Kinshasa, bringing mayhem as he went. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed, running for refuge into the bush. Rwandans, Ugandans and Congolese rebel groups ended up fighting each other. Kabila was assassinated in 2001 and his son Joseph, who is now president in Kinshasa, took his place.

At that point, there were seven or eight foreign armies fighting in Congo, because Kabila *père* and *fils* both drew in Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia on their own side, and against them were Rwanda and Uganda, Burundi and various client groups; so the reality is that for the past five or six years all up the eastern side of Congo there have been a whole series of competing, warring factions. At present, roughly speaking, the Kinshasa government

controls—nominally—about two-fifths in the south west, and the rest is controlled by, well, perhaps five, six or even eight or fifteen mutually competing gangster warlords. And what they are all doing is what King Leopold and all who followed him have always done—extracting and pillaging the resources of the Congo and terrorising its people. The chief pillager at present, in the area controlled by the Kinshasa government, is Zimbabwe. Vast quantities of cobalt, timber, gold, diamonds and other precious substances are going out into Zimbabwe, and equally vast resources are going out through Rwandan and Ugandan individuals and groups, in each case I'm sorry to say, very close to the government. The result up and down the eastern Congo, a distance of about fourteen hundred miles north-south and three or four hundred miles east-west, is a situation of terror and anarchy. There is simply no order, and hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people are living out of their homes, amid every kind of horror. There were numerous fighting fronts operating up to the end of last year, and since then it has got a whole lot worse. Figures vary, but somewhere between three and a half and four and a half million people have been killed up and down the east side of the Congo in the last ten years, and for everybody at some time and for some people all the time it's a very frightening place.

The diocese of Winchester has been involved with central Africa since the late seventies, when Bishop John Taylor, who served for many years as a CMS missionary in Uganda, and was the author of some remarkable prophetic works of theology, led the diocese into a relationship with much of Uganda, and the rest of what was then a single province of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire (as it then was). That relationship continues and it is the reason I was asked some years ago if I would be a patron of the Congo Church Association. Last year I was invited by the then Archbishop of the Province to go to the Congo and give a Retreat for the bishops before they elected a new Archbishop; and at the same time to make what visits could be made, given the state of the country. This former Archbishop is still the Bishop of Boga, which is the place where Apolo Kivebulaya, one of the first generation of Ugandan Anglican

clergy, came and settled in 1903. From Boga there has grown up an Anglican Church which now has six dioceses right across the eastern half of Congo.

When Archbishop Njojo (as he then was) came to the Primates' meeting in England, last April, he was already a refugee from his diocese and was based in Fort Portal in Uganda. I said that I would go if I could take with me somebody who spoke the languages, because I speak no Swahili, and my spoken French is not very good. I went with Jeremy Pemberton, a priest in the diocese of Ely, who once was Principal of the Seminary at Bunia where there is now all the trouble between the Hema and Lendu tribes, and where the retreat should have been held. Even a year ago that was out of the question. With continual fighting going on, there were places where it would have been impossible for us to go, for instance diocesan centres such as Kisangani, or Kindu—they were unsafe for native bishops, let alone Europeans. After complicated discussions it was agreed that we should go first of all to the south, and right in the bottom corner is a place called Lubumbashi, which is part of the huge province of Katanga, and technically in the area controlled by the Kinshasa government. You will remember that in the sixties there were secessionist wars in Katanga; it was in that area that Lumumba was killed and it was there that Hammersjöld's aircraft crashed. We were then eager to get to Bukavu, which is on the river at the bottom of Lake Kivu, but between them is a war zone. So to get into Lubumbashi we had to go right up through Zambia to come out again that way to Nairobi, to Kampala in Uganda and then to come in from the north, avoiding the war zone. Eventually we flew in across Uganda and a series of places down the east side of the country to Bukavu. And then we came back again over to Kampala for the retreat, and then in again to a place called Aru in the north-east of the Congo, which is still part of Bishop Njojo's diocese, where he had not been for three years.

Before I go on, I want to say that what was most deeply moving for me about this whole visit was the privilege of getting to know the people. Before 1997 there would have been Mobutu's young men beating you up, carrying you off, stopping you using Christian

or European names or whatever it may be. Today, the upside of a complete absence of order—which is terrifying for everybody—is that people are entirely free to talk to you, because nobody's going to inform on them, there's no police, no justice system. There really is nothing. As the Archbishop said to me a year ago, if anyone makes up the roads it's the Christians. So everywhere we went people talked to us and because Jeremy was able to translate I think we had a very good idea of what they were telling us. And what they were telling us were endless terrible stories. I had a very strong sense that the Christian people, who are in the midst of it as much as any one else—the vast majority, who are Roman Catholics, the Anglicans, the Baptists and other groups—are working with remarkable courage in a situation where, particularly in the villages, almost everyone is in danger some of the time. In a place where there is no civil order, where there are innumerable armies, constantly shifting alliances between rival groups; where there is a constant over-plus of weapons in the hands of boys as well as young men, nobody has any rations, no locks will keep anybody out, then people are in constant danger. Women in particular. I have heard both there and in this country, from Congolese women working in the care of women, horrifying accounts of mutilations, as well as rape as a weapon of war; children are being carried off, boys for soldiers, girls for sex, crops are being burnt, people's possessions looted, the medical centres are being trashed. Everything is being trashed, except, surprisingly, the mobile phone masts. When I was in Uganda and Rwanda five years ago, there was no telephone system and communication was extremely difficult. Now the mobile phone has come to central Africa, so the land line will not now come. As we drove across the border, out of Lubumbashi, Bishop Isingoma got out and used his mobile to tell his wife that we had got safely past the gangsters at the border. I asked him why the phone masts had not been trashed, and was told that since every bandit uses them, it's in nobody's interest to destroy them!

One of the most striking things about travelling in Africa is the extraordinary welcome that greets you wherever you go. Picture a place where there are three groups waiting. At the front, in this

church in the diocese of Katanga, are the Boys' Brigade, (which includes girls as well). And it's through them that the Church in the Congo is working devotedly in the training and formation of young people. For forty or fifty years the only way for so many young people to get on has been either to be dishonest, or have a gun, or join the corrupt government service, or, if you were a woman, to be a prostitute. I was deeply impressed by the courageous struggles of the Church, through the Boys' Brigade and the Scouts, to hold and form young people in the Christian faith.

The second group which (as everywhere across Africa) is of incalculable value to this country is the Mothers' Union. Across this diocese, the MU (and it's good that the logo should stand for Union des Mères as well) does extraordinarily brave work, particularly with women and girls, who have been widowed or raped or rescued from the streets, while many of its own members are suffering or at risk just as much as those they are seeking to help. So in this church there was a third group, a choir of young girls whose babies the Mothers' Union were looking after. Almost all had been raped or were prostitutes, and the MU were taking them into their houses, teaching them a trade, looking after their children, seeking to educate them in the support of family life, in making the best of next to no cooking resources, in how to read the Scriptures—remarkable work of all kinds was going on.

But because of course we went to moderately peaceful areas and most people put on their best clothes to meet us I simply can't convey to you the horror that surrounds these people in both towns and villages, where life is poor and dangerous. Nevertheless, among Christians there are significant ecumenical relationships. There is a lot of mutual sharing and support in medical work, when even what the churches can offer in the way of medicine and treatment is minimal and constantly exposed to theft and destruction. And it's not just a truism to say that everywhere it is women who sustain society. As the wife of a young Malawian priest once said to me, 'In this country the men talk and the women work'. The vast bulk of the labour—tilling the fields, carrying the water, cooking, bringing up children, struggling to hold the family together—is in the hands of

women. And at a time of huge upheaval and insecurity it is also the women who are at greatest risk. I was constantly moved by the determination of the women we met, and by their readiness to come forward in our church meetings when, after worshipping together, we sat and talked. On such journeys I usually have a little collection of family pictures with me, because you can sometimes communicate by means of these even when you have no language in common. Just after a splendid lunch of red beans and rice cooked on an open fire in the bishop's compound—by the women of course, with no hand taken by the men at all—I remembered that among these pictures was one of our two thirty-plus sons, washing up in our kitchen at home, and when I showed it to the women—partly out of mischief of course—that went down like anything, and they waved the picture under the noses of their sons and husbands to make sure it was understood how men could behave!

One of the things that makes the strongest impression in the parts of Africa I have visited is the huge will to educate children, and the huge struggle to find any money to do so; and the extraordinary devotion of school teachers, most of whom are rarely if ever paid. In Congo at present, probably half the population are not sleeping in their houses at night, they are out in the bush, and if you are out in the bush, not only are your house and your few possessions—your hoe, your machete your clothes, the tin on your roof if you have any—more vulnerable than if you were there, but you yourself are much more vulnerable to mosquitoes, to illness, to injuries of all kinds. And if you are in the bush, you probably can't work your fields, it is probably not safe to walk that five miles to the larger village to sell that little bit of what you do grow and make that bit of money which may enable you to send your children to school, and have a little over for medicines or whatever. The result is of course that the first to miss out on going to school are the girls and young women. In the past twenty years or so girls' education had been rising. Now it has plummeted and that is a bad outlook for the future. In one such school we visited in a poor village where the head teacher is also the catechist there were very few girls indeed. It was always a wonder to me that even in the most wretched places

we went to the Mums always manage to produce white shirts for their children and clean clothes for themselves and sing us their wonderful songs, as well as doing the lion's share of the work.

In one little place in the hills, we found the church full of people. If an African bishop is going anywhere—and the Bishop of Bukavu is now also the Archbishop—and there is transport, lots of people pile in because in that way the person who does education, the person who does children and the Mothers' Union all get a sight of places they would never otherwise go to. So after bumping perilously up and down we ran out of petrol and walked the rest of the way. When we eventually went into the church, the drums—about half the size of a person and producing a marvellous sound when beaten—stopped beating, and everything went quiet. Then the vicar said something which made everyone laugh, especially Jeremy, who explained to me that he had said to the people, 'Don't worry, we're not wearing robes because it's only a short service'. I found that a lovely commentary on the current argument in the Church of England about wearing robes—the Anglican Communion alive and kicking amidst huge difficulty in the Eastern Congo, and the vicar believes very properly that he and his bishop should be properly dressed for worship, but not that day because it wasn't possible.

I heard just after Easter from the Bishop of Bukavu that the village had been again overrun by bandits; the people were safe, but in the bush. The Archdeacon who had been travelling with his Bishop when this happened, has been trying to get to the village about thirty-five miles from Bukavu on his bicycle, just to see the people periodically, because it is not safe for him to sleep there. This village was safe during the day, but tormented by bandits at night, and, as everywhere, the churches were bravely holding out against immense odds. In Bukavu you look down across the river to Rwanda, at a most beautiful view, while Bukavu itself has since Easter been overrun by gangsters; and people told me that the first thing they knew about the genocide in Rwanda was when the bodies started coming down the river. Again and again you realise what these people have been through and that virtually everyone has not

only heard of, but witnessed, the most terrible things, and it's in that context that the courage of the churches, not only in keeping going but in making great efforts for peace, is so remarkable. While we were there the Bishop gathered together the little group of church leaders in Bukavu to brief Jeremy and me in person about the peacemaking the churches are actively engaged in under their leadership. There were a couple of Roman Catholic monsignors, a couple of Protestants, and also a Kimbangwist. The independent Kimbangwist Church looks back to Simon Kimbangwe, a Roman Catholic evangelist in the nineteen twenties whom they revere as a prophet, but who was regarded by the Church as something of a rebel and got thrown out. The Belgian authorities also mistrusted him as a revolutionary because his people used to sing 'Onward Christian Soldiers', which he had learned from the Anglicans, and so he was imprisoned for a time. Now the Roman Catholics and the Kimbangwists are working together for peace and reconciliation. It was very impressive to listen to this group of brave men who had been going out in twos and threes in pick-up trucks to meet bandit leaders in the countryside to try to persuade them to stop, to give the town a break, and also writing very good statements to the people in power in the area (RCD Goma) about what would make for real pacification. One of these monsignors, enjoying a flight of fancy, said wouldn't it be marvellous if in another twenty years' time when all this was over, these places would become tourist resorts as they once had been. That was a bizarre idea but at the same time very courageous, even to think of such a thing

In January last year in Goma, the volcano which overhangs the town erupted terribly. Two great swathes of volcanic material, about forty yards wide and eight to ten feet deep, came pouring through the town about fifty yards apart. It happened just after dark and must have been unbelievably terrifying. Goma is very close to the Ugandan and Rwandan borders, it has gold and diamond reserves, forest reserves and all kinds of minerals and it's also close to where the spheres of influence of the two countries meet. Now bands of marauding forces are criss-crossing to and fro and it is a very unsafe place. When I got home on Good Friday this year, I found a

message for me from the parish priest in Goma, sending me, in French, greetings for the Easter season, and going on: 'May the body and blood of Christ protect and direct your ministry.' That was his Easter message to me. We had been to this church and were welcomed by a Scout guard of honour, boys and girls, with their arms in the air as if at a wedding. The church has been doing so much with young people, using them to re-unite families and go out in the hills with the clergy. All that evening and early the following morning we sat in the classroom—forty people crushed into the desks with one electric light bulb—and they simply talked to us about all that had happened—in the time of the refugee camps, when the volcano erupted and ever since. In the run-down provincial guest house where we slept for a few hours, we could see where the volcanic lava had stopped, at the end of a passage with broken flooring, where instead of the door, which had been burnt down there was a bulbous mass of lava. Next morning in the church we heard a tremendous sermon on Ephesians 6: 'Put on the whole armour of God', and the priest was expounding the passage in direct relation to the people and their existence: Here is the church, here are we, here are the resources to live as Christians in this place; both at the level of day to day living, and in collaborating with other Christians for the re-building of the country. This was immensely striking for me and was foremost in my thoughts when I had to read the passage at Windsor yesterday on Garter Day—the same call to Christian discipleship, the same promise of God's equipping, in two such utterly diverse settings.

Afterwards we were taken round Goma and saw the sheer awfulness of the results of the volcano. Everything covered in ash, the Roman Catholic cathedral an absolute ruin with volcanic dust about fourteen feet high through its bottom floor.

I was taken next to Uganda, where the bishops' retreat was to be held. I had material with me, but no idea what form the retreat was supposed to take, nor apparently had the bishop, or even the Archbishop. Eventually we decided there should be three Bible studies on each of the two days and a sermon on All Saints' Day; and that everything should be in French so that at least we could all use

the same Bible. Poor Jeremy had to translate six addresses and a sermon, unseen, in two days, and got a headache doing so—no wonder.

Two very long-serving CMS women are still working in the Congo: one who has responsibility all over the province for training leaders for youth work, and the other working with children and preparing teaching materials. I saw, too, her work for adult literacy (*alphabétisation,* a lovely French word, new to me). Huge efforts are being made to help people to read so that they can get to know the Bible, and also get enough education to enable them to stand up to propaganda. And there are equally great efforts by just a few people to train clergy and catechists. One of these is Isaac, the only Congolese we met who had sufficient English to translate me. And this lack of English means that Anglicans who are francophone can feel very marginal and isolated in the Congo. Isaac is running singlehanded an ordinand and catechist training school for about thirty men, almost all of them considerably older than himself. He was wonderful and so were they, and the hour we spent talking to these men, who have really no books apart from the Bible, was very exciting.

If you've been in Africa you'll recognise the kind of experience we had in Aru. The bishop hadn't been there for three years and the whole Church, hundreds and hundreds of people turned out, and some must have been organising frantically, because the children were at the front, and gradually they got bigger, and then you met the Mothers' Union, and then you met the clergy—all of whom had come to see the bishop, and the noise as we went in was astounding. There were three archdeacons there; one of them had cycled more than a hundred kilometres to come and see his bishop. It was very moving to talk to such men. Jeremy and I then sat for two and a half hours as the Archbishop talked with the clergy and they with him and with us. A vicar here will have perhaps ten or fifteen churches, each of them between three and six miles apart, with hopefully a catechist in each one; he will have his feet, possibly a bicycle, for getting around and sustaining church life. But this is a context in which the Churches are thriving and growing, partly because there

is just that much structure and organisation; and they do read the scriptures in order, and they do celebrate the sacraments, whatever the obstacles. And it's characters like these archdeacons who hold the churches together, as they would have done in the eighteenth century in England, when my predecessor would have been at court, or in Bath or somewhere—it would have been the archdeacons and the clergy and the churchwardens who would have held the diocese of Winchester together. The missionary compound, where we slept was the only place, during the three weeks of our visit, where neither Jeremy nor I were at all sure we were safe but clergy still kept coming to talk to us at night, telling us about the dangers facing their people

The present situation in Ituri is one that has long been coming. There is no doubt that the traditional hostility between the Hema and the Lendu has been exacerbated by Ugandan and Rwandan elements who have armed group after group, and the position now all across the northern region is really quite appalling; and I know from the information I receive regularly from people working in the Congo that things are much more terrible now than the press are able to describe.

One of the causes is that arms are flowing in, partly from the huge reserves in eastern Europe; arms enter through Libya and move down into Central Africa; arms come from Rwanda and Uganda, and they may well have come originally from this country. Then again, in spite of the wonderful fertility of the Congo, there is dreadful hunger in large parts of it, there is a great deal of disease, and little rural medical centres serving areas of perhaps fifty square miles are destroyed and looted time after time. Two or three medical missionaries who have worked for years to train nurses and orderlies and provide them with the most basic equipment, are now trying to bring back some of these people who have fled into the bush, and to restore at least some elements of health care, because without them, cholera and malaria spread unchecked, and there is no pre-natal service at all over great tracts of the country

Both before and since my visit I have been working with MPs to get our government to act on the UN Special Report which

catalogues the criminal activities of Zimbabweans, Rwandans, Ugandans and all these proxy groups across the eastern Congo, and to seek an increase in the mandate of the UN force there. People are only now beginning to grasp that with its current feeble mandate, the UN force is entirely unable to protect the people. What does a French Légionnaire do, faced with a fourteen year-old, drugged, with a gun? In the run-up to the Iraq crisis aid agencies were telling us that funds were being increasingly withdrawn from Africa, so as to be prepared for Iraq. The difference with this crisis, I think, is that the UK is the major provider of aid of every sort to Uganda and Rwanda, and so there is a substantial kind of engine power in our persuasive relationship which, to give it credit, the Government is trying to act upon, even if only gingerly.

About a week before the war with Iraq broke out the new Archbishop of Congo went with Jeremy Pemberton to the Foreign Office to brief them at first hand. He said to the senior official who saw them, 'I can't understand why when you've got one war like this in Central Africa you want to start another'. The reply is not recorded, but in early March we had in our house within five days, Archbishop Njojo of the Congo, Archbishop Ndayisenga of Burundi and the longest serving of the Rwandan bishops; and these are people who know what the effects of war are upon the countries caught up in them for many decades afterwards. They will not be in the least surprised at the things that are happening in Iraq now and which will continue. Because disorder and breakdown and the experience of entirely inadequate response from anywhere else is what they have known themselves for nearly fifty years.

In the midst of all this, in the places where I have been and have told you a bit about, please continue to remember the Churches and to pray for all the people who are seeking to live as Christians under such daunting conditions.

The Right Revd Michael Scott-Joynt is Bishop of Winchester

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF ECUMENICAL ACTIVITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

H.E. DR PAUL YAZIGI

Introduction

IT IS AN HONOUR for me to address such an assembly and I shall try to present a brief account of current ecumenical activity in the Middle East under the following headings.

1) the necessity laid on the shoulders of the different Christian communities to work together for the unity of Christians;

2) current ecumenical activity within the See of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, highlighting some of its aspects;

3) some difficulties hindering the dialogue between the different Christian communities;

4) some requirements for dialogue and a vision for the future.

1. *The Necessity of the Work for the Unity of Christians*

It will be good, to develop our presentation, by starting with the Bible. In fact, ecumenical activity stems from the word which Christ addressed to His disciples, that they should all be one (John 17:21).

It is a word that Christ gave in testimony to His disciples when he was about to go to His passion (John 17:14). It is a word that Christ characterises to be the 'truth' (John 17:18). Being Himself the Truth, He revealed it to the world as being the true and complete revelation of His love. Being also the Way, He revealed His life as love poured out in abundance. It is the love that gathers Him to the Father and that was the subject of His prayer to Him in order that this love might be poured into the hearts of His disciples and that it might be the norm and, even more, the very life-breath of their soul.

Within this biblical framework, the unity to which all Christians aspire cannot but be, mainly, the fruit of repentance, that is, a way towards fulfilment in truth and love in Christ. The attempt to perfect this repentance is an undeniable sign of our union in the Body of Christ. It is then that ecclesial unity is shown in its most ontological expression.

Commanded by Christ, not only through the Scriptures, but also through His prayer, a prayer that continues to be fulfilled throughout the history of salvation, the work towards the unity of Christians within the ecumenical sphere becomes, on the one hand a witness, and, on the other hand, a realization of Christ's will for His Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Consequently, working for the unity of Christians is a necessity that is laid on the shoulders of Christ's disciples in the modern world.

The realization of this Christian witness becomes more urgent within the multi-confessional composition of the Middle East. In fact, the current situation is characterised, at the pastoral level, by many interactions, for example, the marriages that take place between members of different Christian communities.

On the other hand, these same communities are now facing different problems as a consequence of the current economic and financial situation in our countries. This explains to some extent the insecurity felt by the young. Indeed, the emigration of young people, seeking social security, work and a promising future, constitutes one of the crucial problems for all the Christian communities.

It is clear that a collective witness and a common agreement between the different Christian communities, at all levels, is not only a necessity but also an absolute priority to enable them to face all the problems, mainly because these communities are integrated in an Arab context, with a Moslem majority.

Further, within the globalisation that is affecting all nations these communities are motivated to make a response and present an example which reveals the authentic Christian message, and not merely a Christianity subject to capitalism and secularisation.

2. *The Current Ecumenical Situation in the Middle East*

Aware of the responsibility of bearing a true Christian witness in the Arab world, we will try to give a clear idea of this witness by presenting some of the most significant examples of ecumenical activity now in progress in the See of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. The examples we have chosen will reflect the degree of collaboration and co-ordination between the different Christian communities at three different levels:

i) that of the ecclesial Hierarchy; ii) that of the Faculties of Theolog; iii) that of Aleppo, a city which is more or less unique in regard to ecumenical activity.

i) First, we would like to emphasize the consultative role played by the Assembly of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon (APECL, created in 1967). In fact, it became the custom for this Assembly to invite to the closing session of its synodal work, the Primates of those communities which had not participated in the Assembly. Moreover, this Assembly would invite our Holy Synod to take part in this last session of their synodal work whenever the political and social situation demanded it, notably during the dramatic evolution of events during the war in Lebanon. On the other hand, such consultations used to take place regarding the major events of the Arab world. The presence of our Patriarchate within this witness was appreciated at all levels.

ii) Secondly, we would like to speak about the role of collaboration and co-ordination played by ATIME—Association of the Theological Institutes in the Middle East (created in 1967)—of which all the Faculties of Theology belonging to different Christian denominations (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant) in Lebanon are members. This Association promotes collaboration and co-ordination between all the Faculties of Theology. Its presence constitutes a major link between the students of theology. The common activities in which students engage all through the academic year is a particular witness at the level of ecumenical activity.

iii) Thirdly, we would like to speak about certain aspects of ecumenical activity in the second city of Syria, namely Aleppo, from which I come. In fact, the city of Aleppo forms a mosaic of Christian communities, i.e. Orthodox (including Greek, Armenian and Syriac denominations), Catholic (including Greek, Armenian, Syriac, Maronite, Chaldean and Latin denominations), and Protestant (including Armenian and Arab denominations). Eleven different Christian communities have an organised church structure in Aleppo, and many of them have some health and educational institutions. Even though the city has a strong Islamic character, a

spirit of neighbourliness and conviviality exists between the Christian and Islamic communities. Fraternity, cordiality, mutual respect and co-operation characterize the current situation in Aleppo.

At the same time, at the level of Christian inter-communal relationships, a council has been created in order to discuss different pastoral problems, to take common decisions concerning social issues, and to handle urgent situations. This council is known by the name of 'The Council of the Christian Communities in Aleppo'. The presence of such a council helps to defend the interests of the different communities. It constitutes an appreciable witness before the Moslem community. It has its own secretariat and some minor publications.

On an internal level, ecumenical relationships can be observed in the following areas:

a) the celebration of the World Week of Prayer for the Unity of Christians, and, in this connection, Aleppo has the honour of being chosen to compose the prayers for Unity Week 2004;

b) the pastoral agreement regarding mixed marriage;

c) and last, but not least, common pastoral worries, mainly about the emigration of young people; the embodiment of Christians in their Arab environment; common activities between the youth of different communities; exchange of educational and catechetical programs.

Furthermore, in a multi-confessional environment such as Aleppo, fixing a date for the joint celebration of Easter is a matter of great concern to all the Christian communities. As a matter of fact, permission has been granted by the Vatican to the Catholics resident in the Middle East to celebrate Easter according to the Julian calendar instead of the Gregorian one. Some consultations took place and resulted in a positive response, which the resident Catholics in the Middle East expressed as a promise at Damascus, during the pontifical visit to Syria, in May 2001. Unfortunately, some parties could not keep their promise, a fact that caused general

disappointment. Nevertheless, all the Christians hope that their expectations will be fulfilled before long.

Moreover, regarding external ecumenical relationships, we would like to underline the involvement of many of the bishops and leaders of communities in various international ecumenical councils and associations, and their participation in different international conferences and dialogues. Some of these major councils are:

a) The World Council of Churches, which has organised many meetings in Aleppo, mainly concerning an agreed date for the celebration of Easter, known as the Aleppo Conference.

b) The Middle East Council of Churches, which has opened an office in Aleppo to take care of Christian education and organize ecumenical activities concerning the family, youth, and women.

c) The Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the Unity of Christians, which follows the ecumenical activities in Aleppo, and has sent many delegations with the aim of promoting dialogue and pushing forward the process of unity.

Visits paid by the Primates and Patriarchs of the different Christian communities to Aleppo, are always an occasion for manifesting active ecumenism. In this perspective, we would like to mention some events since October 2001, in which our Archdiocese was directly involved: the visits respectively of Cardinals Duprey, Cassidy and Kasper of Vatican City, as well as of Bishop Tsipert of the Protestant Church in Germany. Moreover, our Archdiocese has organised two public conferences concerning the visit of Pope John-Paul II to Syria and that of Patriarch Ignatius IV to Rome in 2001. The purpose of these conferences was to inform the faithful of all the communities about the latest development in the dialogue. The audience was a large one and was attended by all the leaders of the Christian communities.

In a different perspective, we would like to mention the agreement that was reached between the Orthodox Church and the

pre-Chalcedonians a few years ago, which allows the administration of the Sacraments to the faithful of the other community, when the community in question lacks priests; this is a reality that is encountered in many places overseas.

3. *Some Difficulties Hindering the Dialogue*

Although we have tried in this presentation to highlight the positive aspects of ecumenical activities, yet we need to speak about some difficulties that are destabilising the relationship between the different Christian communities. In fact, if the proselytism of the old days has disappeared, unfortunately it has re-emerged in our day in various disguises on a pastoral and educational level.

Indeed, schools have become the spearhead through which proselytism is exercised in our country. The problem arises with the practice of First Communion at school, a practice that involves all Christian students. The problem is later on extended at the level of catechetical work and all sorts of artistic, sporting and communal activities. This gives a great stimulus to students to get more and more involved in their scholastic environment. Consequently, they are increasingly alienated from their roots and the community to which they belong. It seems that missionary work, as well as promoting education, is engaging in somewhat 'illicit' activity with the youth of our communities. It appears that its primary aim is not so much towards providing a service, as towards exercising control over an increasing number of faithful belonging to other communities. This is a fact that can hardly be overcome in the current social and economic situation, and to find a just balance in the use of the educational 'trump card' seems to be beyond our reach. Consequently, misusing the educational 'tool' in such a way, (a use that we want to believe to be unintentional), is causing increasing tension which is harmful to the attempts at restoring a peaceful relationship between the different Christian communities. This reality has been clearly emphasized by His Beatitude the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius IV, in the message delivered in Damascus at the reception of His Holiness Pope John-Paul II during his visit to Syria in May 2001.

4. ***Some Requirements and a Vision for the Future***

Right away, we would like to underline the importance of face-to-face dialogue. Being conscious of this, we always encourage the participation of all the communities in the World Council of Churches. It is necessary and indeed imperative, that this dialogue, be conducted with mutual respect, cost what it may, between the communities involved. Mutual respect means explicitly the absence of any kind of proselytism. Any dialogue should take place at a round table, where mutual respect and fidelity to the agreements and principles already worked out at different levels are honoured.

At this stage, let us note that the *Edict of Balamand* has already recognized that Uniatism in the East was an historical mistake, since such a movement cannot, by any means, constitute the ideal form and way to achieve the unity of Christians. Dialogue and meeting remain the most appropriate means to reach this goal.

Another document that is relevant to our subject is the message addressed by His Beatitude the Patriarch of Antioch to His Holiness the Pope during his last visit to Syria. Indeed, this message formed a working paper that moved the Pope to invite the Patriarch to Rome a few months later in order to discuss it. This message, characterised by its frankness and its eagerness to promote a sincere as well as a fruitful dialogue, was a good omen and had a positive impact on the bilateral relationship between Orthodox and Catholics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to draw attention towards the role that the monastic communities could have. We think that it is time to promote such a presence within the ecumenical movement, since these communities, with their spiritual experience, are in a better position to undertake a dialogue on the basis of mutual comprehension and understanding. Such an endeavour involving the monastic communities will be as fruitful, in its own way, as a good many of the international conferences and meetings.

Finally, we would like to thank you for your attention and, appreciative of the work involved in this conference, we wish you all success.

THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND ITS MONASTIC TRADITION

COLIN BATELL OSB

Introduction

POPE JOHN-PAUL II in his apostolic letter, *Orientale Lumen* (1995), speaks of the Eastern Churches as 'an integral part of the heritage of Christ's Church'. He goes on to say that the eastern contribution, and especially its monasticism, is necessary for 'the full manifestation of the Church's authority'. East and West should not be seen to be in opposition but to be complementary, the 'two lungs' necessary for a healthy body.

In a famous phrase, Bulgakov could speak of 'a new and unknown world' with reference to Eastern Orthodoxy. That is perhaps less true now than when he wrote, as a result of easy travel and encounters through the Orthodox diaspora. While at first sight such encounters might seem to be with a strange and exotic form of the Christian faith, close contact soon reveals a fundamental similarity with Catholic belief and experience. What we have in common is far greater than what separates and divides us.

If Russian and Greek Orthodoxy, for example, might seem unfamiliar for most people, this is far more true of the Oriental (i.e. non-Chalcedonian churches) and in particular the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. According to recent figures from the Ethiopian Patriarchate, there are forty million believers, including forty archbishops, 400,000 clergy and 1000 monasteries. This makes it the largest of the Orthodox family of Churches after the Russian Church.

To enter the world of Ethiopian Orthodoxy is to be confronted with what at first may seem an exotic and certainly unique form of Christianity. This is the result of its distinctive history and geographical isolation, even from other Christian communities. Perhaps this should hardly be surprising. To the Biblical writers, Ethiopia stood for the back-of-beyond, the extreme limits of the imagination: 'Are you not as the Ethiopians to me?' (Amos 9:14 and Psalm 87:4). For them, Ethiopia stood for anywhere beyond the

fifth cataract of the Nile. Herodotus identifies it with the kingdoms of Nubia and Meroe. The much quoted verse from the Psalms, 'Ethiopia will stretch out her hands to God', originally had reference to the incredibly universal extent of Yahweh's sovereignty.

Certainly, Ethiopia was thought of as remote. Homer's Odyssey could refer to the 'distant Ethiopians, the farthest outposts of mankind, half of whom live where the sun goes down and half where the sun rises'. The word Ethiopia comes from the Greek 'Aithiops' meaning literally a burnt face. The description Abyssinian comes from the people known as the Habasha, but is not used by Ethiopians themselves.

According to the Roman martyrology, St Matthew was the apostle of Ethiopia and he died there. By the fourth century there were some Roman merchants there who were Christian. In the Emperor Haile-Selassie's reign, 1930-1974, (his name means 'might of the Trinity') tourist posters described the country as 'the oldest Christian Empire in the world', and certainly from about 332 the rulers were Christian almost without a break until the communist take-over in 1974. The leader during the communist years, Mengistu Haili-Mariam, also clearly has a name that shows his Christian antecedents.

Ethiopian tradition affirms that not all were converted from paganism but that some were Jews and some were animists. 'Before the coming of Christianity, one half of the people was under the Mosaic Laws, the other half was worshipping the serpent.' In the *Fetha Negast* (the Book of the Law of the Kings), a work which contains secular and ecclesiastical material (insofar as the two can be separated in Ethiopia), the Queen of Sheba from Ethiopia was converted to Judaism by her visit to King Solomon's Court. 'From this moment I will not worship the sun, but the Creator of the sun, the God of Israel.' Although the *Fetha Negast* is a thirteenth century work in its present form, it is acknowledged to contain material dating from a much earlier period. As we shall see, there is a strong Hebraic influence in Ethiopian Christianity.

The story of Rufinus

The story of the conversion of the first Ethiopian king, Ezana, is told by Rufinus of Aquileia. Two boys, Aedesius and Frumentius, were among a party who were shipwrecked and put in at the port of Adulis on the Red Sea. They were from Tyre in Syria. Their companions were slaughtered, but being young, the boys were taken to Axum, the capital of Ethiopia at that time, and attained positions of influence at the royal court. This was probably at the time that the Ge'ez language was replacing Greek as the language of the court. Aedesius, who was less intellectual than his confrere, was made chief steward to the king, while Frumentius became his secretary and treasurer. Being foreign they were perhaps seen as independent of internal politics and intrigues and therefore trustworthy. On the death of the King, the Queen, acting as regent for her son Ezana, asked Aedesius and Frumentius to stay and assist her in ruling the country. Since they were Christian they promoted Christianity and encouraged the building of prayer houses for the Roman merchants who were present in the country. When Ezana became old enough to take over the reins of power Aedesius returned to Tyre, while Frumentius went to Alexandria and told the great St Athanasius that there were now Christians in Ethiopia but no bishop or clergy. Athanasius decided to consecrate Frumentius himself and send him back as the first bishop. 'What other man shall we find in whom is the Spirit of God as in you, who can accomplish these things?' St Frumentius is known in Ethiopia as Abba Salama (Father of Peace) and Kesate Berhan (Revealer of Light). The story of Rufinus is confirmed by inscriptions celebrating victory over the Nubians and by the letter of Constantius, the Arian successor of Constantine, encouraging Ezana not to follow Athanasius. Aksumite coinage also testifies to the conversion of the king to the Christian faith.

Coptic Links

From this we see the close links from the beginning between the Ethiopian and Coptic Churches. The tradition begun by St Athanasius continued until the late fifties of the twentieth century

with the Patriarch of Alexandria sending the Abuna to lead the Ethiopian Church. Obviously there were difficulties in having a foreigner who often did not speak the language as head of the Church on earth, but there were no Ethiopian bishops until the twentieth century. The calendar of twelve months of thirty days and one of five or six with New Year's day on 11 September is also Coptic. (It should be noted here however that Ethiopians are not Copts, a word derived from the Greek for an Egyptian. However close the links may be, Ethiopians are clearly not Egyptians.)

The Ethiopian Church shared in the Alexandrine Christology and hence in the rejection of the Council of Chalcedon, which it saw as failing to safeguard the church against Nestorianism. Nowadays, it would probably be true to say that this is not seen as a fundamental theological difference. Indeed the rapprochement between the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches should perhaps be seen as a major ecumenical break-through (western ecumenists please note!). It is also wrong to describe Ethiopian Christians as monophysites. Ethiopian Christology is essentially that of St Cyril. The official title of the Ethiopian Church is the Ethiopian Orthodox *Twahido* (i.e. united nature) Church. The key phrase in Cyril's writings is '*mia physis tou logou theou sesarkomene'* (one incarnate nature of the Word of God)—i.e. '*mia'* (one, not necessarily alone) not '*mone'* which would mean 'only incarnate nature of the Word of God'. In this St Cyril thought he was quoting St Athanasius, though in fact the phrase comes from Apollinaris. There have been fierce Christological disputes within the Orthodox Church down the ages, but the *Twahido* doctrine is the official teaching of the Church. Correctly understood, this does not mean, as is sometimes alleged, that the humanity of Christ was dissolved or swallowed up in his divinity. The Christology of the Ethiopian church is that of Severus of Antioch and St Cyril. As a modern writer Peter Farrington has put it, the Oriental Churches 'utterly repudiate any teaching in which the distinctions of the natures of divinity and humanity cease to exist in the incarnation, or any teaching which damages the complete and perfect reality and divinity of which Christ is. But equally, in the incarnation and for

our salvation, the Word of God has deigned to unite, in a manner past our understanding, humanity with his divinity, such that even as there is no confusion or separation, equally there is no division or separation, but we see One Christ and One Lord as the creed confesses.'

So, from the fourth century, apart from the occasional aberration such as the Jewish Queen Yodit (Judith) in the tenth century, Ethiopia was Christian, ruled by a monarch who saw himself as vice-regent of God (the Lion of the tribe of Judah) and head of a theocratic state.

From the beginning, Christianity was very closely identified with the social, political and cultural life of the people. Of course it took time for the faith to spread. Unlike the Roman Empire where Christianity took hold, broadly speaking, first among the lower echelons of society and gradually worked upwards to the conversion of Constantine, in Ethiopia the opposite was true. The court was the first to be Christianised and then the faith percolated downwards to the people. Certainly for centuries Orthodox Christianity has been an integral part of everyday life in a way that is scarcely conceivable to secularised westerns.

Jewish influences

Here is a form of Christianity strongly Hebraic in character that has experienced neither the Reformation nor the rationalism of Enlightenment thinking. Ge-ez is a Semitic language and other Jewish influences include circumcision on the eighth day. This does not mean that Ethiopians are unaware of Pauline teaching. In any case they do not believe they were converted from paganism but from Judaism. 'We are not circumcised as the Jews because we know the words of St Paul, who says circumcision avails not, but the circumcision that is practised among us is according to the customs of the country, like tattooing on the face in Ethiopia and Nubia and the piercing of the ear among the Indians. And what we do, we do not in observance of the law of Moses but according to the customs of men.' Other Jewish influences include the following of the distinction between 'clean' and 'unclean' foods as legislated

for in Leviticus. The Sabbath is also observed as well as Sunday. There was long and bitter controversy about this in the fourteenth century, and for a time supporters of Sabbath observance led by Eustatewos were outlawed, but the issue was resolved in their favour at the Council of Metmaq in 1450 by the Emperor Zara Yacoub. Moreover, boys are usually baptised forty days after birth and girls after eighty days, cf. Leviticus 12:1ff.

There is also a class of ecclesiastical professionals known as *debteras* who sing and perform a kind of liturgical dance to the accompaniment of drums, sistra and with prayer sticks (*maqwamia*) rather in the manner of the Old Testament Levites.

The division of Churches into three sections also follows the pattern of the Jewish Temple. Every Church is divided into the *Meqdes* (the Holy of Holies where the altar is situated and which only the clergy may enter), the *Qiddest* or place of Communion, and the *Qene Mahlet* where the singers perform. Men and woman have their separate entrances and are accommodated separately too. The whole of the church compound is regarded as part of the Church. Some who are doing a penance given to them by their spiritual father (*nefs abbat*) for certain sins do not enter the building. Shoes are removed on entering the church. Currently a massive church building programme is being undertaken, and even during the communist years (1974-91) two huge monastic parish churches were built in Addis Ababa. Churches can be round or octagonal, especially in the south of the country reflecting the domestic architecture or basilica style as is common in the north, and are often decorated with scenes from the Gospels and the lives of the saints in the very distinctive style of Ethiopian iconography. Large numbers of clergy are attached to each church as two priests and three deacons are normally needed to service the Liturgy. The Church is involved in aid and development work, but this is usually done by the laity as liturgical functions are a full time job for the clergy. Careful preparation is needed for the reception of Holy Communion and the bread and wine are prepared by the deacons in a special building near the church known as the Bethlehem (House of Bread).

Another Jewish influence is in the veneration for the Ark of the Covenant (*tabot*). The original ark, according to Ethiopian tradition, was brought from Jerusalem by Memelik I, son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba to Axum, where it still remains in the Church of *Debre Tsion Mariam* closely guarded by a monk who, after his appointment to the post of Guardian, never leaves the compound. The manner of its transport to Ethiopia has been the subject of much speculation. (For a particularly fanciful account see Graham Hancock's *The Sign and the Seal*, cf. *Raiders of the Lost Ark,* etc.). A replica of the ark is found in every Church, indeed it is the sign of the building's consecration and without it it ceases to be a Church. Covered in richly embroidered cloths the arks are carried in procession on the heads of the priests on important festivals and are honoured with the greatest reverence.

The Nine Saints and the Monastic Tradition

The fifth century saw an important development with the arrival of the Nine Saints from Syria. They were perhaps among the refugees from the Byzantine Empire who refused to accept the Chalcedonian Christology. All of them were monks and all established monasteries which became very important centres of learning and evangelisation. It would indeed be true to say that all evangelisation and all education in Christian Ethiopia was in the hands of monks until modern times. Monks trained all the secular clergy and secular officials as well. (As in other Orthodox Churches, clergy may get married before ordination, but bishops are chosen only from the monks.)

Many of these monasteries are still flourishing: for example, that of Debre Damo near the Eritrean border, still only accessible by rope. Its founder Abba Aragawi was conveniently provided with a snake in order to ascend and make the foundation. Wisely he insisted that the snake's head should be at the bottom! All Ethiopian monks trace their genealogy to one of the Nine Saints.

The Nine Saints translated the Bible into Ge'ez, probably using the Septuagint for the Old Testament. They also translated some extra books as well as monastic writings so that the Ethiopian canon

is much more extensive than that of any other church, including works such as the Shepherd of Hermas, the Didascalia, Enoch, Jubilees, Synodos etc. As with some other Orthodox churches, there is no definitive text of Scripture. It raises interesting questions about whether the canon of Scripture is closed or open, at least potentially, to further development.

St Aragawi received his monastic habit from Theodore, a disciple of St Pachomius. There were Ethiopian monks in the Egyptian desert from early times, among them St Moses the Black, who was head of a band of robbers until his conversion. He was changed one day when he and his group attacked a monastery, intending to rob it. Moses was met by the abbot whose peaceful countenance and warm manner overwhelmed him. He immediately felt remorse for his past sins, and joined the monastery. For years he was continually tormented by his past ways, and especially by lust, until the prayers of his abbot St Isidore the Great miraculously healed him. Near the end of his life he became a priest and formed a monastery of seventy-five monks, the same number as his robber band, and was martyred in 405 at the age of seventy-five.

So there has been a continuous monastic tradition in Ethiopia from this time, though there are some gaps in our historical knowledge. Axum declined in the ninth century, and later the Zagwe dynasty emerged, which was responsible in the twelfth century for the famous churches at Lalibella carved out of solid rock and recognized as one of the architectural wonders of the world. This dynasty was replaced in 1270 by the Solomonic, which traced its origins to the Queen of Sheba and her son Memelik I, whose father was King Solomon.

The great monastic revival of the fourteenth century led to the establishment of the monastery now known as Debre Libanos, whose founders were St Tekle Haimanot and St Ewstatewos, two very great influential Christian leaders through whom the monks of today trace their origins. The monasteries provided a counter-balance to a heavily established and controlled church.

In their extremes of austerity the monks provide a prophetic and eschatological ministry in the Ethiopian Church. The *bahtawi* are an

independent class of hermits who represent the anchoretic tradition—modern successors of St John the Baptist, rebuking all, including the emperor himself, without fear or favour. As Shimei reviled King David, so the *bahtawi* have been known to hurl abuse at all and sundry, including the emperor. Some live completely separately from society, unseen by all, their bones occasionally discovered after their deaths in the remotest of places. Others lived in trees (*dendrites*) or small holes in the ground. Often they live on leaves and bitter roots and reduce sleep to an absolute minimum. (One who had found his way to New York was taken to a mental institution after being found praying half-naked in the snow!) Those living in wilderness zones on the edge of the empire had the effect of expanding the empire because they invariably attracted followers. Evangelisation was not systematic but the effect was to extend the frontiers of Christianity by being so successful in converting the surrounding population.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the spirituality of the laity in Ethiopia is essentially a monastic spirituality. Some emperors even saw themselves as monk-kings. 'When Lalibella established the throne he submitted himself to a fast more severe than that of the monks because to him the kingship appeared as the monastic life.' This may have been the ideal but of course there was always a tension between this and the reality. Emperors may have been the vice-regent of God on earth and protectors, defenders of the faith, but they were not its exponent, even though they may have assisted in the settling of disputes, for instance regarding Sabbath observance. Moreover their moral laxity often came in for monastic chastisement.

Fasting

Monastic austerity is seen in the great emphasis on fasting, cf. St Benedict's somewhat unfashionable 'love fasting'. The clergy fast two hundred and fifty-six days a year, the laity one hundred and eighty. On these days no meat or animal products are eaten and one meal is taken after the Liturgy, which takes place on those days at mid-day finishing around three o'clock. All Wednesdays and

Fridays except in Eastertide are fast days (cf. the *Didache*), and Lent lasts fifty-six days, with another sixteen days added in commemoration of the conquest of the city of Harar. There is also a major fast of fifteen days before the feast of the Dormition of our Lady, and Holy Week is observed very strictly indeed, often with a complete fast from food and drink during the Triduum. The *Fethe Negast* says 'fasting is abstinence from food and is observed by man at certain times determined by law to obtain forgiveness of sins and much reward obeying thus the One who fixed the Law. Fasting also serves to weaken the force of concupiscence so that the body may obey the rational soul.'

Not to take part in fasting would still result in ostracism in many rural areas and many will fast strenuously who perhaps do not practise their faith much in other ways. The laxness of western Christians in this respect scandalises the Ethiopian faithful. Ethiopia is not a secular society in the western sense. The cadres who went into the university to preach atheism during the communist years following the fall of Haile-Selassie were mostly laughed at (cf. Psalm 53:1).

Saints such as St Tekle Haimanot were renowned for their asceticism. His life was seen as a sign of the angelic life to the extent that he is often pictured with wings. He surrounded himself with eight spears to prevent himself from falling asleep while praying. The true ascetic we are told does not need to eat or drink or, if he does, then the natural waste will be miraculously disposed of. We are in the world of the Desert Fathers here. Such asceticism is greatly admired if not always emulated. It is seen as an ideal to which all should aspire and as a superior form of the spiritual life rather than as a special vocation. This finds an echo in Pope John Paul II's words in *Orientale Lumen*: the monasteries are a reference for all the baptised.

Feasts

But as well as fasts there are feasts too. Major saints have their feast day celebrated every month and the faithful flock to the church named after him or her on that day. On important festivals the

tabots are brought out in procession on the heads of the priests. Other major feasts with a distinctive ritual and enormous popularity include *Timqet* (the Baptism of the Lord) when water is blessed and the faithful are sprinkled or even bathe in it! And *Mesqel* which celebrates the finding of the True Cross by the Empress Helena in the fourth century. Bonfires are burnt in recognition that she was led to the correct place by a mysterious smoke rising from the ground.

St Tekle Haimanot

The founders of monasticism as known today are St Ewstatewos, the upholder of the Sabbath observance in the fourteenth century, and St Tekle Haimanot. The life of St Tekle Haimanot may be given as an illustration of the world in which we are moving.

St Tekle Haimonot was from a family of priests. Miracles attended his birth. His first recorded words were to object to receiving his mother's milk on a fast day! He learned the psalms by heart and was ordained at fifteen. He travelled round the countryside demonstrating the power of Christ. He met the devil occupying a tree which was worshipped by the local people. He ordered the tree to come to him and it was uprooted, killing twenty-one people in the process. He raised these from death and such was the *dynamis* that went out of him that he also raised the dead of a neighbouring grave-yard. Since they were unbaptised, he baptised them, then reburied them. He converted a pagan king and studied in three monasteries for many years under the great monastic saints Basalota Mikael, Iyesus Moa and Yohannes of Debre Damo. Stability as propagated by St Benedict is unknown in Ethiopia. A monk may attach himself to a teacher for many years then move on to another. After three pilgrimages to the Holy Land he founded the monastery of Debre Asbo in Shoa, today known as Debre Libanos. It was here he prayed for seven years on one leg until the other dropped off and he was given wings. Many miracles are recorded as the result of his prayers. Such stories raise questions about our common presuppositions. As children of the Enlightenment, we tend to ask, 'Did it happen?': compare the quest for the historical Jesus, and the careful research of the *Societé des Bollandistes* in

their patient weeding out of legendary material to preserve the historical elements in the lives of the saints. We need to understand these stories on their own terms, not from the perspective of a modern historian (compare Fr Raymond Brown's tongue-in-cheek reply when asked if the New Testament was true: 'Yes, everything except the facts!')

A strong belief in the miraculous and its practice following the New Testament is seen as a strong tool for evangelisation. The Christian missionary has to carry conviction in a society where the exercise of magic is a normal source of power. Exorcisms and confrontations with evil spirits are seen as normal. The faith spreads by demonstrations of power as well as by catechesis. Animism is successfully challenged and the power of Christ is seen to be superior to all others. The conversion of King Matalome by St Tekle Haimanot is a symbol of the struggle with the monarchy. The monasteries were centres of influence sometimes opposed to the king and challenged the easy-going moral standards of the court. It has to be remembered that in Ethiopia for many centuries there were no city churches, bishops or councils—only monasteries.

Monastic Rules

The monastic rules followed go back to St Pachomius and St Antony, with local adaptations, and are set out in the *Book of the Monks* and the *Fethe Negast*. There are three professions symbolised by the girdle or belt (*kedet*), the skull cap (*qob*) and the scapular (*askema*). There are hundreds of monasteries, mostly smallish, but some have as many as five hundred monks. Usually monasteries started as a place of retreat for the founder who then attracted followers who came to ask for prayers and for education. A modern phenomenon resulting from the loss of land after the communist take-over in 1974 has been the emergence of an urban monasticism which has led to a Sunday School movement for adults as well as children. In the big cities there were no monks at first. Now many parish staff and administrators are monks. The emergence of this was also linked with the achievement of autocephalous status and the need for a patriarchal bureaucracy.

Inevitably there is a certain tension between the demands of urban life and monasticism—the word for monasteries, *goddam*, literally means 'a place of solitude and quiet'. As one monk put it, the pure '*tedj'* (honey mead) of the rural areas is better than the watered down version available in the cities! The monks have introduced evening prayers in church, which are well attended, and promoted popular piety as well as being involved in catechetical teaching. Those with preaching gifts are much appreciated, and long sermons are preferred in a way that those used to the sound bite may find difficult to appreciate.

Education

Ethiopia has the only written culture in sub-Saharan Africa. Church schools are still active and there was no other education until the late nineteenth century. The educational system is highly complex. Clergy may often appear poorly or even shabbily dressed and may seem to be lacking in the most elementary principles of modern western education, especially the sciences, but that is not to say that they are uneducated. Many have spent years in disciplined study and are immensely erudite in a tradition completely foreign to western models. The educational system is also largely based on a tradition of oral culture. In contrast to a system that promotes individual creativity and independence of mind, Ethiopian Orthodox education comes from a traditional society where the purpose is to integrate pupils fully into society. That is not to say that lively theological debate and discussion is excluded—far from it—and there were long periods, especially of Christological controversy, before the *Twahido* doctrine emerged as normative in the nineteenth century.

Education begins with the Reading School (*nebab Bet*) which teaches the syllabary and the reading of religious books in the Ge'ez language. Reading is aloud and the murmuring of the law of the Lord day and night that this produces would certainly win St Benedict's approval. Then the first letter of St John is learnt by heart, followed by the Psalms, the Gospels and the Miracles of Mary. The Psalms (*Dawit*) are most important in Ethiopian

spirituality, monastic and lay. They are read or chanted aloud and memorised since few books are available even for the Liturgy. The *Qidane Bet* or Liturgy School teaches the deacons and priests and educates them in the liturgical functions—the Liturgy is steeped in Scripture. The aim is to produce a mind-set steeped in the Word of God.

In the Higher Schools the *debteras* are often the teachers—they also have a ministry of healing linked with holy water and herbal remedies and are consulted to interpret dreams.

Church music in Ethiopia goes back to St Yared in the sixth century who is said to have been influenced in his compositions by the song of the birds. It uses a pentatonic scale and while Middle Eastern in character it differs from Coptic music. There was no notation until the sixteenth century. It is mostly restrained and slow and in strophic and ametric form. It also includes the hymns performed by the *debteras* at the end of the Mass and the use of drums, sistra and prayer-sticks. Music is performed without any books.

The *Qene Bet* (Poetry School) teaches a highly sophisticated poetry, the fruit of long pondering on the Scriptures (*lectio divina*). It is highly creative and requires enormous skill. It generates lively discussion about the merits of a particular composition. It uses word-play so that there is a surface meaning and a deeper hidden meaning (wax and gold) in a way that is difficult to convey in translation. Because it requires great skill many of its practitioners attain to high positions in the Church. It takes many years to become a teacher in this field, and a minimum of twelve years of full study is required for those who attend this school.

Finally, the *Metsehaf Bet* or Literature School studies the literature of the Church and especially the *Amdemta Commentaries*. These are collections of the comments of the Fathers of the Church, mostly on the Scriptures. Again, all is memorised. Only recently have these commentaries received any attention from western scholars such as Roger Cowley. The teacher comments on the texts, not critically, but to expound the text in a way that puts the student

under the text. It is said to take forty years to follow the complete course!

From this it should be seen that many of the clergy are highly educated. This is a living tradition. The Coptic monastic revival in recent times has been attributed in part to an Ethiopian, Abd al-Masih el-Habashi, the teacher of the renowned Matthai el-Meskin of the Monastery of St Macarius in the Wadi el-Natrun. He lived in a cave there from 1935-1970 and is a modern successor of Moses the Black who was also Ethiopian.

Concluding Remarks

As in Russia and Eastern Europe, the Church underwent a testing time during the communist years, but perhaps emerged stronger and purified as a result of the experience. Sometimes the Church could be compromised in its witness by its close relations with the state. The Church, and especially the monasteries, also lost their extensive land holdings, though some urban property has been restored including the Theological College in Addis Ababa. The Church is popular in the best sense of the word and much loved by the ordinary people even though there may be criticism of the hierarchy. Here is an example of a truly inculturated Church with a rich monastic tradition. Whatever problems may be confronted as a result of western influence and the secularism that so often attends urbanisation, it is an Ethiopian article of faith that the psalmist's prophecy will be fulfilled and 'Ethiopia will continue to stretch out her hands to God' (Psalm 68:31).

The above article and the preceding account by His Eminence Dr Paul Yazigi, Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo, were first given as talks at the Fourth East West Christian Monastic Meeting*, held in September 2002 at Minster Abbey. Both are printed here by kind permission of the Benedictine Community at the Priory of St Mildred, Minster Abbey.*

A LINE OF TRADITION:
FROM THE SONG OF SONGS TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

A talk given at the College of the Resurrection, Mirfield on 22 May 2003 by Sister Edmeé SLG

AN UNEXPECTED consequence of my research on the Song of Songs has been the emergence of a strong sense of the historical setting in which it was produced: an ascetic community, to be dated most probably to the middle of the 200s BC, possessing an extensive library, and an ethos, common to those extraordinary times of religious ferment, times in which messianic expectation and eschatological hope provided the matrix in which Christianity was gestated and finally brought to birth. An important study, to cite only one of a number, is 'Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism' by Stephen Fraade,[1] which supplies a wealth of information concerning the intensity of religious feeling which prevailed among the Jews in the turbulent years before and after the turn of the era, revealing a world it is almost impossible for us to imagine unless we are able to tunnel our way back through centuries of humanism and increasing secularism to reach a cast of mind, or a disposition of soul—however one may describe it—in which God is loved passionately.

Above all it is the discoveries at Qumran which have opened up new ways of understanding some of the crucial influences on the New Testament. The similarities in terminology and thought between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gospel and First Epistle of John in particular have generated a considerable literature, and if the first excitement has been modified by reflection on the dissimilarities, both similarities and dissimilarities have thrown fresh light on the role and the uniqueness of the Jesus presented by John. But, as one writer puts it, 'one should not leap to the conclusion that certain important ideas which John and Qumran seem to have in common derived from Qumran. These ideas may have characterized a much wider cultural movement flourishing in

[1] Art. cit. in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages*, Arthur Green (ed.) London: SCM Press, 1987.

an environment shared by Jewish groups and John's community.'[2] Another writer, Raymond Brown, puts the matter similarly: '… we cannot be certain that even the most characteristic Qumran features found in the New Testament came to Christianity from Qumran, and it is best to attribute the influence to a type of Judaism of which Qumran is exemplary.'[3]

That was written in 1972, and yet the idea that Qumran is exemplary of a type of Judaism still surprises. More surprising in the present climate is the suggestion I am now making: that the Song of Songs issued from just such an ascetic milieu—though of a quite different theological cast of mind to that of Qumran—and was no less influential on the Johannine corpus. This influence, hardly, if at all, discussed in the vast literature on John, is, I believe, the influence responsible for the mystical dimension of the Gospel, and it is expressed in the same themes: the Bridegroom who comes to restore the relationship with the Bride; the role of the beloved disciple who, I shall claim, represents the contemplative element among the disciples; the seeking and finding motif of the Scriptures, consummated in the story of Mary Magdalene at the tomb, and several other themes which the Song and John have in common. Apart from numerous similarities of vocabulary, which would require detailed examination, mention must be made, first: of the links with the Wisdom literature, the Prologue of the Gospel linking especially with Sirach 24 which, in turn, manifests multiple links with the Song; the rivers of living water which Jesus promises, in the Temple at 7:38, will flow from the belly of the one who believes in him, the phrase 'living water' being identical to the one used in the Septuagint of the Song at 4:15 where the context, I claim, is also the Temple; and the many links to early Jewish mysticism about which one writer comments: 'very remarkable indeed is the attention which the Gospel [of John] pays to texts of importance for

[2] James L. Price, 'Light from Qumran upon Some Aspects of Johannine Theology' in *John and Qumran*, James H. Charlesworth (ed.), London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972, pp 10-11.

[3] Raymond E. Brown, 'The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament' in Ibid., p.3.

the Jewish Merkabah mysticism,'[4] which can equally be said of the author of the Song. But these subjects are too large to be included in a talk you will at some point want to come to an end, and I shall confine myself to the first three: the Bridegroom, the Beloved Disciple, and Mary Magdalene at the tomb.

The Theme of the Bridegroom

The word *chatan*, 'bridegroom', only occurs ten times in the Hebrew Bible and, for the present purpose, the two occurrences at Isaiah 61:10 and 62:5 and the four at Jeremiah 7:34, 16:9, 25:10 and 33:11 are probably the relevant ones. Thus Isaiah 61:10 gives:

> I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
> my soul shall be joyful in my God;
> for he has clothed me in the garments of salvation,
> he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
> as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
> and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

The line generally translated 'as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland' is difficult and a literal translation gives: 'as a bridegroom priests it with his turban', which suggests that bridegrooms wore turbans such as the priests wore. The last line takes us straight to the Apocalypse: 'I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (21:2). The second text, Isaiah, 62:5, gives: 'as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you', namely, Jerusalem. The first three of the four verses from Jeremiah depict scenes of desolation:

> Then I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah,
> and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth,
> and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom,
> and the voice of the bride; for the land shall be desolate. (7:34)

The second and third passages from Jeremiah, 16:9 and 25:10, are almost identical, including the four occurrences of the word for 'voice', *kol* in Hebrew, which can also be translated 'sound'. NRSV

[4] Nils Alstrup Dahl, 'The Johannine Church and History' in *The Interpretation of John,* John Ashton (ed.), Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2nd edn, 1997, p.164.

accordingly alternates 'voice' and 'sound' for the sake of variety which, as we shall see, does not serve the exegetical purpose. The fourth passage, 33:11, comes in a chapter in which the Lord tells Jeremiah in his prison that the time will come when he will cure the people of Jerusalem, 'and will reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth' (*shalom ve-emet*. NRSV: 'prosperity and security'). And 'there shall be heard in this place ... the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness; the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride … .'

The language of the Song is metaphorical throughout and leads to other biblical texts from which it becomes clear that a network of allusions is being woven for the purpose of conveying a picture opposite to the condemnatory one we find in the prophets, especially in Jeremiah. The Song is concerned to encourage its readers or hearers by depicting the ideal in place of the discouraging reality described by the prophets, and it does this by taking their texts and reversing them in the highly compressed language of biblical poetry, the meaning of which is easily missed. Thus, the voice of the bridegroom in Jeremiah is captured in the Song by two words: *'Kol dodi'*, 'the voice of my beloved,' an exclamation by the bride when she becomes aware of the bridegroom 'leaping over the mountains, springing over the hills' (2:8). The word for 'bridegroom' does not occur in the Song, but that the beloved is a bridegroom is to be inferred from his references to 'my bride'.

The four evangelists use the term explicitly: six times in Matthew, four of them in the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, three times in Mark, twice in Luke, four times in John, the first of them occurring in the story of the marriage at Cana, and once in the Apocalypse. In the Synoptic Gospels, the term is used by Jesus to describe himself. 'Can the wedding guests mourn while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast' (9:14-15). And similarly in Mark and Luke. In all three of these Gospels, the reference to the bridegroom follows the mention of John the Baptist and is in answer to the question of fasting. In John's Gospel it is John the Baptist himself who speaks:

> ‘No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s *voice*; therefore this joy of mine is now full’ (3:27-29).

The author of the Fourth Gospel uses Scripture, Jeremiah in particular, as extensively and as subtly as the author of the Song. The relationship between God and his creation, which the word of God, through the writings of his prophets, depicts as breaking down through the failure of the creatures to return God’s love, is restored in the Song by its portrayal of the ideal, that is, of the love which flows from God to his creation and returns to God from the creation by means of the same love. In the Gospel of John the Word of God is made flesh, and the ideal portrayed so beautifully by the Song becomes the reality.

The ascription to Jesus of the role of ‘bridegroom’ in all four Gospels, was taken by the earliest Christian commentators on the Song to signify that the bridegroom of the Song is the prophetic Word of God, and was understood as such by the Gospel writers. In the Jewish tradition of Song exegesis it is significant that, although God is portrayed as the husband of Israel, the bride/bridegroom motif is altogether absent. The Song is rated no less highly but is used to give light and warmth to the Torah, thus it becomes a midrash on the Pentateuch rather than a work which functions in its own right. This use of the Song is remarkably consistent with the Rabbinic aim, in the face of the threat of Christianity, to control the eros for God which, the evidence strongly suggests, was causing whole communities of ascetics to embrace Christianity. A parallel attempt to control the eros which draws a person to God was made at the Reformation, but whereas the Jews were fighting a movement of phenomenal vitality, the Reformers were striving to inject new life into a system which was seriously sagging at the centre. The first struggle, central to the Gospel of John, produced in effect two new religions, Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, and that God also blessed the latter is clear to anyone who studies its miraculous

survival, its writings, and the great religious figures it produced in the early centuries of its development. The division of Latin Christianity, on the contrary, resulted in the emasculation of its mystical dimension, on the Catholic side no less than on the Protestant, an outcome the commentaries on the Song of the last two or three centuries clearly chart

But that is history. And when we meditate on the Gospels, especially on John, it is of crucial importance not to read them historically—though they are historical—but to read them spiritually, that is, to understand the struggle between Jesus and the Jews as being *between Jesus and us, not between us and them.*

The Beloved Disciple

In scanning the commentaries on John for this talk I noticed that indices and subject lists have nothing under 'Bridegroom', a major subject, but quite a lot under the 'Beloved Disciple' who, though important, is nothing like as central. This is undoubtedly because the present consensus on the Song as being a secular work in origin prevents it from being understood theologically. The one exception of which I am aware comes from a Catholic writer, Sandra Schneiders who, among other passages on the same theme, writes that 'the first four chapters of John contain numerous evocations of the nuptial theme of the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel that runs through the Old Testament, especially in the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea, and culminates in the Canticle of Canticles.'[5] Very unusually she cites no other works in support of this view, which suggests there are none to be had, or none she cares to quote in a modern work of critical scholarship. It is very different when she comes to the beloved disciple. Every half-page of text on this subject is supported with a half-page of footnotes pointing to the best studies available. Under a heading 'The Literature on the Subject' she writes:

> Jobannine scholars today are just as divided as ever over such questions as: whether the Beloved Disciple was identical with or

[5] *Written that You may Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel,* A Herder & Herder Book, The Crossroads Publishing Company, New York, 1999, p.35.

> was distinct from the Fourth Evangelist; whether the Beloved Disciple is a pure literary creation used as a symbol by the Fourth Evangelist or was a real, historical person who may or may not represent some idealized role; who the Beloved Disciple, if historical, was; and what role the Beloved Disciple plays in the Gospel.[6]

That is written in Part 3 of the book entitled 'A Feminist Re-examination of the Authorship of the Gospel' which, pressed for time, I had intended to omit. But a glance at it caught my attention, and I found Schneiders's argumentation richer than I could have imagined, and more illuminating about the Gospel than feminist approaches to the Scriptures usually are. So I warmly commend the whole book, including this last Part, especially because Schneiders focuses on certain central aspects of John which are generally neglected in the present climate. But I shall nevertheless follow a different lead on the subject of the beloved disciple, especially in this context of a theological college for the training of priests.

In the last chapter of my thesis on the Song I have expounded certain verses as being about prayer, about the contemplation of God, which, to understand, the reader must know something, even if not much, about different states of prayer. The most striking verse is: 'I sleep, but my heart is awake' at 5:2 which describes a state of prayer in which the faculties are held immovable in a kind of sleep, even though one can hear exactly what is going on and might even like to get up and investigate. Related to this is the charge to the Daughters of Jerusalem to 'stir not up nor awaken love till it please', that is, not to arouse a person who is held in a state of prayer. That the Song is about prayer was recognized in earlier centuries, St Francis de Sales, for instance, stating quite baldly: 'the Canticle is about mental prayer', while a yet earlier writer, John of Mantua, declares: 'Solomon's intention in this book is to teach contemplation.'

There is a similar recognition, even in our day, that the Gospel of John is contemplative in character; the word is very frequently used in relation to it. And the beloved disciple provides one of the

[6] Ibid. pp.213-4.

elements which imparts this contemplative quality to the Gospel, notably in the episode when he is first called 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (13:23) which occurs at the Last Supper. The Greek tells us plainly that this disciple was lying 'in the bosom' of Jesus, and that after Peter nods to him to ask Jesus who it is of whom he speaks, the beloved disciple, 'leaning back ... on the breast of Jesus, says', and so on. In the present climate, such intimacy is immediately given a sexual connotation, and to prevent, presumably, such an inference being drawn, NRSV omits both 'bosom' and 'breast' giving: 'One of the disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him', and goes on: 'So while reclining next to Jesus …'. Thus, for fear that some may get it wrong, others are denied the possibility of getting it right. And since some will always get it wrong, it seems to me of much greater importance to be concerned about those who have the capacity to penetrate deeper into the meaning of the biblical text. There is a lovely passage in Andrew Louth's recent study of John Damascene which describes one way of lying in the bosom of Jesus. First Louth quotes from this Greek theologian of the seventh to eighth century, who writes, in the context of meditating on the Scriptures, that it is not enough to reach the gate, we have to knock hard on it, so that

> when the door of the bridal chamber is opened to us, we may see the beauties within. For the gate is the letter, and the bridal chamber within the gate is what is hidden by the letter, the beauty of thoughts, the spirit of truth. Let us knock hard, let us read once, twice, many times, so that by digging we may find the treasure of knowledge and delight in its riches.

Then Louth goes on to say:

> This is the voice, not so much of the scholar, as of the monk: knowledge, the pursuit of truth, is to follow Christ, the Truth. The way demands humility and purification: it demands one's whole life, not just one's committed intellect. The focus of this search ... is a careful and repeated reading of the Scriptures, a reading that enables one to hear the voice of Christ, the Truth, speaking in the Scriptures. It is the kind of meditative reading of Scripture called *lectio divina* in the Western monastic tradition ... This reading and

> pondering the Scriptures is the work of love: the one who pursues it enters into a bridal relationship with Christ, and delights in the truth discovered in the bridal chamber. John [of Damascus] is drawing on a long tradition, going back at least to Origen, in seeing meditation on Scripture as leading to a loving relationship with Christ, such as is celebrated in the Song of Songs.[7]

Another way of reclining on the breast of Jesus is in the kind of prayer which leads to the suspension of the faculties, the silent, wordless prayer to which the Apocalypse of John may be referring at 8:1: 'Whenever the Lamb opened the seventh seal, a silence, occurred in heaven [for] about a half-hour.' This kind of prayer is what, I believe, the beloved disciple represents. But this disciple is only one among the twelve, while Peter, the leader of the apostles, and by tradition married, represents something quite different: the active life. And so do the other disciples, from which I think it is to be understood that the priestly vocation is an active one. This is confirmed when Jesus calls the disciples 'friends'. It is only in the Gospel of John that Jesus calls the disciples 'friends', that is to say, this Gospel implies a distinction between two fundamental types of response to God: that of the bride and that of the friend, as we have already seen in the verse,

> He who has the bride is the bridegroom;
> but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. (3:29)

and of which we will see more in the next section.

The disciples begin by being servants, that is, being taught by Jesus, and progress to being friends, that is, to being co-teachers. But the presence of the beloved disciple among the disciples suggests that a contemplative element must not be left altogether out of account in the priestly vocation. The beloved disciple represents the salt, one might say, without which the active life becomes tasteless.

[7] Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology,* Oxford Early Christian Studies, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp.44, 45.

> All things are twofold, one opposite the other,
> and he has made nothing incomplete.
> One confirms the good things of the other,
> and who can have enough of beholding his glory?
> (Sirach 42:24-25, cf. 33:15)

Taking up the idea of there being two fundamental responses to God, that of the 'bride' and that of the 'friend', I want to apply these lines from the Wisdom of Ben Sira to the twofold nature of the human race, but not in terms of 'man' and 'woman' but in terms of male and female principles, the 'friend' and the 'bride', manifesting two quite distinct responses to God—a fruitful way, I believe, of understanding male and female characters in the Scriptures.

But the first point which must be noted about these principles is that they have nothing to do with gender. Moses often provides an example of the female principle in his relationship to God: 'Did I conceive all this people?' he asks. 'Did I bring them forth that you should say to me, Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child?' (Numbers 11:12). And again in his unwillingness to act: 'Come', the Lord says to him, 'I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people.' But Moses resists with one excuse after another in a dialogue with God which continues through two chapters (Ex. 3:10-4:17). This unwillingness to act is especially characteristic of the 'bride' temperament, which desires not so much to act as to be *acted in*.

One example of this principle at work in the Song is to be found in its use of breast imagery. An examination of the two words for 'breast' throughout the Hebrew Bible reveals that they occur only in poetic contexts, where the image is symbolic of nurture. There are no references to breasts in narrative passages concerning sexual encounters, and this accords with an evident convention whereby 'breasts' signify nourishment and not sexual pleasure. Thus, in the Song, breasts, twice specified as 'your two breasts' (4:5 and 7:4), which puzzles commentators, are a metaphor for the two tablets of stone which Moses brings down from the mountain. These tablets of stone are the means by which the people are to be nourished and so

grow to full spiritual maturity, the Torah, represented in the Pentateuch by the metaphor of stone, symbolizing permanence and durability, for the Torah must, in the first place, be engraved on the hardest, the most unyielding material available so that it might not easily be effaced and thus forgotten, or defaced and thus misinterpreted. But other aspects of the Torah, and thus other metaphors, are needed. The importance of the Song for the biblical literature is that it picks up from Hosea (2:2) and Isaiah (66:11) the metaphor of 'breasts' for that aspect of the Torah which is yielding, comforting and, above all, nourishing. The breasts, then, represent the feminine aspect of Torah, an implicit metaphor, unlike 'stone' which is always explicit, and point to that aspect of the Torah often called both 'mother' and 'wife', especially in the Wisdom literature.

The Gospel of John plays a similar role among the Gospels. It is by no means wholly 'bridal' in its emphasis, as the Song certainly is, and a careful study of it from the 'bride/friend' standpoint would probably reveal it to be evenly balanced between the two. But the 'bridal' half is extraordinary. One of the merits of Schneiders's book is the clear way, without any exaggeration, she reveals the centrality of women in this Gospel. They are, she shows, the privileged recipients of three of Jesus' most important self-revelations: first, to the woman of Samaria, the revelation that he is the Messiah, the great 'I am'; second, to Martha, that he is the resurrection and the life; and third, at his appearance to Mary Magdalene, that his glorification is complete and its salvific effects are now given to his disciples.[8] Schneiders also shows how these incidents, especially those concerning the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene at the tomb, have been trivialized by commentators—as, indeed, has the Song of Songs. But in my interpretation of all this material it is not so much women as women who are being trivialized—though of course it is—but it is all that is comprised in the female principle: sympathy, warmth, nourishment, imagination, intuition, contemplation, mystical theology, and, above

[8] Op.cit., p.114.

all, the desire to be drawn by the eros of God into an intimate and loving relationship with him.

The figure of Mary Magdalene represents this female principle, no longer as it is portrayed throughout the Old Testament, from the first failure in the garden of Eden to the countless failures in faithfulness, described by the prophets as 'playing the harlot', but as it is portrayed in the Song, which picks up the seeking and finding motif of Jeremiah: 'Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, says the Lord' (29:12-14a), or again from Deuteronomy: '… you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul' (4:29). This is a key motif in the Song:

> By night on my bed I sought
> him whom my soul loves;
> I sought him, but I found him not.
> I will rise now and go about the city;
> in the streets and in the broad ways
> I will seek him whom my soul loves.
> I sought him, but I found him not.
> The watchmen who go about the city found me.
> 'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?'
> Hardly had I passed from them
> when I found him whom my soul loves.
> I held him and would not let him go ... (Cant. 3:1-4)

But in the Gospel of John there is a reversal of this last line for Jesus tells Mary: 'Do not hold me', and he goes on, 'for I have not yet ascended to the Father', with the possible implication that when he has she will not need to. The usual explanation is quite justified, namely, that Jesus is no longer to be known according to the flesh. But there is more to it, I think. First, not until Jesus has ascended to the Father can the gift of his indwelling be given (cf. John 16:7) and the gift of his indwelling will reverse the next two lines of the Song also:

> until I had brought him into my mother's house,
> and into the chamber of her who conceived me.

In the language of the Song these two lines bring us into the Temple and to its worship. In the conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4, Jesus says to her: 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.' And he repeats: 'The hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth' (4:21-24). Similarly, the Apocalypse presents the heavenly Jerusalem as having no temple, 'for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb' (21:22).

But lest it should be thought that I am understanding the gift of the indwelling of Christ to render places of worship redundant, I will resort to the conclusion of Luke's Gospel where the disciples return to Jerusalem after the Ascension 'with great joy' which, since their beloved Lord has just withdrawn himself for ever from their sight, is surprising. But if the disciples experienced Jesus' departure as the moment of the gift of his indwelling, and if they knew in that moment that, as the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel reports, he is now with them 'to the close of the ages', their great joy becomes comprehensible. Then Luke concludes, 'they were continually in the Temple blessing God', while the first miracle wrought in Acts shows Peter and John going up to the Temple at the hour of prayer. I think this is an example of how we need all four evangelists to keep us from one-sided emphases.

In conclusion, I hope I have managed to suggest something of the line of tradition from the Song to the Gospel of John which I believe exists, as well as suggesting both the continuity and the discontinuity there is between them and, indeed, between all the Hebrew Scriptures and all the Gospels. In the last few centuries the emphasis has been on the discontinuity between the two Testaments, but happily, the signs are, especially in the studies on the Johannine corpus, that we are recovering the sense of continuity with what were *the* Scriptures for the New Testament writers, about which Origen marvellously said: 'Christ is as incarnate in the Scriptures as he was in the flesh.'

BOOKS

ROWAN WILLIAMS An Introduction by Rupert Shortt, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 2003, £7.95.

The Anglican Communion is living through interesting times. With this hour of the Church is matched the extraordinary figure of our new Archbishop. At a time of open hostility to the Church in the media he still seems to enjoy the affection and esteem of many journalists. At a time of division and anger the possibility of his appointment united Church of England people in hope. At a time when theology seems increasingly marginal, the Church of England appointed a great theologian rather than a manager as its leader for the first time in a generation; and a theologian who in a phrase of Oliver O'Donovan, 'did not think it the business of theology to make Christian faith less offensive to modern man, but rather to expand modern man's imagination to the dimensions of Trinitarian faith'.

But Archbishop Williams' conception of orthodoxy, as he describes it in his book on Arius, is of a 'making difficult' of a Gospel buried under the familiarities of folk piety. His thought is difficult, written in an idiom that is both allusive and elusive in its range and opacity. This new book by his former pupil Rupert Shortt, who is now religious editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, thus does notable service in offering a succinct introduction to Archbishop Williams' life and thought to the wider audience that his new appointment has drawn. He uses unpublished material and extensive interviews with friends and colleagues and he immediately rescues his subject from the reductive simplifications of those journalists who attempted to label him a 'liberal' in an abortive search for a newsworthy successor to John Robinson and David Jenkins. Shortt describes Archbishop Williams as a 'radical traditionalist' who is subversive in his ability to arrive at fresh conclusions via orthodox paths.

There are one hundred and twenty-five pages of text divided into four clear but demanding chapters. A long biographical chapter

traces the course of Archbishop Williams' life to date. It follows him from the Presbyterian Church of Wales to the Anglo-Catholic parish of All Saints, Oystermouth, across the bay from Swansea, where he was mentored by its Vicar, Father Eddie Hughes. Cambridge theology in the late 1960s offered the chance to encounter the philosophical engagement and moral intensity of Professor Donald MacKinnon. A doctorate at Oxford explored modern Russian Orthodox thought under the supervision of Canon Donald Allchin, then Warden of Fairacres. After teaching at Mirfield, he was ordained, having returned to teach theology in Cambridge. From there he went to become Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in Oxford in 1987. Shortt acknowledges Augustine as probably Archbishop Williams' greatest intellectual influence of all and, like Augustine returning from Milan to Africa, he returned home to Wales to become Bishop of Monmouth, and, later Archbishop of Wales. Shortt deftly evokes his character in these pages; brilliant and melancholy, intensely private and yet with a *disponibilité d'espirit* that draws the vulnerable to him, his humility and charity suggesting that his scholarship proceeds from what the Russians he studied called 'integral knowledge' of the divine. He is a theologian who knows that 'failures of understanding are failures of praying' (p. 81).

Instead of attempting an overview of Archbishop Williams' major academic writings, Shortt's chapter on his philosophy and theology elucidates his thought by presenting his recent reflections on the possibility of thinking beyond the secular, on the Incarnation, and on the Spirit. While Archbishop Williams' reverence for Wittgenstein is noted all too briefly, his intriguing affinity with Hegel's great system is outlined at greater length. Shortt emphasizes his belief in the inseparability of theology and spirituality and the coherence of his thinking before beginning a chapter on his spiritual teaching which draws on unpublished papers on the Desert Fathers and the Dark Night of the Soul, as well as his small book of meditations on three icons of Our Lady, originally written for a diocesan pilgrimage to Walsingham. Shortt offers evidence here for

his description of Archbishop Williams as a theologian of *ressourcement* who returns to the study of Christian tradition in order to nourish debate in a context in which he sharply diagnoses 'complacency and acquisitiveness all around', and a carelessness about the language of faith among Christians that provides endless scope for self-delusion and spiritual infantalism' (p. 102).

Shortt's final chapter on politics recounts Archbishop Williams' sympathetic account of liberation theology and the way in which he finds much Anglican social thought hopelessly compromised by a temptation to sacralize the existing order, as well as his thinking on poverty, the contemporary socialist agenda, and on globalization. Archbishop Williams emerges as a socialist capable of strident language about the free market. This final chapter is more critical of Archbishop Williams than any of the others. One commentator is quoted as damning him with the faint praise that 'he has an above average non-specialist grasp of the problem'!

Shortt can cite more criticism of Archbishop Williams in his final chapter because he suggests that he is more plain-spoken about politics than about theology. One of the frustrations of such a brief treatment, despite its rigour and clarity, is its inability to really penetrate what has been called the 'carefully judged unclarity' of Archbishop Williams' theology. Where exactly would he stand, for example, in recent debates between the Chicago and Yale schools in America? Would he finally be a friend or foe to the controversial Radical Orthodoxy project of his most brilliant pupil John Milbank, to whom he seems to stand in a relation something like that between the saintly Lancelot Andrewes and his polemical disciple William Laud? Milbank has described him as uninterested in managing decline. Either we go down fighting or we return. Maurice Cowling, in his great and neglected history of religion and public doctrine in modern England, spoke of the theology of Michael Ramsey as finally inadequate to the demands of such a fight. The theology so admirably outlined by Rupert Shortt promises more. But now history will be its final reviewer.

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ANGLICANISM: THE ANSWER TO MODERNITY by Duncan Dormor, Jack McDonald, and Jeremy Caddick, The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.**,** London, 2003. £14.99.

This collection of essays is loosely strung together under the headings of 'Presence, Inquiry, Engagement, Identity', with a substantial introduction by the contributing editors, and a preface by Archbishop Rowan Willliams: the effect is an attractive picture of a group of colleagues who are being respectful of each other's concerns and insights, and who are rooted within the tradition of *Anglicana Ecclesiana.*

The witness of Christians in the society in which they live sometimes takes the form of protest and resistance. In modern liberal western culture, the language of protest is characteristic of the language of human rights, and Jeremy Caddick (following Alasdair MacIntyre) notes that protest is 'not communication; it is struggle'. The authors of this collection, however, are offering dialogue and conversation as a preferred Anglican mode of communication.

The eight contributors all have experience as Cambridge college deans. Their pastoral responsibility naturally involves the need to communicate from within the prevailing intellectual discourse, for the sake of making 'the workings of the college human and its worship divine', (in the pithy formulation of Jo Bailey Wells). This requires an attitude of great trust and confidence and hope; it means being first prepared to listen to secular culture in terms of its own understanding of itself, and then to find ways in which Christian teaching and insight can be put at the service of human flourishing. 'Serious worship of God and being taken seriously by the world are complementary projects, and not opposed', is how Timothy Jenkins describes the Anglican 'answer'. So, in terms of specific situations, how does this work?

Jeremy Caddick explores recent headline cases of medical ethics: situations where women have wanted to have children, using previously stored embryos and against the wishes of their former

partners; and at the other end of life, the suffering of Diane Pretty, and her appeal for the 'right to die'. Duncan Dormor ponders the implications of the modern social norm of cohabiting before marriage, and the church's consequent need to restate and reposition its role recognizing the reality of human circumstances, and from there to offer ministry to couples. This is not about 'selling out', or watering down the faith. It is a way of showing compassion and respect, in the face of our human needs and desires and limitations. Thus whilst Caddick and Dormor take seriously both the claims of post-enlightenment models of individual autonomy and human rights legislation, they argue that these prove to be impoverished models of what it is to be human, and reductive of the human capacity for relationship. Scripture connects us to the life of God, and invites us into covenant relationship. The Church can work to expand our understanding and re-orientate (convert) our minds and hearts. Duncan Dormor quotes a heartfelt passage from St Augustine, where he is striving urgently and passionately to extend the boundaries of marriage to include his youthful faithful relationship with his concubine; and then later a passage from a representative thinker of modernity, Anthony Giddens, which is coolly utilitarian in defining the 'pure relationship' in contractual terms reminiscent of the free market.

Another reviewer might complain that the historical riches of the Anglican heritage are being ignored, and that there is moreover a rather exclusive focus on the nature of Establishment and Church-State relations in England. But attentiveness to local situations, and a willingness to grapple with questions that are actually being raised in society is Anglicanism's gift of 'being there' in humble witness of Christ's presence to humanity.

SISTER DIANA SLG

LANCELOT ANDREWES, Private Prayers, trans. David Scott.
GEORGE HERBERT, Verse and Prose, ed. Wendy Cope.
THOMAS TRAHERNE, Poetry and Prose, ed. Denise Inge.
SPCK 2003. £12.99 each.

The seventeenth-century writers represented in these three small volumes under the general editorship of David Scott, have in common a preoccupation with God and the life of the Spirit which resonates in their prose and in their poetry as well as in their sometimes visionary perception of the world. Not for nothing are these books presented under the general heading *The Golden Age of Spiritual Writing*, and in one of them, a selection of the work of Lancelot Andrewes, David Scott has translated and expounded *The Private Prayers,* that wonderful series of meditations, in a manner that is sensitive, imaginative and intensely prayerful.

Wendy Cope's volume on George Herbert includes a valuable introduction to her wide selection of Herbert's poetry as well as some of his prose, and it is hard to resist the temptation to quote from much of it.

In Denise Inge's choice of poetry and prose by Thomas Traherne, the reader discovers a great deal that may hitherto have been unknown in the thought of a poet of exceptional theological brilliance. 'The contemplation of Eternity', says Traherne, 'maketh the soul immortal', and it is clear, even within the scope of these short studies, that this preoccupation is common to all three writers. It is not clear why, disappointingly, the introductory preface to the volumes is in each case exactly the same. But this is a mild criticism to set against the pleasure and satisfaction the reader derives from handling the books, produced by SPCK with an artistry that enhances the literary and critical value of each of them.

Paradox is at the heart of metaphysical prose and poetry, and the fusion of thought and feeling so integral to the work of these writers has affinity with the moods and uncertainties of our own, less questioning, less faithful age. It is often said that the seventeenth century has much in common with the twentieth (and

now with the twenty-first), in terms of discord, struggle, scientific exploration, war and general unrest. If this is so, it would be good to think that the Herbert who wrote in ‘The Search’:

Whither, O whither art thou fled,
My Lord, my Love?

had his counterpart among the poets of our own day, but that remains to be seen. Meanwhile, George Herbert’s ‘Prayer’ speaks to us still:

Eternal manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the soul’s blood,
The land of spices, something understood.

ANN BONSOR

BOOKS RECEIVED

In Sure & Certain Hope: Liturgies, Prayers and Readings for Funerals and Memorials, written and compiled by Paul Sheppy, SCM-Canterbury Press, 2003. £12.99.

Crowning the Year: Autumn in the Christian Tradition, by Martin Dudley, SPCK, 2003. £8.99.

Prayers for Healing: A Burrswood Companion, by Michael Fulljames and Michael Harper, SCM-Canterbury Press, 2003. £9.99.

Seek the Silences with Thomas Merton: Reflections on Identity, Community and Transformative Action, by Charles Ringma, SPCK, 2003. £9.99.

A Priest to the Temple or The Country Parson with Selected Poems by George Herbert, edited and introduced by Ronald Blythe, SCM-Canterbury Press, 2003. £9.99.

The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation by Thomas Merton, edited and with an introduction by William H Shannon, SPCK, 2003.

Introducing Spiritual Direction, by Peter Ball, SPCK, 2003. £8.99.

The Cockleshell Pilgrim: A Medieval Journey to Compostela, by Katherine Lack, SPCK, 2003. £9.99.

Joy of Heaven: Springs of Christian Spirituality, edited by Benedicta Ward and Ralph Waller, SPCK, 2003.£11.99.

For Love Alone, Mother Mary Agnes, SOLI, SPCK, 2003.

Lost in Wonder, Esther de Waal, SCM-Canterbury Press, 2003. £9.99.

Hear Our Prayer: Gospel-based Intercessions for Sundays, Holy Days and Festivals, Raymond Chapman, SCM-Canterbury Press , 2003. £12.99.

How To Be An Anglican: A Beginner's Guide to Anglican Life and Thought, SCM-Canterbury Press, 2003. £7.99..