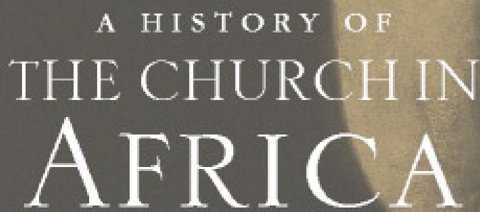


BENGT SUNDKLER
& CHRISTOPHER STEED

CAMBRIDGE

more information - www.cambridge.org/052158342X

This page intentionally left blank

The late Bengt Sundkler was the leading authority on African Christian Churches, and he pioneered the study of Independent Churches in Africa. He had a long career as a missionary, in South Africa and in Tanzania, and he became the first Lutheran Bishop of Bukoba in Tanzania, before returning to Sweden as Professor in Church History at the University of Uppsala. Christopher Steed was Bengt Sundkler's research assistant, and he currently teaches African history at the University of Uppsala.

In this magisterial work, Sundkler and Steed review the entire history of the development of Christianity in all regions of the continent. In contrast to the conventional focus on the missionary enterprise, they place the African converts at the centre of the study. African Christians, typically drawn from the margins of the society, reinterpreted the Christian message, proselytized, governed local congregations, and organized Independent Churches. Emphasizing African initiatives in the process of Christianization, Sundkler and Steed argue that its development was shaped by African kings and courts, the history of labour migration, and local experiences. of colonization. This long-awaited book will become the standard reference text on African Christian Churches.

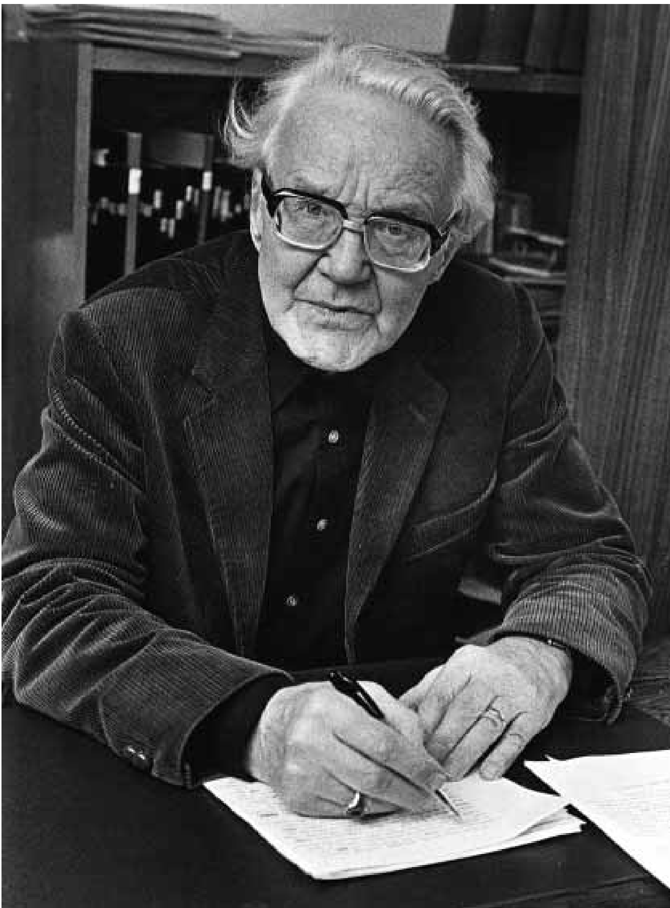
A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

BENGT SUNDKLER AND CHRISTOPHER STEED

STUDIA MISSIONALIA UPSALIENSIA LXXIV

In honour and memory of Bengt Sundkler, who was the founder of Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia and the editor of its first twenty-seven volumes, *A History of the Church in Africa* is also included in that series.

Cambridge University Press acknowledges with gratitude the generous assistance it has received towards its publication from the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, the Swedish Mission Council, the Faculty of Theology – Leander Foundation for Mission Research, University of Uppsala, the Church of Sweden Mission, the Finnish Missionary Society, and the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).



Bengt Sundkler 1909–1995

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

BENGT SUNDKLER

AND

CHRISTOPHER STEED

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

© Cambridge University Press 2004

First published in printed format 2000

ISBN 0-511-03879-8 eBook (Adobe Reader)
ISBN 0-521-58342-X hardback

CONTENTS

List of maps xiii
Acknowledgements xiv
List of abbreviations xviii

INTRODUCTION 1
Bengt Sundkler

PART I: THE FIRST FOURTEEN HUNDRED YEARS

1 THE BEGINNINGS 7
Egypt 7
North Africa 21
Nubia 30
Aksum 34

PART II: THE MIDDLE AGES 1415–1787

2 MARITIME CONNECTIONS 42
Explorers of seas and souls 42
West Africa 45
Kongo and Soyo 49
Angola 62
Protestants at the Cape of Good Hope 64
South-eastern Africa and Mombasa 67
Ethiopia: reversal and well-nigh catastrophe 73

PART III: THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY 1787–1919

3 OVERVIEW TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY 81
Two diverse maps 81
African religions 91
The West and Africa: humanitarianism and imperialism 97
Missionary societies 100

4 NORTH AND NORTH-EASTERN AFRICA 124
Egypt 124
The Maghreb 132
Sudan 136
Ethiopia 150

5 WESTERN AFRICA 169
Senegambia 169
Sierra Leone 179
Liberia 195
Ivory Coast 196
Ghana 201
Togo 220
Benin (Dahomey) 221
Nigeria 224
Cameroon 259
Gabon 273

6 WEST-CENTRAL AFRICA 278
Introduction 278
The Catholics 287
The Protestants and the Rivers 302
Angola 317

7 SOUTHERN AFRICA 323
Introduction 323
Cape of Good Hope? 328
Southern Nguni 344
Northern Nguni 362
Lesotho 374
The Pedi Drama 383
Early migrant labour from the north 391

On the Rand – South Africa 1880–1919 399
The Tswana 427
Namibia 441

8 SOUTH-CENTRAL AFRICA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN 445
The way north to Zimbabwe 445
David Livingstone 454
Zambia: The Lozi, the King and the missionary 459
Malawi 467
Mozambique 482
The Church in the Indian Ocean 487
Madagascar 1895–1920 502

9 EAST AFRICA 510
Introduction 510
The Tanzanian Coast 519
Southern Tanzania 530
Northern Tanzania 540
Kenya 552

10 EAST-CENTRAL AFRICA 562
The Church at the Kings' Way 562
Buganda, the *kabaka* and the Missions 564
Other Kingdoms of Uganda 587
The lake margins: the eight Bukoba kingdoms 593
Rwanda and Burundi 597
Ushirombo 599
Lake Tanganyika and Baudoinville 602
Ufipa 603
The Bemba 605
Conclusion 606

PART IV: THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE 1920–1959

11 CONTINENTAL PANORAMAS 608
The colonial state 608
Two world wars 610
Time and expectation in the Church 620
Church strategies 626

Education 636
Islam–Muslim responses to Christian education 646

12 LOCAL PERSPECTIVES 659
Catechists and catechumens 659
Preaching 665
The ambiguity of healing 673
The invisibility and visibility of women 679

13 NORTH AND NORTH-EASTERN AFRICA 686
The Maghreb 686
Egypt 687
Sudan 691
Ethiopia 694

14 WEST AFRICA 700
Francophone West Africa 700
Sierra Leone 706
Ghana 714
Nigeria 729

15 CENTRAL AFRICA 750
Cameroon 750
Congo–Brazzaville 757
Zaïre–Congo 762
Angola 783

16 SOUTHERN AFRICA 786
Zambia 786
Malawi 795
Zimbabwe 800
Mozambique 816
South Africa 818
Namibia 841
Madagascar 843

17 EASTERN AFRICA 846
Introduction 846
Uganda 848
Rwanda and Burundi 861

The East African Revival 863
Tanzania 865
Kenya 883

PART V: INDEPENDENT AFRICA 1960–92

18 INTRODUCTION TO INDEPENDENT AFRICA 901
Church and State in Africa 901
Liberation and the community 907
African church music 916

19 NORTH AND NORTH-EASTERN AFRICA 918
The Maghreb 918
Egypt 920
Ethiopia 927

20 WEST AFRICA 932
Francophone West Africa 932
Ghana 943
Nigeria 947

21 CENTRAL AFRICA 957
Cameroon 957
Congo 960
Gabon, Central African Republic and Chad 964
Zaïre–Congo 965
Rwanda and Burundi 968
Angola 971

22 SOUTHERN AFRICA 974
Zambia 974
Malawi 978
Zimbabwe 981
Mozambique 984
South Africa 987
Namibia 996
Madagascar 998

23 EAST AFRICA 1000
Kenya 1000
Uganda 1006
Tanzania 1011

24 ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVES 1018
The Catholics and Vatican II 1018
The Protestants, the Bible and Ecumenical co-operation 1025
Independent Churches 1032
Islam in Independent Africa 1035

EPILOGUE 1038

Notes 1041
Bibliography 1099
Name index 1148
Subject index 1175

MAPS

2.1.	Ethnic groups and key centres of Ethiopia.	*page* 43
5.1.	Ethnic groups and coastal towns of West Africa.	170
6.1.	Ethnic groups and key towns of West-Central Africa.	279
7.1.	Key towns and centres of South Africa.	324
7.2.	Ethnic groups of Southern Africa.	325
9.1.	Ethnic groups of East Africa.	511
9.2.	Key towns and centres in East Africa.	512
10.1.	The kingdoms and key towns and centres in East-Central Africa.	563

The maps only include place names and ethnic groups referred to in the text.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge with thanks the diligent service provided by the following research libraries: Carolina Rediviva – Uppsala University Library, and the Nordic Africa Institute, also in Uppsala; the Statsbibliotek, Aarhus; and the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. We record our debt to the following mission archives: the Holy Ghost Fathers at Chevilly-Larue, Paris; the White Fathers, and the Capuchin Historical Institute, both in Rome; the Jesuits at Heverlee, Louvain; the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society; the Church Missionary Society, now located at Birmingham University Library; the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, kept at Rhodes House Library, Oxford; the London Missionary Society (now the Council for World Mission), and the Methodist Missionary Society, both deposited with the School of Oriental and African Studies, London; Action Partners (formerly the Sudan United Mission), Bawtry, near Doncaster; the American Board, New York. We are very grateful for the financial support received from the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Stockholm, and the Church of Sweden Mission, Uppsala.

Before his death, Bengt Sundkler had worked for over a decade and a half on researching and writing this African church history. With such a lengthy period of preparation, it was perhaps inevitable that the scholarly apparatus of such a large book became both exceedingly complex and somewhat irregular. Since his passing in 1995, it has been necessary to review the accuracy of and complement the factual material presented, particularly with regard to source references and the system of notation references that Bengt left behind. Although these tasks have to a large extent been satisfactorily accomplished, there is a modicum of such references where it has proved impossible to give adequate source acknowledgement.

In the twenty years over which this book took form, we express our gratitude for the erudite counsel we have received from many scholars and friends around the world, both living and those now of blessed memory. This advice and guidance was particularly appreciated as invariably it was

accompanied by an encouragement to us to persevere with writing this history of the Church in Africa, and by a forbearance with our many requests for information. Although many may have forgotten the help they once gave us, we wish to record our indebtedness to the following individuals:

In Australia: D. Dorward and Norman Etherington.

In Belgium: Fr François Bontinck, Fr Omer Degrijse, Fr P. Raymaekers, Fr Auguste Roeykens and Fr Marcel Storme.

In Cameroon: Jean Kotto and Fr Engelbert Mveng.

In Denmark: Johannes Aagaard, Holger Bernt Hansen, Hans Iversen, Lissi Rasmussen and Ane Marie Bak Rasmussen.

In Finland: Juhani Koponen, Henrik Smedjebacka, John Stotesbury and Lloyd Swantz.

In France: George Balandier, Fr Jean Barassin, Fr Paule Brasseur, Henri Brunschwig, Fr Paul Coulon, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Fr Joseph Cuoq, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Fr Christian de Mare, Fr Bernard Noël, Françoise Raison-Jourde and François Renault.

In Germany: Heinrich Balz, Bairu Tafla, Hans Jürgen Becken, Peter Beyerhaus, Hans-Werner Gensichen, Erhard Kamphausen, Frieder Ludwig and Theo Sundermeier.

In Ghana: Christian Baeta, (and in France) Francis Bartels, Kwame Bediako and John Pobee.

In Great Britain: Archbishop Donald Arden, Bishop Simon Barrington-Ward, Brian Beck, David Birmingham, John Blacking, Bishop Stanley Booth-Clibborn, Brian Brown, Bishop Leslie Brown, Peter Clarke, Gervase Clarence-Smith, Kenneth Cracknell, Allan Easter, John Fage, W. Frend, Humphrey Fisher, Christopher Fyfe, G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, Deborah Gaitskell, Paul Gifford, Sidney Groves, P. E. H. Hair, Andrew Hake, John Hargreaves, Adrian Hastings, Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, Cecilia Irvine, Douglas Johnson, (and in Malawi) Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, Rosemary Keen, Elliott Kendall, Martin Legassick, Ian Linden, John Lonsdale, John McCracken, Peter McKenzie, Fergus Macpherson, Shula Marks, Albert Mosley, J. D. Y. Peel, Margaret Peil, Louise Pirouet, Terence Ranger, Andrew Roberts, Andrew Ross, Isaac Schapera, George Shepperson, Fr Aylward Shorter, John Taylor, Jack Thompson, Michael Twaddle, (and in New Zealand) Harold Turner, Werner Ustorf, Andrew Walls, Richard Werbner and Jean Woods.

In Italy and the Vatican City: Teobaldo Filesi, Fr Willi Henkel, Fr René Lamey and Fr Josef Metzler.

In Kenya: Fr John Baur, (and in the United States) David Barrett, James Chege, Agnes Aboum, Jose Chipenda, John Gatu, Bishop David Gitari and Fr Arnold Groll.

In Nigeria: Jacob Ajayi, Emmanuel Ayandele, Fr Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, (and in New Zealand) Elizabeth Isichei, and Godwin Tasie.

In Norway: Sigmund Edland, Torstein Jørgensen, Ludvig Munthe, Olav G. Myklebust and Jarle Simensen.

In Sierra Leone: Edward Fasholé-Luke and Eldred Jones.

In South Africa: William Beinart, Sibusiso Bengu, David Bosch, Nancy Charton, D. Crafford, T. R. H. Davenport, Inus Daneel, Allie Dubb, Donald Cragg, Jeff Guy, Sheila Hindson-Meintjies, Janet Hodgson, J. W. Hofmeyr, Tom Lodge, Anne and Cecil Luck, G. E. van der Merwe, Bishop Stanley Mogoba, Beyers Naudé, Charles van Onselen, Gerhardus Oosthuizen, Jeffrey Peires, John Rees, Gabriel Setiloane, Peter Storey, Archbishop Robert Selby Taylor, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Martin West, Michael Whisson, Donovan Williams, Francis Wilson and Monica Wilson.

In Sweden: Gustav Arén, Sigbert Axelson, Bishop Rune Backlund, Axel-Ivar Berglund, Jan Bergman, Ingrid Dahlqvist, Karl Eric Ericson, Ezra Gebremedhin, Alf Helgesson, Jan Henningsson, Carl-Johan Hellberg, Stiv Jakobsson, Anita Jacobson Widding, Bishop Jonas Jonson, David Lagergren, Aasulv Lande, Birgitta Larsson, Viveca Halldin Norberg, Björn Ryman, Birgitta Rubenson-Jonson, Samuel Rubenson and Sven Rubenson.

In Switzerland: Hans Debrunner and Paul Jenkins.

In Tanzania: Anza Lema, Wilson Niwagila and Fr Frits Versteijnen.

In the United States: Gerald Anderson, Thomas Beidelman, Henry Bucher, Willy de Craemer, Jean and John Comaroff, Mary Crawford, Donald Crummey, Richard Elphick, James Fernandez, Charles Forman, Dean Gilliland, Rosalind Hackett, Robert Hill, William Hutchison, Noël King, Janet and Wyatt MacGaffey, Phyllis Martin, Birger Pearson, Benjamin Ray, Lamin Sanneh, David Shank, Leonard Thompson, Jan Vansina and Marcia Wright.

In Zimbabwe: Canaan Banana, Ngwabi Bhebe, Ester Gwele, Elleck Mashingaidze, Wilson Nyilika, O. Ramushu and Archdeacon O. Somkence.

We especially wish to thank Aina Abrahamson and Krista Hurty Berglund for typing and revising drafts of the manuscript; Jocelyn Murray for assistance in the early stages of this book; Roland Oliver and Richard Gray for their close concern and encouragement; Jessica Kuper and the Syndics of

the Cambridge University Press for their long sufferance with us and their dedication in seeing this book to press; Jenny Oates for her advice and acumen in copy-editing the final manuscript; and Carl Fredrik Hallencreutz and Marja-Liisa Swantz for steadfast support over many years.

ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
ABFMS	American Baptist Foreign Mission Society
AIM	Africa Inland Mission
AME	African Methodist Episcopal Church
AMECEA	Association of Members of Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa
AMEZ	African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
BCMS	Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society
BFBS	British and Foreign Bible Society
BMS	Baptist Missionary Society
CICM	Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mercy – the Scheut Fathers
CMML	Christian Missions in Many Lands
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CR	Community of the Resurrection
CSSp	Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans)
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
HGF	Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans)
IMC	International Missionary Council
LMS	London Missionary Society
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MMS	Methodist Missionary Society
OMI	Oblates of Mary Immaculate
OSB	Benedictine Order
PEMS	Paris Evangelical Missionary Society
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SAGM	South Africa General Mission
SIM	Sudan Interior Mission
SJ	Jesuits – Society of Jesus
SMA	Society of African Missions

SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts
SUM	Sudan United Mission
SVD	Society of the Divine Word (Societas Verbi Divini)
TEF	Theological Education Fund
UBS	United Bible Societies
UMCA	Universities' Mission to Central Africa
USPG	United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
WCC	World Council of Churches
WEC	Worldwide Evangelization Crusade
WF	Society of Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers)
WMMS	Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society

INTRODUCTION
BENGT SUNDKLER

'A bitter pill which the majority of writers on Christianity and missionary activities in Africa should swallow is that they have not been writing African Church History.'[1] This statement by Professors J. F. Ade Ajayi and E. A. Ayandele must serve as an introductory remark to our Church history of Africa. The two Nigerian scholars developed their point by claiming that hitherto Church history had been written 'as if the Christian Church were in Africa, but not of Africa'.[2] It stressed the missionary presence while forgetting or neglecting whatever there was of an African initiative, an African dimension of African Church history. The sort of book which my Nigerian colleagues may have had in mind was not least the detailed and lengthy Mission histories, produced in the pre-Independence period and stamped by this fact. Of necessity this implied a view centred in some Western metropolis and in certain mission societies there. This view of Christianization was to treat it as a Western invasion in sub-Saharan Africa. The continent was mapped out according to mission societies and mission fields.

Confronted with the challenge of Professors Ajayi and Ayandele in the 1970s, I was asked to take on the task of writing a Church history of Africa, covering nearly 2,000 years and an entire continent. How could one attempt this? History, I realized is somehow related to the standpoint and experience of the writer. My own Africa background was largely limited to two Lutheran Churches: one in Zululand and the other in north-west Tanzania, with both of which I encountered situations which seemed to open up more comprehensive perspectives. The Zululand missionary in this case, throwing caution and prudence aside, entered into empathetic contact with what was then termed 'the Sects' or 'Native Separatist Churches' and launched out on a research which was published in 1948 as *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* and as *Zulu Zion* in 1976. The Bukoba experience during the Second World War brought me into contact with an 'orphaned' Church or rather a self-governing Church of immense vitality and liveliness, resulting in two books: *Ung kyrka i Tanganyika* (1948, in Swedish) and *Bara Bukoba: Church and Community in Tanzania* (1974 in Swedish, 1980 in English and 1990 in Swahili). The

opportunity to compare these two Churches was useful, more particularly as in 1953 I was part of an IMC (International Missionary Council) Theological Commission and could take this comparison one step further. Through comparison one discovers the distinctive characteristics of each.

In the meantime, the African scene changed as did the writers on Africa: the historical dimension of African reality came to the fore. A new generation of history scholars appeared inspired by Professors Roland Oliver, Richard Gray, Terence Ranger and others. These British history professors did not neglect the Churches as history professors in other countries are wont to; in fact they pioneered both research and interpretation of African Church history. It began with Professor Roland Oliver's *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (1952). With the 1950s and the 1960s there followed a new period in African history-writing. My work was enriched by relating it to the ongoing international process of African history-writing achieved by this new generation of African and Western scholars. On every point, for every African country and period, I have benefited from these contributions.

My own perspective also changed while serving the Church in Tanzania as a bishop in the early 1960s. I realized the need to re-interpret African religions and church history from a distinct African perspective. At that stage I was encouraged by the advance represented by studies into the history of local African cults, studies inspired by Professor Terence Ranger and others who adopted an historical approach to the study of African religion. A new image of the history of African religion emerges. Instead of the earlier image of a static, immobile religion, to be changed only through the invasion of Western imperialism and its Western faith, we are presented with a dynamic, multifaceted image of local territorial cults undergoing change, sometimes over a period of some 400 years. These cults were exposed to new agencies of change during the nineteenth-century wars and epidemics, which introduced new ecological and economic factors.

However, having recognized the need for a new continent-wide African Church history I had to face a serious question: should such a church history be attempted by a Westerner, an outsider, a European scholar in his shielded study? I see this point almost as clearly as others do. I have tried to place the emerging church, throughout the continent, within African structures such as population movements and resulting refugee groups, within the relentlessly ongoing movement over the savannah, through the forests and along the rivers. As I became aware in Bukoba, the Christian message in the local village was largely transmitted by African initiative, more particularly by groups of young converts looking towards a new fellowship in and beyond

village and ethnic community. With all its limitations this book focuses not on Western partners but on African actors.

Although I had some share in African studies with my *Bantu Prophets* and other works, I would like to draw attention to the relationship between the study of Independent churches and that of the mission-related Churches. The more established Western- or mission-related churches have often been relegated out of sight by a hunt for something 'authentically Africa'! Yet it is to the Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist etc. Churches that the overwhelming majority of African Christians have belonged and still do. The current depreciation of these 'established' churches is as mistaken as was once the neglect of the 'Independent Churches'. The term 'Independent Church' has in fact now lost some of its glamour, when all churches are in some sense independent. Consider those great numbers – 3,000 or 6,000 – which have exercised their fascination for some time. For South Africa one should perhaps refer to them not as some 3,000 different groups but as *one* charismatic movement with local and personal variations. The Independents are not just another world, peripheral to the real thing. They are actively shaping the *milieu* and expectations in city locations, influencing both Catholic and Protestant, to the extent that an African Catholic archbishop exercising his ministry in a Central African capital, serving also as a healer of the sick (to his great surprise he discovered that his hands could mediate a therapeutic power) was removed from his high office and transferred to Rome.

The role of the individual must be seen as part of vast and fundamental movements and tendencies. Nevertheless, the question could at least be put as to whether it is not a special obligation for church history to emphasize also the role of the individual and the extent to which over-arching trends are modified by the peculiarities of the individual. No other movement in Africa allows the individual African personality to stand out as clearly as does the movement of the Church, yet even here the available biographical and archival material is limited and patchy. Not many archives equal those of the Moravian churches. The two-centuries-old Moravian international rule was that each Christian individual should write or relate his/her life story, as it turned out with significant differences between the life stories of men and women. These biographies were later gathered in Moravian archives and are significant for African Church history.

In places the Church history of Africa is a brief affair; elsewhere it is a matter of 1,900 years of history. The first 1,000 years – in Egypt, Nubia, North Africa and Ethiopia – play a special role in our presentation. Attending the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in

Lund, Sweden, 1982, and the Sixth International Conference for Nubian Studies in Uppsala, Sweden, 1986 provided me with the opportunity to discuss matters with specialists in these fields.

What is specific about the history of the church? Is the church anything more than just another kind of sociological construct, informed by its particular ideology; a religious department fashioned by economic forces and social tensions and struggles? The political, social and economic backgrounds are therefore duly emphasized here, but this is not all. This book is a Church history dealing with religious movements, religious institutions and religious personalities. I quote Professor Lamin Sanneh:

> Christianity in Africa has had more than its share of the attention of Western writers, including throngs of social scientists and their disciples, most of whom are interested in everything except the Christian religion. It is as if in our concern to describe the sunlight we concentrate on the shadows, using that derivative relationship as the justification for a reductionist approach.[3]

While as far as possible integrating this church history into the wider frame of African history, my interpretation is basically not just a secular history with the church somehow thrown in, but a church history in its own right. This claim is vindicated more clearly in some parts of the book than in others – in itself an admission that in a work of this kind, conceived and written over a period of twenty years, it was not always easy to retain the same level and tone of interpretation.

If there is a need for a new, overall look at African church history, this does not only stem from the nineteenth- and twentieth-century studies. I must at least hint at the new image of the Donatists (W. Frend), the surprisingly rich new material on the church in Nubia and the great contributions to the study of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the Congo area (Jadin, Bontinck, Rich and Gray etc.). In the nineteenth-century Catholic Church the two great opponents or competitors, Cardinal Lavigerie and Father Duparquet, both stressed their strategies as a 'reprise', a recapture of Catholic positions lost in the Congo and elsewhere in the eighteenth century.

A synchronic comparison between the regions forces itself on the writer dealing with the nineteenth century. The concept of regions might be disputed, for the primary unit is of course the local congregation and the local diocese or church. However, particularly for the nineteenth century, there is a need for this concept of regions. It is suggested that the evangelistic dynamic in the various parts of Africa was sparked by an African equivalent of F. Jackson Turner's 'frontier' idea. The 'line of advance' stretched from

Sierra Leone to Nigeria, Fernando Po and Cameroon in the west, and from the Cape of Good Hope to Zambezi and beyond – sometimes referred to as the 'Church's hinterland'. This 'frontier', and the ever-receding 'regions beyond' are recognized both by the Independent Churches and the mission-related Churches. At the same time we stress the wide chronological discrepancy between the regions. West and South had a lead of half a century – or two to three generations – over the Congo and the East. There is a similar chronological discrepancy *within* the regions: the obvious example is the difference in West Africa between the Coast with its early international and Christian contacts, and later Christian activity far inland.

The concept of a one-volume work may be criticized. But all history is selective, and in this case distinct pedagogical needs determine this selection. In the process of Christianization we can discern a selectivity relating to both communicating parties, Selective Giving and Selective Appropriation.

This book is an unashamedly ecumenical study highlighting Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Independent work. Here the book appears at a propitious time. For centuries the two competing confessions, Catholic and Protestant, treated one another with damning silence – plodding along on different sides of the same hill or river, relying on the same vernacular related to the same traditional African religion, dealing with similar daily experiences in the district in hot season and rainy season – yet never meeting. The other party did not or should not exist.

I know of one exception to this rule (see p. 298), a meeting between a Belgian Catholic missionary just arrived in Zaïre, and a British Baptist missionary with long experience from the villages along the River. To their surprise they found themselves as fellow travellers for a day in the same train compartment on the new railway from Boma to Kinshasa (Léopoldville). Fortunately overcoming an initial embarrassment they soon were engaged in a lively and constructive debate on mission evangelistic methods, one of the fundamental problems of Congo missionary policy at the time.

I have had the ambition to attempt an ecumenical history of the Church in Africa. This can mean different things to different people. I take it to mean a book where both Catholics and non-Catholics might find an interpretation of the essential intentions and achievements of their respective churches. An attempt of this nature could only be made now, after Vatican II, the great event of twentieth-century church history. Vatican II gave rise to the possibility of a new order of things, also in Africa. This Church history of mine would love to be a contribution towards a saner order of things. During all these years of work I have been amazed at the persistent generosity which I have met from the Catholic side, from archivists and

other scholars in Rome, Paris and Louvain, and from other Catholic scholars in the West as well as in Africa.

The generous opening of Catholic mission archives, after Vatican II, meant a new opportunity. It was an eye-opener to discover that these Catholic archives were in the care of men and women elected at an early age by their respective societies, thus acquiring an excellent command of their task as life-long caretakers of their epistolary treasures. My correspondence over many years with them and their colleagues can now be found in the University Library, Uppsala, Sweden, and can hopefully serve new generations of Church history scholars.

My early International Missionary Council contacts with non-Roman archives and libraries served as an introduction to these rich treasures and I thank them all. Protestant mission archives form the basis of certain parts of this book and it goes without saying, as with the Catholic archival treasures, that only a minor percentage has been consulted, but none the less significant in the interpretation of developments.

The strength of the Protestants was reduced by the fact of their divisiveness. The influence of the International Missionary Council, with its incomparable leader J. H. Oldham and his American counterpart in Zaïre, Dr Emory Ross, held the Protestant forces together. In many African countries Protestants were for decades excluded from whatever there was of the benefits of colonial rule: their share of land for church and school purposes was infinitesimal; administration assistance to their school personnel was imperceptible. Despite this, Protestants developed their own school system, inspiring new generations of youngsters for a new world.

The heart of the matter

Reception of the Gospel is, on the deepest level, an expression of African peoples' 'conscientization', by which they rise to a new awareness, a new conscientiousness kindled by faith in Jesus Christ and his message: 'I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly' (John 10:10). They could affirm a saving relationship to the Cross, to the Life and Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, creating in the hearts of men and women something gloriously new to be claimed and reclaimed in every new generation. Where this did not happen, there was stagnation and a stifling tradition. Where this did happen there was kindled a resolve, through the Church to serve and inspire individuals, groups, nations, and the continent. In the Church, in Christ, was 'a new creation, old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new' (2. Cor. 5:17).

I

THE BEGINNINGS

EGYPT

The Holy Refugees

It was as refugees, according to St Matthew, that the Holy Family came from Bethlehem to Egypt. In later Coptic tradition the pious story has followed the pilgrimage of the Holy Family from the Nile Delta all along the river to Asyut and back again, altogether a period of some three and a half years. Great miracles occurred during the passage. At place after place in a dry land, as the Divine Child stretched out his hand, fresh water wells would spring up and the trees would bow their heads; yes, the very palm tree to which the Mother held her hand during her birth-pangs gave the family shadow from the heat of the sun. (This has a Mediterranean background – *Leto*.) The sick were healed and the dead were raised again. South of Asyut – later to be one of the great centres of the Coptic Church – the Holy Family, having passed ruins of rock-temples and other holy buildings, found refuge in large rock-tombs from the early dynasties of Egyptian history.

This vivid tradition has more to say about the local Church – which has loved to narrate it – than about historical fact. It has been retold by generations and helped to make Egypt a 'holy land', *because* Jesus the Child and Mary, the Mother of God, by their holy presence, had made it so.[1]

The first chapter and the rest of the book

Twentieth-century literature devoted to the first thousand years of Church history of Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia and North Africa is immense. Finds of sources have added to our understanding of the forces which shaped the spirituality in the Church in those centuries. Archaeological excavations have brought to light invaluable documents and a fascinating world of

Christian art. The UNESCO campaign in the 1960s to save the culture hidden in the sands of Nubia has produced sensational results, and even now, innocent-looking mounds in the sands of the desert may hide buildings, ruins and documents which could change our entire outlook on certain periods of this history.

Scholarly congresses on Coptic Studies, Nubian Studies and Ethiopian Studies gather together scholars from around the world in order to report on and discuss new discoveries of material and perspectives. In view of all this truly impressive richness, the following brief pages attempt a rapid survey based on the volumes published by scholars and experts in this field.

This chapter on the first 1,500 years has a function of its own, related to the book as a whole. This part was written towards the end of the total enterprise. Here as elsewhere, but more so, selection was necessary, and we found *our* selective principle for this first chapter in the great themes which have been worked out for the following centuries. The survey of the first 1,000 years will be related to the general Church history of Africa, with its great themes such as Church and State, Church and indigenous culture, the city and rural population movements, theology and spirituality. Some of these themes, writ large for more recent centuries, will be found as it were, anticipated in those early centuries.

The Jewish Diaspora and the Beginnings of the Church

The first beginnings of the Church's history in the Nile Delta must be understood as closely related to the life of the Jewish Diaspora on the Mediterranean coastline. About the first 100 years of Christian beginnings in the Nile Delta, the fundamental fact of the relationship to, and dependence on, the Jewish community in the city stands out as of primary importance. The Jews represented a highly significant minority in Alexandria with a population of hundreds of thousands. In all of Egypt there were, at the time of Christ, about 1 million Jews, thus representing the largest Jewish community outside Palestine. Two of the five sections of the city into which Alexandria was divided were dominated by the Jews, their synagogues and their culture.

A leading spokesman for the Jewish Diaspora in Alexandria was Philo, philosopher and Bible expositor, international and cosmopolitan Jewish scholar, deeply influenced by Hellenistic culture and concerned with establishing areas of contact and understanding between Hellenism and Judaism. Alongside Philo and his assimilationalist teaching there also appeared the more conservative schools of Jewish thought, less given to allegorical

interpretation of the Scripture. It was here in Jewish Alexandria, that the Septuaginta translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek was created.

In this Jewish world, marked by the Torah and the Prophets, the Sabbath and the feasts, the first Christian groups from Judaea appeared as missionaries, refugees and traders. While at first possibly seeking refuge in the synagogue they were soon prepared to proclaim their astounding and necessarily divisive message, that the Messiah, the Saviour and the Lord had indeed come, in Jesus of Nazareth. Scholars are at present attempting to identify the very place in the city of Alexandria where the first Christians congregated for worship, agape and eucharist, in an area of the Jewish neighbourhood, later known, from the fourth century on, as Boukolou.[2]

A far-reaching generalization can be made at the outset: this religion of the Messiah, proclaimed by Jewish individuals, families and groups, came into Egypt and Africa from the East. It was an Eastern religion, and whatever changes it has since undergone because of its missionary outreach and consequent identification with many cultures, it retains its fundamental consanguinity with its Eastern origins, with Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and with those 'homeless wandering Charismatics' who, in the Holy Land, as the disciples of Jesus had been the first to preach the Christian message. 'It was a coincidence for Christianity that it became Westernized' according to Cardinal Jean Daniélou,[3] and the West African scholar E. J. Penoukou adds: 'Likewise it remains a coincidence for the Church in Africa that it received Christianity in a Western form'.[4] Ancient tradition referred to by the learned Eusebius of Caesarea (?265–?340) – 'the Father of Church history writing' – suggests that the see of Alexandria was founded by St Mark the Evangelist, martyred AD 68.

Modern scholarship moves carefully with regard to this Marcan tradition. 'The historicity of this tradition, though unprovable, should not be ruled out ... Indeed the tradition of the preaching of Mark in Alexandria may predate the acceptance of the canonical Gospel of Mark in the Alexandrian Church.'[5] This St Mark tradition has had a resounding echo in modern times. In 1968 the new St Mark's Cathedral was consecrated by Patriarch Cyrillos VI, in the presence of President Nasser, Vice-President Sadat and Haile Selassie I, the Emperor of Ethiopia. On the same occasion the relics of St Mark, seized in 828 by the Venetians, were returned to Egypt by Pope Paul VI in Rome. The relics were thus brought from one cathedral of St Mark to another. (It should be added, perhaps, that another Mediterranean city church – Venice – also counts St Mark as its founder.)

The coastal city and rural inland

For an understanding of the fundamental tensions in Egyptian Church history one has to distinguish between the city of Alexandria and the rest of the country. On the one hand, there was the international Greek-speaking city on the coast with its cosmopolitan culture and Greek Church, turned to the North and to the Mediterranean world – *Alexandria ad Aegyptum* ('Alexandria beside Egypt') – although the city of Alexandria (Rakote in Coptic) also had a Coptic population. On the other, Upper Egypt, the rural region with its emerging Coptic language and culture, monasticism and church, turned away as much as possible from the cosmopolitan world of the bustling city on the coast. Here one was 'Coptic'-speaking, the word being an Arabic form for Egypt. The idea of 'the Egyptian' is a 'fundamental element in this religious community' and emphasizes its heritage from the ancient Egyptians of Pharaonic times.[6] The Coptic language emerged from the second century. The first translations of Bible text were probably made in the third century, or possibly earlier.

From the vantage-point on the coast at Alexandria the spectator could survey the drama of ancient world politics enacted by succeeding regimes and affecting the fate of Egypt and of all Egyptians: the rise and fall of the Pharaohs, to whose political forms and cultural visions the pyramids, temples and ruins bore witness. The Greek era of the Ptolemies followed with its Hellenistic culture, Greek language and Greek pantheon and the intermixture of Egyptian and Greek gods, (particularly the role of the fertility-saviour goddess, Isis).

In the first century before Christ, the Ptolemies were followed by Roman emperors who began to exert their influence with Latin language and culture and with an insatiable demand for and ever-rising taxation of the wheat-lands of Egypt – the granary of Rome. This economic exploitation had been so harsh and sweeping that the narrow strip of arable land along the River Nile could no longer keep up with the demands. The burden of taxation of corn had from then onwards to be carried by North Africa (the present Maghreb). After the fall of Carthage in 146 BC, North Africa was a vanquished country and now had to keep the conqueror supplied by way of annual tribute, while in Egypt, a Roman colony under Mark Antony since 42 BC, impoverished peasants unable to pay their dues fled from their fields into the deserts.

Economic pressure and consequent local rebellions in the Delta led to mounting tensions between Rome and Egypt. In order to ensure obedience the Roman emperors demanded signs – sacrifice at first of a few grains of

incense, and later, the handing over of the Holy Scriptures – to prove submission to the Emperor. Those who refused this sacrifice were convicted as Christians and thus disloyal subjects: here was the root of the persecutions against the Christians, the worst of all coming under the Emperor Diocletian, from AD 303–05. The persecutions hit the young Church in Egypt as a traumatic blow, never to be forgotten, forever to be re-enacted in the collective memory of the Church, making the Coptic Church into 'the martyr Church'.

The 'era of the martyrs', inaugurating Coptic Church history, begins with the accession of the dreaded Diocletian as Emperor, AD 284, and the Coptic calendar even today begins not with the Birth of Christ but with AD 284. The actual Diocletian persecution took place in the years 299–304. But in Egypt it lingered on and reached a climax in AD 311–12 under Maximinus. The bishop of Alexandria himself was executed; venerated as Peter Martyr he was the first Egyptian saint, also remembered in the Roman canon of the mass. The greatest tragedy took place in the Thebaid in Upper Egypt: day by day, fifty to a hundred of the 'stubborn peasants', the Coptic Christians were martyred. In Switzerland the Theban Legion, a unit in the Roman army showed the same stubborn resistance under its leader St Maurice and was decimated again and again, to the last man.

The theologians

Alexandria with its Greek and Jewish populations, its learning and international horizons, was the ideal place for theological debate and an acrimonious theological struggle. The Catechetical School, founded in the second century by the Greek theologian Titus Flavius Clemens (?150–?215), otherwise known as Clement of Alexandria, provided a basis for great theological systems. Clement's thought was turned to the heavenly world with the 'Church on High' where 'God's philosophers assembled the Israelites, the pure in heart, in whom there is no guile'.[7] Clement was succeeded in the Catechetical School by Origen (?185–?254), probably the most learned and possibly the most difficult of the theologians of his time. The study of the Bible was his great concern and he produced the *Hexapla*, an enormous volume where the Hebrew text, both in Hebraic and in Greek letters, was placed side by side with four Greek versions of the Scriptures. His allegorical interpretation of scripture follows a tradition going back to Philo and, before, to Alexandrian Judaism.

Various schools of thought soon competed for attention. Gnosticism was a complex religious movement with roots in the Old Testament and claiming

to possess certain secret knowledge – '*gnosis*'. Alexandria had these Gnostic systems. Collections of Gnostic manuscripts have been found in the so-called 'Nag Hammadi' texts discovered in 1945 in an old fortress in the desert in Upper Egypt. A young priest named Arius, felt that he could lean on Origen for his own doctrine. In order to extol the person of the Father in the Trinity, to safeguard the unity of God, he made the position of the Word (*Logos*) – the Son – secondary and subordinate. Arius had an uncanny, almost modern gift of propagating his views and ideas. He wrote songs for sailors and millers, for traders and travellers to be sung in the streets and in the harbour. He attracted the masses. All the more St Athanasius, as patriarch, and deeply convinced of the orthodoxy of his position, insisted on the 'consubstantiality' of the Son with the Father. (The term *homousios* was first used by the Gnostics!)

In St Athanasius (?296–373), Bishop of Alexandria 328–73, the Church in Egypt saw its greatest patriarch. Unbending in all his convictions, he had a violent temper and would flog some of his younger priests and imprison or expel bishops. His struggles identified him with the great doctrinal proclamations, the 'creeds', of the Church. Against Arianism and other dangers he safeguarded the great formula about the Trinity which has followed the Church ever since: 'consubstantial (of one being with) the Father . . . ' etc. One of the three Ecumenical creeds, the 'Athanasian' (*Quicumque vult*), is named after him. He was himself exiled from his Alexandria see by the Emperor no less than five times, altogether for a period of some twenty years. (In those international times he was once banished, during the years 335–37, to Trier in Germany.) His friend and colleague was the liturgically creative Serapion of Thmuis.

In this book we are not likely to forget that it was St Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, who consecrated Frumentius as Bishop of Aksum, thus establishing the links between the Church in Egypt and the Church in Ethiopia which were to last for 1,600 years. For the future of the Church in Egypt it was particularly important that St Athanasius, himself an ascetic, identified with the rising monastic movement: through his influence, hierarchy and monks were to be closely united.

St Athanasius' teachings and ecclesiastical intentions were followed up by St Cyril (380–444) – 'the super-Athanasian',[8] Patriarch of Alexandria 412–44. St Cyril's influence was felt far beyond Alexandria. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church regards him as 'her teacher *par excellence*'. Its most important doctrinal manual, with translations in Ge'ez of St Cyril's main works, bears the name Qerillos (Cyril).[9] This is another indication of the close affinity between the two Churches of Egypt and Ethiopia.

The Desert Fathers and the monks

There were long lines of connection to the Desert Fathers from the earliest generations of the Christian Church in Palestine and in the East generally. Through these first centuries there was a pull from the desert, leading to an opposition movement to ordinary established society and thus altogether different from the Greek world of business, learning and philosophy. One recent interpretation sees the Desert Fathers as a continuation of the Jewish–Palestinian world of travelling preachers and prophets.[10] For generations these men had been looking for radical change, establishing a counter-society of their own with a totally radical way of life, where they could live out their faith in total poverty and withdrawal from ordinary society. They preferred to disappear into the desert mountains for long periods of time. At first it was a question of individuals who, as hermits, withdrew for a life of prayer and meditation finding their abode in a grotto or perhaps an abandoned grave.

In the desert grottoes they found opportunity for prayer, for a life of the Spirit and a realization of the mighty presence of God. The maxims of the Desert Fathers take the reader to a distant, foreign world. St Antony is obviously one of the leaders among the desert hermits but he cannot unreservedly be regarded as the founder of the movement: he built on an older tradition with which he associated himself.

The majority of these desert *abbas* were men of peasant stock, simple men of faith but with unfailing knowledge (by heart) of Bible passages upon which they could feed the spirit. They were distinguished by 'visions, miracles, prediction of events and insight into occurrences in far-away places'.[11] To some of these men, withdrawal to the desert was a reaction against outrages of the State. Torture, persecution, economic exploitation and hunger had combined to exert a horror in the minds of the people, and some of these anachorets became hermits for economic reasons. From the State's point of view the Desert Fathers were nothing but a bunch of objectors to military service and tax-evaders.

St Antony (*c.* 251–356) went into the desert to fight against the demons and to live with God. Renowned for his piety he attracted other men as his disciples. He had to find out 'whether they were Egyptians *or* men of Jerusalem': only to the latter would he give of his time to discuss spiritual matters with them.[12] His life can be studied in valuable primary sources from the late fourth century. Among the best known is *The Life of Saint Antony* by the Patriarch Athanasius, an expression of the veneration that the great church leader and theologian felt for the ascetics in the desert. Later in

the history of the Church monks were to write the lives of bishops. In this early Egyptian case, the Bishop and Patriarch wrote the life of the monk, shortly after St Antony's death.

While a distinction between Alexandria and the rest of Egypt has to be made on economic, linguistic and cultural grounds this difference should on the other hand not be over-emphasized. A recent learned study, entitled *The Letters of St Antony* by Dr Samuel Rubenson, shows that at the time of the late third and early fourth centuries – the period of St Antony and his followers – there was in fact 'a much more extensive contact between Alexandria and the towns of Upper Egypt than hitherto supposed'. There was a cultural movement in both directions between city and countryside. Egypt had its share of scholars, philosophers, poets and bibliophiles and was clearly no less literate than the other parts of the Graeco-Roman world. Dr Rubenson makes the point that 'it is unlikely that Christianity was not heard of in the towns of Upper Egypt before the end of the second century'. The literary papyri give a picture of third-century Egyptian Christianity as strongly Biblical and much less Gnostic than has been suggested. In this context St Antony the hermit was deeply influenced by Origen's theology and there he developed his teaching. The spiritual teacher was the father of monasticism, a monastic *abba*.[13]

A somewhat different picture of St Antony and his colleagues is presented in the charming collection of impressions and short maxims of the Desert Fathers, *Apophthegmata*, 'a gallery of monastic icons'.[14] St Athanasius' study cannot be taken at face value. It does, however, give an impression of St Athanasius' own view of a model Christian and of the ascetic in the desert cell. It also shows the monk as having the power to prophesy future events, even if cautious in the use of this gift.

Arsenius (360–440) was different from most of the Egyptian Desert Fathers in that he was a foreigner from Rome where he had held the rank of a Senator and had been tutor to the sons of the Emperor. In 394 he unexpectedly broke with this kind of life and left for Sketis in the Egyptian desert where he remained until his death in 440. While still 'in the palace' he prayed to God: 'Lord, show me the way how I can be saved'. A voice came to him: 'Arsenius, flee from men, then you will be saved'. Later somebody asked him how, with all his education, he could turn for help to illiterate peasants. His answer: 'Indeed I have received both Roman and Greek education, but the alphabet of this peasant I have not yet learned.' Arsenius placed himself under an *abbas*, the dwarf Johannes, and eventually had disciples of his own.

The Pachomian monastic movement

The hermits in their grottoes were followed by a new significant development, the Pachomian monastic movement. As a young soldier, St Pachomius (?290–346) had joined the Christian camp and decided to become a hermit, settling down first with the hermit Palamon and then establishing a community at Tabennesis. He developed his hermitage along creative lines, founding a community of men living together inside the walls of a centre, walls which now could become symbols not of seclusion but of fellowship. St Pachomius gave structure and programme to the movement. There was a rule of life with 194 articles to be strictly followed by the inmates, living in community with colleagues, subordinate to a superior who exercised the spiritual direction of the community.

Each monk had a little cell of his own which could not be locked. They lived together in 'houses', the head being a house-father, and three to four houses forming a group. Each house had to be concerned with its particular handicraft; making mats, weaving linen, or working as fuller or tailor. Three of the houses had more general duties, such as receiving guests or taking care of novices. There were two meals per day. Likewise there were two prayer sessions, early morning and late at night. For the morning session twelve psalms were read, in the evening this number was reduced to six, with prayers and two lessons. The Sunday morning Eucharist was taken by a priest from the community or, if one was not available, a priest from the neighbourhood. This was followed by a catechetical lecture by the *abbas*. In the houses on Wednesdays and Fridays the house-father gave catechetical teaching. In order not to feel sleepy during prayers, the monk had to work his spinning wheel, making thread for his mats; the prayers were thus accompanied by the soft humming of the wheels – perhaps unwittingly soporific. But the monastery was related to the world and, more acutely, within the secular community there were religious devotees: 'the *Koinonia* did not enjoy a monopoly of the evangelical life.'[15]

At the time of St Pachomius' death in 346, there were nine monasteries for men and two convents for women, one of these under the leadership of Pachomius' sister, Mary. The rapid growth of the movement is seen in the fact that at Easter 390, no less than 50,000 monks congregated for the feast. This also explains the rural masses' transition to Christianity in Upper Egypt. The monks were the missionaries of the Church. They were at the same time enthusiastic local leaders of a Coptic national movement about to emerge in the fifth century. They acted as catechists teaching young and old the stories of the Bible and the lives of the martyrs. As the persecutions

came to an end in the early years of the fourth century, the monks succeeded the martyrs as the great heroes of folk-piety in the village churches.

After Chalcedon

For Alexandria and Egypt, AD 451 meant the parting of the ways from the West as well as from the Greek Church. Until that time, Alexandria had, as a matter of course, been awarded a leading position in Orthodox Christendom. On behalf of both East and West, Bishop Athanasius had denounced his recalcitrant priest Arius and all his works and thereby played a central role in the post-Nicean period. As Bishop of Alexandria, the authoritarian St Cyril built on solid Athanasian foundations assisted by the enthusiastic support of thousands of monks. Yet, in his effort to suppress the influence of Arius and the related Nestorius, he was to be acclaimed as an authority in the emerging Unionite movement. This taught that in the person of the Incarnate Christ there was but a single, Divine-human nature, thus opposing the Orthodox 'Diophysite' teaching of a Double Nature – Divine and Human – after the Incarnation. The Egyptian monks firmly held to the Unionite position. From AD 452 the Patriarch of Alexandria, representing the Coptic Church, was a Unionite although he has been opposed by a Greek-Orthodox Patriarch till the present day.

After an especially agitated period of doctrinal debate in the West in the period 431–50, the synod of Chalcedon (near Constantinople), a supposedly ecumenical encounter, decided for the 'two natures' and against the Unionite position. Most significantly, its Patriarch, Dioscorus, was deposed. With this fateful decision the Church in Egypt had to orient itself in an altogether new direction. When the state authorities chose Proterius, 'a docile friend of Byzantine imperialism' to replace the deposed Patriarch, the Egyptians immediately chose their own Patriarch in the person of Timothy Aelurus. Unable to remove his imperial rival, the excited crowd of monks and other faithful eventually took their revenge. In 457 they invaded the Baptistery where Proterius was officiating at the Eucharist and slaughtered him, then dragged his body through the streets, burned it and delivered the ashes to the wind.

Very soon the Coptic Church could answer in kind, denouncing Constantinople and the Chalcedonians as 'Diophysites' and 'Melchites' (the Emperor's men), 'running dogs of the imperial regime'. This led to renewed persecutions hitting the Unionite community. On the other hand, this outrage helped to solidify Egyptian nationalism built on the Coptic language and tradition, the Unionite doctrine and enthusiastic monastic leadership.

Fifteen hundred years after Chalcedon, the Pope of Rome, Pius XII, by his encyclical *Sempiternus Rex Christus*, declared that the differences between the Churches were due above all to questions of vocabulary and to the fact that the accusation of Monophysitism was unjustified.

Favour of kings and queens

World politics together with their most personal, even intimate variations, could in certain cases determine the fate of national Churches, such as those of Egypt and Nubia. In Byzantine Constantinople, the ambitious law-giver, Justinian (Emperor 527–65) had, in his youth, shown Unionite sympathies. However, as Emperor he held firmly to that religious policy which was most likely to serve the unification of his vast empire, in this case, the Chalcedonian position. He saw himself as Emperor and priest in one. Church and State were to be totally integrated.

There was, however, an embarrassing hitch: his empress, Theodora (d. 548). A woman of humble background, she had ideas of her own. She was a Unionite at heart and in her political actions as far as she could go. This was to benefit the Unionite Churches in Egypt and in Nubia. Her influence could be seen in the impressive basilicas erected in her time, at her instigation. The lovely wall-paintings, both in Egypt and Nubia, were no doubt drawn after Byzantine models. This, however, could not affect the liturgy, the prayers and the devotions to Mary, Mother of God: which were all Unionite.

'Descendants of the Pharaohs'

On consideration of the fate of the Church in North Africa, submitted to recurrent onslaughts, and leading – albeit slowly – to virtual extinction, one begins to appreciate something of the stamina and adaptability of the Coptic Church in surviving over the centuries. The losses in membership and influence can be comprehended by counting the number of episcopal sees in the Coptic Church: in AD 600 these numbered one hundred, by AD 700 they were reduced to seventy, and by AD 1400 they had been further reduced to forty (and at present, twenty-five bishops and metropolitans in Egypt, two in Sudan and one in Jerusalem).

In the local congregations, however, particularly in Upper Egypt around Asyut, Church life continued, adding its special colour and rhythm to the life of the total community. More than that of any other country in Africa, Egyptian culture represented 'the long duration', to use F. Braudel's term.

Near the River Nile, the Sphinx and the Pharaonic pyramids watched over changes and developments: they had already been there for some 3,000 years when the first Christian preachers arrived in Alexandria. As the Coptic Church emerged, its members took pride in the idea that they were indeed 'descendants of the Pharaohs' and this claim to an ancient origin could, in a critical political situation, be held against even the most powerful invader.

The Copts could assimilate the new without discarding the old. They were inclusive rather than exclusive. This is seen in the fact that old quarries from Pharaonic times were used as Christian grotto-churches, with local settlements lasting for centuries. At Luxor, a pagan temple dedicated to the god Amon was adapted for use by the local congregation. Christian paintings and other symbols were plastered over the ancient pagan symbols, to signify that from now on this was to be a Christian temple. In the case of other pagan temples the Coptic priest and his artisans took wooden boards, placing them over previous pagan reliefs (thereby, incidentally, saving the pagan relief for posterity). Dendera, near Luxor, had in pagan times been a pilgrimage centre to which the sick could turn to be cured. Here a Christian church from about the fifth century was built with pagan mussel-shells also used as symbols in the Christian Church, thus testifying to unhampered survival of symbols. Here also the Egyptian cross took shape in the form of the beginnings of the 'TAU' cross devoted to the Victorious Christ. A century later this cross becomes the Life-Giving Tree, in the form of a cross with leaves.[16]

Some of the pre-Christian temples such as the one in Philae devoted to Isis, the goddess of fertility and salvation, were used for the new Christian religion until about AD 580. From that date, for a period of sixty years (580–640) Christian worship could, without pagan influences, develop its specific forms and expressions.

The Muslim invasion and beyond

By the seventh century the Coptic Church was well established with the Patriarch in Alexandria and bishops and monks and nuns in monasteries and convents. They were leading annual pilgrimages to the tombs of holy martyrs. Then came the Muslim Arab invasion.

Across the Red Sea, southern and northern Arabia had for centuries represented important trading areas. Mecca with its famous black meteorite, the *Ka'ba*, was such a centre. Yathrib (Medina) had three Jewish 'tribes', all concerned with trade and with their religion. Jewish colonies established themselves in various parts of the country and one of the Arab kings

accepted Judaism as his religion. Here also the Jewish Diaspora served as a bridge for transition to the Christian faith, in a Nestorian or Monophysite form, together with various Gnostic sects. It is realized of course that prior to Muhammad millions of Arabs had been catechized in the name of Allah the true God, and had learned the prayers, the fasts and the feasts in the schools of the missionaries and monks. At the beginning of the seventh century the majority of the Arabs of Mesopotamia and of Syria were Christians. Traditional Arab religion with its sacrifices and pilgrimages had obviously lost its hold on the people, who were looking for a comprehensive faith.

Muhammad, 570–632, came forward as the prophet of this faith, 'Islam', meaning total surrender [to God]. A successful trader, he had contacts with both Jews and Christians. He felt inspired to withdraw into the mountains near Mecca for meditations. He too was fascinated by the desert mountains, their peace and the presence of God. From about 610 he had a number of visions and auditions realized as the voice of God, given to him by the Archangel Gabriel: he knew that this was indeed the 'religion of Abraham'.

Yet he did not feel accepted at Mecca and in 622 made his *hijra*, or, exile, to Yathrib, later renamed Medina, i.e. 'The City' (of the Prophet). There he found other exiles from Mecca, who became his devoted supporters. The visions and auditions were assembled into a Holy Book, the *Qur'an*. As the three Jewish tribes in Mecca could not accept his prophetic claims he chased them away from the city. Yet, the *Qur'an* always recognized that Jews and Christians were 'People of the Book', who should be treated with a certain degree of toleration.

In 632 the prophet died. Soon his followers went beyond the borders of Arabia with the mottoes: 'Allah Akbar', (God is Greater) and 'Muhammad is His Prophet'. Egypt was a neighbour and an obvious target for this campaign. After a certain number of military attempts the country was won for the Prophet in 641, nine years after Muhammad's death.

The attitude of the Copts towards this invasion was not unique. It was largely similar to that of Unionites in other countries such as Syria and Palestine. Byzantine Constantinople and its imperial regime had long been seen as the enemy, and in these eastern countries the Arabs were at first regarded as a possible ally against the Emperor. The ever-widening abyss to Constantinople and its Chalcedonian faith meant that the Arabs did not meet with any significant opposition, and could establish themselves as rulers of the country. The Arab Muslims also at first allowed free worship, on condition that the People of the Book paid individual head tax, *jizya*.

Over the following centuries, succeeding but different Arab regimes

presented the Church with varying degrees of political pressure, resulting at times in conversions to Islam, and other times – i.e. AD 868 to AD 1096 – in the closing of the Christian ranks. Coptic language, art and music flourished. The present city of Cairo was founded in 969 and eventually the Patriarch moved to the new metropolis.

The Copts and the Crusades

Increasingly the Copts were made to feel that they were now a religious minority in a Muslim world. The relationship between Coptic Church and Muslim State depended on variations in Arab regimes, with changes in the caliphates, and on certain local crises. The rulers of the Fatimid caliphate, AD 968–1171, were on the whole tolerant towards both Christians and Jews. Capable Copts were to be seen in high places in the administration, mainly in finance and in the banks. The Copts also had many famous physicians and writers. There were other Arab regimes where the Copts had to suffer serious hardships and heavy taxation, against which they sometimes revolted. Locally, incidents of arson could all too easily be blamed on the Copts and outrageous vengeance was taken: in the period AD 1279–1447 forty-four churches were reported to have been razed to the ground in Cairo alone, and Copts became subject to humiliations and confiscation of every kind.

Dramatic changes on the international scene could expose the Copts to serious pressures. From AD 1100 the Crusades from the West made the Coptic minority suspect. This was particularly so with the Fifth Crusade at the beginning of the thirteenth century. This crusade was no longer directed by kings and knights but by the Pope himself. From the other side of the Mediterranean the ill fortune of this crusade was watched with dismay by St Francis of Assisi. He decided to go himself to Egypt in 1219 to try to establish peace. He was given permission for this by the Cardinal Pelagius and arrived at the scene of warfare in the Damiette branch of the Nile Delta, moving unarmed between the armies in no man's land. The Moslem guards were suspicious at first but soon decided that anyone so simple, so gentle and so dirty must be mad and treated him with the respect due to a man who had been touched by God.[17]

The Sultan al-Kamil, who was also inclined to peace, listened patiently to this surprising intervention. In the long perspective of Church history, St Francis' daring mediation was to inspire Latin missions in Egypt at a much later date in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the fifteenth century there followed new attempts at contacts between Rome and the Copts. In 1439 Pope Eugenius IV invited Patriarch John XI

to the ecumenical Council of Florence and the Patriarch sent the *abbas* of the St Anthony monastery. Later, however, political developments obliterated these attempts. From 1517 Egypt was occupied by the Ottoman Turks, and for a long time contacts between the Copts and the West ceased.

NORTH AFRICA

The Mediterranean over which St Paul sailed to Rome and, perhaps, to Spain, also served as a route for the Christian message to reach North Africa. This Church history will repeatedly emphasize the role of the waters in the propagation of the Gospel: the oceans, the lakes, the rivers. For the first Christian centuries, shipping over the Mediterranean and the Red Sea played a fundamental role. Here was an extensive system of international contact, supplying goods and mediating ideas.

The busy North Coast harbours of Carthage, Hippone, Hadremethum (now Sousse) and others saw foreigners arrive from afar, from Egypt, Greece, Sicily and Rome. From the middle of the second century, Rome could also impose imperial power over North Africa. Sailing ships could cover the distance Carthage–Rome in three to four days. The coastal cities had small Jewish communities with their synagogues and international cultural contacts. The large estates inland, under Roman landowners, had to supply corn by way of tribute to the metropolis. North Africa succeeded Egypt as the granary of Rome and was forced to keep the city inhabitants with the daily ration of wheat. On the estates inland there were Berbers and a Punic population together with large numbers of slaves.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when, towards the end of the second century, a Christian Church on the North Coast can first be identified, it had already reached certain dimensions. One is faced with local congregations of determined men and women prepared to give their lives for the faith. The first historical document of the Church relates to a group of Christians from Scillium in Numidia – at least two of the names seem Berber – who on the 1 August 180 were put to death and became martyrs. Twenty years later Perpetua and Felicitas went to their deaths, thrown to the lions.

Already by the middle of the third century paganism in North Africa saw decay and down-fall – the same period as for Egypt – and simultaneously mass conversion to Christianity occurred. At first, Greek was presumably the Church's language in Africa – even today one can see Greek texts on wall inscriptions and graves – but in the second century there was a definite change to the language of the Imperial power, Latin.

This linguistic innovation was to exert long-range influences, positive and

negative, on the Christianization process in the country. The problem was how far could the impoverished masses on the estates and in the harbours identify with the Imperial language and make it their own? If they could not, there was a danger that the rapid Christianization might remain somewhat superficial and that this might show later under the impact of some sudden onslaught from abroad. A comparison with Egypt is revealing. There the Church acquired a national language of its own, Coptic, which became identified with as a symbol of their struggle for autonomy over the language and culture of the Imperialists, the 'Melkite' Greeks in Alexandria. In Northern Africa on the other hand, however much Latin became the proud possession of the intellectuals and the well-to-do, it never attained the same creative, symbolic role as did the Coptic language in Egypt.

Tertullian and Saint Cyprian

Tertullian (*c*. 160–*c*. 220) from Carthage is the first in the line of great theologians in North Africa: a vehement, uncompromising and irrepressible personality with great visions and a dedicated will. Having started as a lawyer and a rhetor he loved words and the play on words, a love which led to his creation of Ecclesiastical Latin. This form of Latin first emerged in North Africa, in and through Tertullian's disturbing writings, demonstrating to much later generations of the Church in Africa what it takes to form, curb and appropriate a language. In Tertullian's case the language emerged from a creative personality, dedicated to proclaiming an overwhelming message, and to reaching out to as many as possible.

There were connections between the two North Africans, Tertullian and St Cyprian (?200–58). Cyprian referred to Tertullian as his 'master'. Cyprian, like Tertullian, had a lawyer's training. When converted both held to a strictly ascetic interpretation of Christianity. Rome had worries with both men, although from different points of view. Tertullian's critical mind ultimately took him over to the Montanist camp. A presbyter himself, he found some bishops difficult to manage and his spirit yearned for a Spirit-dominated religion which the Montanists were supposed to represent. Montanism was 'an explosion of prophetism'.[18] (There are surprising points of similarity between Montanism in the second century and some of the modern ecstatic African prophets and prophetesses in the twentieth century.)

St Cyprian, on the other hand, was involved in a controversy with Bishop Stephen in Rome over the matter of re-baptism of heretics. Here, Cyprian was uncompromising and insisted on re-baptism while Bishop Stephen pleaded for re-admitting heretics by the imposition of hands. There were

sharp arguments on both sides and the Bishop in Rome threatened the bishop in Carthage with excommunication. In this struggle of minds Cyprian elaborated his view of episcopacy. While emphasizing the unity of the Catholic Church, with deference to the successor of Peter – his great book was called *On the Unity of the Church* – he was nonetheless determined to uphold the rights of the local bishop and did so to such an extent that he came to be regarded as 'the champion of episcopalism'. These were terrible times for faithful Christian confessors, their existence dominated by the fear of and longing for martyrdom – the 'heavenly crown'. Long before Cyprian was beheaded he had a vivid dream experience. He saw a young man of extraordinary height who brought him to the proconsul's court. The proconsul wrote something on a slab of wood and Cyprian could see his own death sentence. The young man in the dream extended and bent his fingers, one after the other, thereby indicating a respite with the execution of the punishment,[19] but the bishop's dream was followed by stark reality.

Bishop Cyprian's martyrdom

On 14 September 258, Bishop Cyprian was called to appear before the proconsul Galerius Maximus who put to him the following questions:

> 'You are Thascius Cyprian?'
>
> 'Yes, that is me.'
>
> 'You are the leader of these sacrilegious people?'
>
> 'What then?'
>
> 'The holy emperors have ordered that you sacrifice.'
>
> 'No, I won't do that.'
>
> 'Consider it well.'
>
> 'That I have already done. Do what you must.'
>
> 'You have lived in sacrilege and have made yourself the enemy of the gods of Rome. Therefore your blood will be the sanction of the laws ... We direct that Thascius Cyprian be put to death by the sword.'
>
> Cyprian replied: 'Thanks be to God.'

The crowd of Christians cried out: 'Let our heads fall with his!' The executioner arrived and the bishop ordered that this man receive twenty-five pieces of gold. While this was carried out, the faithful spread cloths and towels around the bishop in order to gather the precious blood of the martyr.

Then St Cyprian bound his own eyes. As he could not tie his own hands, the priest Julian, together with a deacon, offered him this service. In that posture Cyprian met death. The martyrdom was enacted by the bishop as a liturgy in which he was, as Christ on the Cross, both victim and priest.

Saint Augustine

St Augustine (354–430) is generally considered the universal genius, the truly Catholic churchman and theologian whose books have been of immense importance for Christian thought throughout the ages and this theology took form in the otherwise little known town of Hippo on the North African coast.

As a young man he was deeply involved in the thought-world of his generation – being a Manichaean for nine years – until he took the step to conversion and Christian baptism in 387. Five years later he found himself – much to his surprise and against his will – ordained and in 394 made bishop in Hippo, to which diocese he was to give thirty-six years of unique leadership and inspiration.

He has interpreted his own life in an autobiography, *Confessions*, in the form of a long prayer to God. It is a deeply personal literary document, intimate at times, with searching self-knowledge – 'a manifesto of the inner world'.[20] These words come from the introduction to *Confessions*: 'You have created us to yourself, and our heart cannot be quieted unless it finds rest in you', *Fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*.

As bishop he had a biblical message to convey. When he found himself suddenly chosen as bishop, he insisted that he take ample time for a retreat so as to read the Bible. He had an extraordinary memory and was able, while preaching, to recall examples and stories from the Old and New Testaments. The Bible was 'the medicine to his soul'.[21] This helped him to formulate his memorable sentences: 'This man who, whenever he says anything, seems to be saying it for the first time.'[22]

He was greatly influenced by his mother, Monica. Dr E. Mashingaidze of Zimbabwe has made an observation of relevance to the Church in Africa: 'It is the mother who encourages her son to accept new ideas.'[23] This was definitely the case with the devout Christian mother of St Augustine (the medieval Church was to call her St Monica). She was from Thagaste in Berber-dominated South Numidia and thus her son the bishop was 'most probably' of mixed Berber background.[24] 'Augustine's Berber descent shows itself in numerous small ways'.[25] It was this heritage, perhaps, which induced Monica to have visions from time to time by which she could advise her son.[26] It was Monica who persuaded him to abandon his Manichaean faith, to which he, as a young man, had adhered.

In his conversion crisis, in 387, St Augustine's Christian mother was his support. She was a truly great woman who had received elementary education and Augustine enjoyed discussions with her, referring to her as a

philosopher whose disciple he loved to be. 'She can dismiss a whole philosophical school in a single vulgar word', says Peter Brown, and Professor Ragnar Holte, of Uppsala, writing on 'Monica the Philosopher', says of the dialogue between mother and son: 'There is a most touching and enchanting mutual respect and acknowledgement, or even humility, an ardent wish from either side to be instructed, inspired and elevated by the other's experience and insights.'[27]

As bishop, St Augustine was existentially engaged in the struggle against what he regarded as the three great adversary systems of his generation, Manichaeism, Donatism and Pelagianism. The study of St Paul and of the Bible as a whole made him discover divine grace (*gratia*) as the fundamental power for the religious and moral life of the individual and of the Church. This emphasis on divine grace helped him overcome what he saw as a dangerously and narrowly moralistic tendency in earlier and contemporary theology.

He could try out his thoughts in continuous and daily encounter with the enquiring minds of the young priests in his monastery, and he would generalize and simplify his ideas in weekly sermons to a responsive crowd of people from very different intellectual and theological backgrounds. Add to this something about his complex personality, his freshness and freedom of mind, his immense courage in taking and defending a standpoint – and one has an idea of how he could produce a great and enduring theological message.

St Augustine is the greatest theologian that Africa has produced. Not all theologians are at the same time inspiring preachers and bishops, but St Augustine was. Seated in his cathedral he sometimes preached to as many as 2,000 people, all standing before him as the custom was at the time. 'Augustine bore neither cross nor ring. His figure was slight, his features somewhat sharp, his head shaven. He was usually wrapped in a cloak or *birrus* (probably dark in colour), open in front.' He held his congregation spell-bound and they responded vivaciously to his message. 'This unusual liveliness, presumably a heritage of Berber blood, was fortunately displayed as much in spiritual matters as in the people's outward bearing.'[28] In his sermons in the city basilica he would not forget the poor labouring Berbers. He had seen them working in the fields and heard them sing as they laboured (*maxime jubilant qui in agris*), anticipating humming and hymn-singing of people at work in the fields of Africa some 1,500 years later.

As a Bishop preaching to his congregations, St Augustine was aware of the linguistic problems in the Hippo diocese. Both he and his Donatist opponents recognized there were two languages to worry about, Latin and

Punic, the latter a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew. Because of this affinity of Punic to Hebrew, Augustine used Punic words when he wished to explain biblical words. As a bishop Augustine felt the need of having a clergy skilled in Punic for his diocese. While some of the cultured Latin-speaking class looked down upon Punic as inferior, Augustine insisted on Punic as an honourable part of their native heritage. Even if he did not himself preach in the language and had to use interpreters when necessary, he would, by this reference to Punic words and proverbs, gain the good will of the audience and increase the cheerfulness of the congregation as well as, no doubt, that of his own good humour.[29]

As a preacher St Augustine had none of the pomposity characteristic of some bishops. He had a liveliness which was part of his great communicative charisma. He was the opposite of the pious recluse. He loved to be surrounded by people, the more the merrier, although he felt the burden of his episcopal office. The Bishop's house in Hippo was turned into a monastic chapter and establishment where his young priests were living with their bishop and taught the Bible by him. Sometimes a bad sleeper, he would dictate chapters of his books to his young scribes and co-workers during the night. At least five of these young men trained by Augustine were later to become bishops themselves.[30]

Donatism

As bishop and theologian, St Augustine acted as a polemicist, and from the point of view of North Africa the struggle with the Donatists was of particular importance. While the Catholics were particularly strong in the Romanized cities on the coast, the Donatists dominated the inland plains in Numidia and among the Berber-speaking labourers on the inland estates.

In modern terms one would characterize the Donatists as a 'holiness' movement. According to them the true Church consists of holy members. They felt that they could rely on Tertullian's and Cyprian's authority for their standpoint. Particularly abhorrent in their eyes were the *traditores*, such Catholic bishops who had, in times of persecution, 'handed over' the Holy Scriptures to be burned in order to placate the demands of the pagan state. The Donatists were likely to identify their Catholic adversaries with such *traditores*. In this struggle the Donatists, according to Augustine, represented a 'heresy' and through his long struggle on this front Augustine managed to stamp them with this mark.

African Church history, in later centuries, was to face the fatal power of denominationalism with its notoriously divisive and weakening influence. In

the Catholic propaganda of the period, Donatism was seen as an early example of such denominationalism. They were named after Donatus who, in the time of the Great Persecution, 303–05, had become a bishop in North Africa and represented the claims of the holiness tradition in the Church with great vigour. Donatus claimed that his Church was *the* Catholic Church in Africa, 'sanctified by the martyrs and purified from its errors by their leader Donatus.' During the fourth century Donatism experienced rapid growth, not least among the Berber in Numidia, although by about the year 400 they were weakened by inner divisions.

A decisive date in the struggle between Catholics and Donatists was the conference between the two contending parties at Carthage in 411. Each side was represented by no less than 280 bishops, disputing in the large *Thermae* – or baths – in Carthage, under the supposedly impartial presidency of Count Marcellinus, the Emperor's representative. Each side had eighteen special spokesmen – seven speakers and seven deputies, with four invigilators to supervise the drafting of the record. After three days of vehement debate, Marcellinus pronounced sentence in favour of the Catholics, and the Emperor himself was soon to ratify this. The Donatist clergy were to be exiled and dispatched to remote corners of the Empire.

While the Donatist Church must be seen primarily as a religious movement with an urge for holiness, martyrdom and the study of the Bible, their militant arm, the fanatic 'Circumcellions', appear primarily as social revolutionaries. They were determined – by religious fervour and visits to martyrs' graves – to gather strength for a total overthrow of the social and political order. On the big estates near Hippo, Donatist preachers managed to instil on their labouring listeners a deep sense of social injustice. Parallels have been suggested with the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 in England, and the Peasants' Rising of 1524 in Germany.[31] For the purpose of this book on African Church history it is natural to draw the parallel with the Kikuyu rising in the 1950s ('Mau Mau') and the Zimbabwe war of liberation in the 1970s.

Marcellinus' decision was a victory for the Catholic side and for Bishop Augustine himself. That the controversy itself was a tragedy for the Christian cause as a whole was not seen by the conquerors who preferred to expel their adversaries rather than attempting to integrate them as a healthy salt in the body of the Church. It needs to be added, however, that despite his anti-Donatist and anti-Pelagian polemics, St Augustine was led to conceive an infinitely more wide-hearted theology. More particularly, his teaching about grace, according to which faith itself is a gift of God, laid the foundation for a truly Catholic theology. The first life of St Augustine was written by an episcopal colleague of his, Passidius, a comprehensive account

of St Augustine's personal development. It is also remarkably balanced when assessing Augustine's contacts with the Donatists. It is an impressive African contribution to African church history.

Arian Vandals

In the year of St Augustine's death, 430, both parties – Catholic and Donatist – were overrun by a more serious adversary, the Arian Vandals who swept through North Africa. In the age of European population movements, a Germanic tribe had begun a southerly move across the map of Europe. They crossed France and Spain, reaching North Africa in 429. On the way they met and accepted Christianity in its Arian, anti-Catholic form. With the capture of Carthage in 439 the Vandals were the masters of North Africa, ruling there for a century. In that period they were to cause terrible destruction of Catholic churches, monasteries and in the personal lives of Church leaders, until in 533, Emperor Julianos of Constantinople managed to reconquer North Africa. The Catholic Church was then given more than a century of respite for reorganization and relatively quiet growth – until the latter part of the seventh century.

The next, and this time definitive, conquest – through Muslim invasion – obliterated most of what there was of a Christian Church. Subject to the Muslim role of *dhimmi* (protected status for religious minorities) both Christians and Jews could subsist for some time in certain areas, although very much on the margins of society and housed in special quarters of the cities. In certain parts of North Africa, islands of Christian influence held out for a long time. In the sands of the country south of Tripoli, archaeologists have found Christian gravestones from 945–1003, and their very local Latin inscriptions (*bixit* for *vixit* and *bitam* for *vitam*) testify to characteristic local influence.

This gallant Berber attempt at writing Latin is perhaps an even more important indication of why there ultimately followed a great difference between the fate of the Church in North Africa and its fate in Egypt. In Egypt the Coptic Church was Coptic, in and through its very own language, proudly possessed, and its means of expression in personal prayer and common worship. In North Africa the Church spoke Latin and the Bible translations were in Latin, a language appropriated for the Church's elite by Tertullian, St Cyprian and St Augustine, but never fully assimilated by the labouring masses on the inland estates.

Thus in a comparatively short period of time the young Church along the North African coastline was overrun by two harsh adversaries – the Arian

Vandals and the Muslim Arabs – and then came the end. This tragic finale has of late been subject to adverse comment directed against the evangelistic inadequacy of the North African Catholic Church, as compared with the missionary drive of the Coptic Church to the east.

The Christian community did not give up without resistance. Towards the end of the 690s the Arabs met with resolute Berber opposition under the prophetess Kahina. The Arab forces under Hassan were repulsed and had to withdraw eastward, but they persevered and soon returned. In 703 Kahina was defeated and slain. Her sons, more pragmatic than their prophetic mother, adopted Islam and from then on Berbers and Arabs made common cause.

Whom to blame?

It has been maintained by one writer that 'the great failure of the African Church was the failure to evangelize' and he suggested that 'the chance to enter Africa from the north was not given again.'[32] Another writer was more specific: 'in the centuries from AD 200 to AD 700 Christianity missed its supreme chance of expansion in the immense land empire from the North African coast to the tenth parallel of Latitude North'.[33]

These reprimands are misplaced. For one thing they do not take into consideration the geography of the area. In the north of the continent geography was infinitely more disadvantageous for evangelization than in Egypt to the east. In the east, two great parallel waterways – the River Nile and the Red Sea – both furthered communication and interchange of ideas, and the Church's missionaries could travel along the water in order to evangelize in the south – Nubia and Ethiopia. These advantages did not obtain in North Africa where beyond the populated zones there stretched the vast impenetrable forests and the deserts.

Of course one might speculate on the linguistic problem: what would have happened if St Augustine and his colleagues had been fluent in the language of the Berbers and thus able to address the Berber-speaking masses and whether this could have changed developments after the onslaught of the Vandals and the final embrace of the Arabs. But somehow these speculations come a little late. History will have to take consolation from von Harnack's version of these matters.

The great historian of the early Church, Adolf von Harnack, in his *Mission und Ausbreitung* (first published in 1915), takes a final look at the fate of the Christian Church in North Africa. He concludes his chapter on North Africa:

> As a Church province, Africa has a timeless endurance in the history of the Church through its three great sons Tertullian, St Cyprian, and St Augustine. It is one of the most paradoxical facts of history that, after St Paul, Christianity received its strongest impulse for further development from the seashore of Tunisia.[34]

NUBIA

The 1,000 years of Nubia's Church history – 450? to 1450? – stand out in the record of the Church in Africa. Consider the drama of its discovery, made only recently in the 1950s and 1960s. For centuries this history had been hidden, until the concerted scientific archaeological efforts of the world community, co-ordinated by UNESCO – with fifty-nine archaeological expeditions to Nubia in the period 1959–1969 – uncovered an extraordinary Christian culture, in ruins, yet sufficiently well-preserved to allow a breath-taking impression of the glorious riches of this ancient Church.

The occasion for this combined effort on the part of archaeologists and engineers arose with the realization that the building of the 'High Dam' between the First and Second Cataracts of the Nile would result in an enormous permanent lake which would submerge and destroy many invaluable monuments. The resulting High Dam Campaign was committed to the 'dismantling, transportation, and reconstruction on higher ground' of ancient temples and other monuments.[35] Certain expeditions, notably the Polish, were in a position to concentrate on the cathedrals of Faras, Abdullah Nirqi and Sonqi, which among other things brought to light 169 Faras wall-paintings of extraordinary beauty and also an anchoret's grotto.

A divided mission

There is an official year for the beginnings of the Christianization of Nubia: AD 543. But perhaps a 100 years before the arrival of the official heralds of the new religion, anonymous witnesses had brought the message into the country. Recent excavations have uncovered a Christian church of unbaked brick from a period well before AD 543, and finds of pottery and oil lamps with the Christian cross and other symbols, also before that date, testify to some Christian activity which 'readily made converts among the poor'. Just as later on, in other parts of the continent religious ideas were carried by anonymous witness. Northern Nubia had been reached by unknown Christians traders, possibly Coptic monks, or Coptic refugees who had arrived along that incomparable way of communication, the River Nile –

bringing with them their objects and with these, ideas and expectations symbolized by these wares.[36]

However, there followed an official imperial initiative which was significant in subsequent development in the country. Emperor Justinian in Constantinople, as much churchman as political ruler, was anxious to preserve the unity of his realm by insisting on the Orthodox faith as formulated by Chalcedon. He could not, however, avoid opposition, particularly as his empress Theodora was an enthusiastic protectress of the Unionite conviction. A Coptic priest named Julian implored Theodora to send missionaries to Nubia and the zealous empress suggested to the Emperor that Julian should be sent. A secret competition between husband and wife ensued, both designing to arrive first with their own special envoy. In this race along the Nile, Theodora won. Julian arrived in 543 thus securing for Coptic Monophysitism the privileged position, while the Emperor's man was initially unsuccessful. Julian spent two years in Nubia and managed to baptize the king and the aristocracy and to constitute in his place the bishop of Philae by the name of Theodore. A former guest house was converted into a church, called by modern archaeologists the 'Rivergate Church', thus using the same method as in Coptic Egypt where former pagan temples or other official buildings could be converted into churches.[37]

The bishop's task was complicated as the country was divided into three kingdoms along the River Nile, with Nobatia in the North – near the Second Cataract of the Nile – followed by the kingdoms of Makouria and Alodia. Around 570, Makouria accepted the Melchite (or Orthodox) faith, while a decade later Alodia turned to Monophysitism (all according to the account given by John of Ephesus, himself a Unionite).[38] Here also the Christian Church presented a divided image.

The impact of Arab rule in Egypt from 641 could not but affect Nubia too, isolating it from ready access to the Mediterranean Christian world. An Arab attack on the country followed in 641, but ten years later the two parties could agree on a remarkable peace treaty which virtually guaranteed Nubian independence and which – with later modifications – was to last for 700 years. The Arabs pledged themselves not to wage war against Nubia while the Nubians promised to deliver annually – later modified to every three years – 360 slaves 'from the finest slaves of your country . . . both male and female'. The Nubians also promised to look after the mosque built in the Christian capital: 'you are not to prevent anyone from worshipping in it . . . and you are to sweep it, keep it lighted and honour it.' The treaty concludes in terms which could be a guide to modern efforts at a dialogue between the two religions: 'Incumbent on you toward us is the utmost

observance of the good faith of the Messiah and that of the Disciples and of any of the people of your religion and community whom you reverence. God be the Witness of that between us.'

A royal Church

To a much larger extent than in Egypt, Nubia's Church history was that of its kings, taking on the aspects of a court religion, while the masses were, perhaps, only superficially incorporated into the Church. This gave status to an institution, presumably closely associated with the cosmic powers, and allowed for the planning and building of impressive ecclesiastical monuments and for the commission of artistic work in the cathedrals. Under its Christian kings Nubia, particularly the Nobatia kingdom, saw a rapid economic development with irrigation schemes – some areas had piped water from the River Nile – which benefited agriculture (wheat, barley, millet, and grapes).

The king in Nubia was at the same time a high-ranking priest – the idea of sacred kingship had been transferred to the Church. Some of the kings were remarkable personalities. Merkurios (697–707: 10/30) referred to by sycophantic aristocrats and bishops as 'the new Constantine' gave to Nubia much of its political unity and prosperity. Together with Bishop Paulos he planned and realized the reconstruction of Faras Cathedral and ensured a steady development as far as church buildings were concerned. More than a century later King Georgios I, who ruled for the long period 860–920, was to extend his influence beyond the national borders. With mounting Arab pressure on the Coptic Church in Egypt he seems to have been accepted 'as at least a semi-official protector of the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, and thus in some sense responsible for the whole Christian population of Egypt'.[39] Another Nubian king, Georgios II, was approached, during a Church crisis, by the king of Ethiopia to send a canonically consecrated bishop to lead the Ethiopian Church.

There were thus Nubian Christian influences towards the North and the East. Even more surprising is the presumed extension westwards, near Darfur nearly half-way to the Niger, a centre for age long contacts between the Nile and the Niger. At Ain Fara, archaeologists have discovered pottery with typical Christian symbols, a fish and the cross or a dove's head and the cross, all from the tenth century. What once was thought to have been a mosque may have been a church, and the building on the nearby hill-top was built initially as cells for Christian monks.[40]

Faras

Great care was given to the building of churches, from the smaller buildings of unbaked brick in the centre of villages to cathedrals in stone or baked brick, with the cathedral in the capital of Faras as the most prominent. It was built in the seventh century and renewed in 707, the latter a reconstruction under the leadership of Bishop Paulos. This allowed for an artistic activity of surprising wealth, with large mural paintings of biblical and ecclesiastical personalities becoming the inspiration to other ecclesiastical buildings. Many of these splendid paintings may be seen today in the National Museum in Warsaw, the rest in the National Museum in Khartoum. One of the cathedral walls had a list of names of the succession of twenty-seven bishops, a document obviously of immense importance for the reconstruction of the history of the Church and for the dating of the artistic styles of the paintings. The colour-scheme of the wall-paintings shows a chronological development with a scale of colours from the eighth to the twelfth century, with at first violet to red tones and finally dark-brown tones. Of special interest for our history is a picture on the east wall of the Bishop's Hall in the Faras Cathedral. It shows the Madonna and Saint Peter, the bishop's Patron Saint, together with Bishop Petros, the latter with a dark brown face indicating the definitive Africanization of the hierarchy at this time. It is claimed that this picture was made during the lifetime of the bishop who died in 999.

About 926 the Faras cathedral was hit by fire but was later reconstructed. Finally, around 1170, the cathedral dome and the nave vault were destroyed, although for a time the side aisles could still be used for worship. Yet gradually, the sands of the desert with their implacable power surrounded and submerged the cathedral and similar remains and ruins of this Christian culture.[41]

Alodia and Soba

In 580 the ruler of Alodia approached his colleague in Nobatia to ask for missionaries. Dr Jacobielski has pointed out that in Alodia Christianization did not appear through a sudden change but had been prepared by an 'infiltration of Christianity' from the neighbouring country of Aksum. Soba, the southern-most kingdom, takes the Church 400 miles further south into Africa. Soba was converted to Christianity about 580, most probably by traders and monks from Aksum. A cathedral of red brick was built at the capital, the remains of which are currently being excavated. Soba had three

churches. The Soba churches seem to have been comparable to Faras and Dongola. It is possible that Soba had adjacent churches with a baptistery between them. To a much larger extent than in Nobatia and Makouria, the Soba churches used timber for the columns of the churches.

The remarkable community of Nubiologist scholars have discussed the similarities and differences between north and south in Nubian Church history. Much of the archaeological material remains to be found and analyzed. Professor William Y. Adams, after writing his authoritative volume *Nubia, Corridor to Africa*, has said: 'the question of cultural differences between the Christian north and south is one that must still be "argued with a shovel".'[42]

Disintegration of a Church

Two forces, from the south and the north, marked the end of Christianity in Nubia. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the Funj people, having accepted Islam, conquered Soba and Alodia from the south. At the same time the Ottomans conquered Egypt and pushed south towards Nobatia. In spite of these military conquests elements of Christian faith survived, particularly near the Third Cataract, and in connexion with certain family rituals. In the eighteenth century the ruler of the Kokka kingdom was still recognized as being Christian.[43]

Why did this Church of Nubia come to an end? For one thing, the faith had not reached deep enough. It was a court religion, the concern of a ruling caste. The people in the countryside had only a superficial understanding of what it was all about. There does not seem to have existed any training of a local clergy. Not only bishops but also priests and deacons were largely foreigners, having been sent there from abroad. Portraits and documents testify to the existence of a Nubian clergy but they were few, too few. Nubia lived for seven centuries in great isolation from the rest of the world – except for its emigrants in Cairo and Jerusalem. The change from an agricultural mode of production to nomadic life took some two to three generations. In the final 'twilight of Christianity' there were strong social influences from Arab nomads, who intermarried into Nubian families.[44]

AKSUM

The waterway of the Nile made possible a rapid expansion of the Church from the Delta and adjoining monastic centres to Upper Egypt and the three kingdoms of Nubia. Similarly the beginnings of the Church in northern

Ethiopia depended on another, parallel waterway, that of the Red Sea, making possible contacts between the Semitic population on the south-western Arabian coast and the northern Cushitic communities in Ethiopia. For at least a 1,000 years before Christ, people had migrated from southern Arabia into northern Ethiopia. The Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 8, has a reference to an Ethiopian eunuch, working with Queen Candace (Qinaquis), of importance for Ethiopian Church history and its relationship to Jerusalem. 'Ethiopian' in this context meaning Meroe, in the modern Sudan. Merchants from Saba on the Arabian coast brought their desirable goods – mats, incense, ceramics – and sometimes decided to settle in the new country.

Place-names often provide important clues to early cultural contacts. In south-western Arabia and in Eritrea and Tigray, certain place-names are almost identical, no doubt brought by Semitic immigrants as they settled on the Ethiopian side of the Red Sea. Linguistic studies, also, indicate these ancient connexions, although an earlier held view of the Ge'ez language as derived from the Sabean is no longer so firmly established; the importance of the Cushitic contributions is becoming increasingly acknowledged. The traditional religion of South Arabia with its moon deity Athtar found its way over the waters to be assimilated with Cushitic pagan beliefs.

The period was one of more mobility and geographical exploits than it is generally given credit for. Meropius, a Christian of Tyre in Syria, went to 'India' and took two young men along, Adesius and Frumentius. On the return voyage they stopped at one of the Eritrean harbours where the crew was intercepted and only the two young men were rescued and taken to King Ella-Amida at Aksum. The king made Adesius his cup-bearer and the gifted Frumentius steward of his fortune. When the king died, Prince Ezana was too young to reign, and the Queen Mother asked the two foreigners to assist her in the administration. Frumentius was now in a position to give special consideration to Christian traders arriving at the court and to provide them with a site on which to build a small Church where he could bring them together for worship. Eventually, Frumentius and his friend were freed to return to Syria and on the way Frumentius visited Patriarch Athanasius in Alexandria. While giving him a vital report on the Church in Aksum, he was able to share with the Patriarch his concern about the need for a bishop from Egypt to guide the emerging Christian movement. For St Athanasius the choice was not difficult. He made Frumentius a bishop and consecrated him sometime between 341 and 346. By this act the ecclesiastical links between the Patriarch in Egypt and the Church in Ethiopia were established – supposedly regulated by Coptic Canons, although very much apocryphal – which lasted for no less than 1,600 years.

One should avoid the simplistic idea, based on Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, that the Christianization of Aksum was achieved solely by these youngsters. The case of Aksum was probably not very different from that in other parts of the Middle East. Christianity spread via the Red Sea as it had done in the Mediterranean: by Christian traders bringing their goods and their witness. The coastal towns and the islands in the Red Sea also provided points of communication for religious gestures and ideas. Frumentius' role was of course decisive, but he could operate in a community which was already beginning to be Christianized.

One can follow the religious change in the country on the coins which King Ezana minted. At first these bore the symbol of the crescent and two stars signifying traditional paganism, but eventually they were replaced by the sign of the cross. The King of Aksum had accepted the new faith, thus following the example of his colleague, Emperor Constantine. In Ezana's time Aksum became distinguished by its unique indigenous art, particularly the impressive high grave-stones, or *stelae*, the largest of them seventy feet high (there was one *stela* 110 feet – 35 metres – high which eventually fell, breaking into pieces). The ornamental patterns of the *stelae* with their depictions of doors, windows and floors indicate that the Aksumites erected multi-storey buildings for themselves in the early centuries of the Christian era. The architectural pattern depicted in these beautiful monuments is repeated in the churches of Tigray as well as in the famous rock-hewn churches of Lalibela. As long as the Semitic influence was dominant in Aksum, its churches were constructed on the mountain-tops, nearer the heavens.

Towards the end of the fifth century, with the arrival of the 'Nine Saints', holy men, most of them of Syrian background, the foundation was assured for the Ethiopian monastic movement in Aksum. 'The Nine' built a number of monasteries and churches, among them Debre Damo in Tigray, the oldest existing church in Ethiopia, established on the site of a traditional pagan shrine. Ethiopian architecture had found its characteristic form. It was of beautiful design, situated on an *amba* – one of the flat-topped hills so common to the Ethiopian landscape. In describing northern Ethiopia, one can write not only of a religious geography but of a religious topography as well. For centuries its high mountain plateaux, falling sharply on all sides, became ideal fortresses and refuges where churches and monasteries were built. Debre Damo is one of the most inaccessible church buildings in the world, to be reached only by hardy sportsmen and, of course, pious Ethiopians. A winding path takes the visitor up a high hill until he stands in front of a vertical cliff. From there one climbs to the actual church with the

help of a fifteen-metre cable of plaited copper. The timelessness of early monasticism is almost physically present.

'The Nine', all devoted Unionites, had arrived in Ethiopia at the end of the fifth century as refugees after Chalcedon. Three monks were to become the very backbone of the emerging Church and soon attracted thousands of men and women into their ranks, totally devoted to the Church. They became the carriers of a literary and liturgical movement which gave the young Church its style and its strength, but were also decisive in taking the Christian message to the illiterate masses. They acquired undisputed status and power in the country. The first beginnings of the 'Qêrilos' were now slowly emerging: a theological compilation in Ge'ez of Patristic texts, particularly from St Cyril, which were eventually to become the foundation of Ethiopian theology and faith.

As the churches were built, holy wells with the power to heal all illnesses would miraculously spring up on the spot. It was better not to cross these holy men. If angered they might hit back. Matta Libanos, called 'the apostle of Eritrea', translated the Gospel of St Matthew into Ge'ez, but when leaving Aksum he is believed to have sent a drought to the country lasting for three years. He thus coerced both king and metropolitan to follow his will.

The first two centuries saw the establishment of the foundations of the Church in Aksum, achieved through the determination and devotion of Christian kings and monks. In the sixth century, Aksum had a powerful ruler in Kaleb, 510–58. He came to the military rescue of the battered Christian communities in southern Arabia, and Aksum ruled the Himyarite kingdom in southern Arabia between 520 and 525. With the help of monks Kaleb was able to convert the pagan masses. Placed in the north of the country, with constant contacts with the Syrian church across the Red Sea and having acquiesced to a far-reaching dependence on the Patriarch in Alexandria (later in Cairo), the Church in Aksum presented an image whereby its ecclesiastical experience was an Ethiopian illustration of the universality of the church.

Zagwe and Solomonide Dynasties

However, the glories of Aksum came slowly to an end. The monks took the lead in shifting the centre of Church and State from Aksum in the north to the central highlands. From the eighth century, colonies of faithful Christians began to move south with their Ge'ez language, their liturgy and their Unionite version of Christianity.

In the tenth century there was a revolt led by the Agew chieftainess, Gudit (Judith), followed by a long period of almost fatal weakness of the Christian regime. This was emphasized by the fact that for long decades the Patriarch in Alexandria could not, or would not, send a new bishop or *abun* to be the official head of the Ethiopian Church. In the meantime the coastline was the scene of rising Muslim power. Towards the end of the thirteenth century, Ethiopia was surrounded by Muslim states, and about the year 1300, Islam held sway over half of present-day Ethiopia.

Two dynasties dominated the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: the Zagwe from 1137–1270, and the Solomonides from 1270 – incomparably creative years in Ethiopian religious history. The Zagwe dynasty came to power in a new rebellion of the Agew people in Lasta, the central province. Their most famous king was Lalibela (1190–1225) who built his capital at Roha in the Lasta mountains, later named Lalibela after the king. He was a deeply religious personality, the King-Priest, withdrawing at times for meditation, and an architechtural genius. For three days he had a revelation of the New Jerusalem to be built at Roha. His capital had to surpass ancient Aksum with its Old Testament symbols, such as the Throne of David and the Tables of the Lord. Instead the New Jerusalem was to extol Christ, the New Testament and the Apocrypha. To that end eleven churches were cut out of the red volcanic tuff of the mountain, with an Ethiopian River Jordan in their midst, all inspired by one single vision. These temples, many not visible above ground, were clustered together, and are breath-taking beautiful as well as affording proof of dedication, skill and ingenuity. The Medani-Alem church was the largest and the most beautiful, measuring 33.5 by 23.5 metres. Another sanctuary, Abba Libanos, was built in a grotto.

The siting of the churches changed. They were no longer placed on the high mountains as in Aksum times but, adapting to the local Agew valley population with their river cults and holy wells, the churches were now built close to holy and healing waters. The monks made use of spring waters to Christianize the people. There was a grotto known to have a holy spring: so a church was built inside the grotto. Of course, they brought the Holy Word in that holy language, *Ge'ez* but in doing so they found a spot for the holy building – near flowing waters. This was, in a dry land, a response to a deep-rooted human need for life-giving and healing water. The royal vision and the artisans' craftsmanship transformed the young institution from a Coptic Church into a truly indigenous, Ethiopian Church.

The Solomonides

The Solomonide period developed Ethiopian spirituality at its noblest. The ideological foundation and character of the new kingdom was to be found in its fundamental document: the *Kibre Negest* – Glory of Kings – containing the myth of a sacred link between the Old Testament and Ethiopia. The core of this myth is the legend of the Queen of Sheba – a literary enlargement on certain passages in I Kings 10:1–13: how the Queen visited King Solomon, accepted his faith and bore him a son, Minilik I. When this son had spent some time with his father in Jerusalem, he took the Ark of the Covenant from the Holy City and brought it back with him to Aksum, the new Zion. As important as the Old Testament is to the Hebrews or the Koran to the Arabs, so the *Kibre Negest* is to the Ethiopians. It is 'the most genuine expression of Abyssinian Christianity'. This central myth lies at the root of the national and religious inheritance of a sacred king, people and Church. Ethiopian liturgical and literary life have been inspired by these documents. Every church, with its threefold division, is modelled on the Hebrew Temple and has its *tabot* (altar stone) as its most holy and precious property. At this time, too, the churches were moved onto the hill-tops again, visible from far and wide.

The *Kibre Negest* regards the Zagwe kings as usurpers and relates how all the descendants of the royal house in Aksum were killed: only one boy was saved by the monks and hidden in the monastery. Tekle Haymanot, the outstanding monastic leader – *c*. 1215–1313 – helped this boy to regain royal power. In 1270 he began his rule as Yikunno Amlak, thus restoring the Solomonic dynasty and opening the golden age of Ethiopia. Yikunno Amlak rewarded Tekle Haymanot for his help by awarding to him and the Church one third of state lands as a perpetual feudal benefice. Thus the Ethiopian monk patriarch was able to make his monastery, Debre Libanos, the leading religious centre of the country. The King's bequest was of enormous importance as long as the Church enjoyed the unlimited confidence of the people. When this relationship was questioned, the Church was increasingly to find its land ownership an embarrassment.

Amda Sion (1314–44), one of the most powerful of the Solomonide kings, was successful in his wars against the enemies. His victories led to mass conversion to Christianity and to a period of impressive building of churches and monasteries. His greatest successor was Zar'a Ya'qob (1434–68), 'unquestionably the greatest ruler Ethiopia had seen since Ezana'.[45] He continued his country's military expansion but above all devoted himself to the promotion of church and culture. This king was a

religious author who wrote or edited a number of books for the benefit of the Christians. By 'associating the Church more closely with the throne, Zar'a Ya'qob greatly enhanced the mystery and ritual with which the monarchy was imbued and which have become a mark and symbol of Ethiopian sacral kingship.'[46]

The highland of Abyssinia was at the time less isolated than one would expect. From the medieval crusades arose the myth of 'Prester John', and when Ethiopian pilgrims appeared in Cairo, Cyprus and Jerusalem, the Catholic Church desired contact and even union with Prester John's Church. The fifteenth-century Christians saw Islam approach Europe across Asia Minor, and finally capture Constantinople in 1453. The Church through the Council of Florence, meeting from 1439–42 realized the necessity for a united Christendom.

It was during this medieval period in Ethiopia that the rise of the 'Holy Men' occurred. At first, in the province of Shewa, a new militant monastic movement grew, often sharply and courageously critical of royalty and its polygamy. Preparation for life in the great monasteries involved a change in personal identity, with a new garb and a new name. There were three groups of clerics in the Ethiopian church: parish priests, monks and nuns, and *debteras* (men of religious learning). Monasteries provided for the celibate branch of the clergy, and were often the standard-bearers for the various doctrinal parties engaged in internecine arguments. Some of the monasteries helped to fashion the character of the people in their midst, as did the one at Debre Margos, which encouraged the surrounding Orthodox peasantry of Gojjam to sternly resist any foreign influence. Gojjam had thousands of monks and priests, and the adjacent areas of Begemdir and Shewa also proudly claimed a very high number. Women were not encouraged to become nuns until they were over fifty years old and widowed, but many left their families to join an order. Convents usually adjoined a monastery and in Begemdir and Shewa monks and nuns were members of the same religious community. The monks were also the ecclesiastical artists. The monastery acted as an arts school where gifted men would exchange experiences and inspire one another to greater achievements in the beautification of the churches.

In the eyes of the peasant population, the monks had supernatural powers, they could exorcize demonic spirits and were renowned healers. 'Such cures as were achieved resulted not from the holy man's application of a special medical knowledge or training, but rather from his use of religious techniques involving prayer, the cross, the Eucharist, monastic garb and holy water.' This healing power was very efficacious in the monks'

missionary activities, reaching out to the unchurched peasant masses. A rumour about a successful healing, together with singing of psalms and sometimes the display of liturgical vestments, demonstrated to everyone the attraction of the monks' religion. After such a demonstration the actual conversion of a particular group or community could be a brief and informal affair, involving profession of faith in the Triune God, baptism and a new name. In the national arena, the services of the holy men were of particular importance in preparation for war: 'predictions and blessings before battle and moral assistance on the battlefield', for which services the king gave them land and booty. From their monasteries the holy men influenced deeply the life of both the nobility and the ordinary peasants.[47]

In these centuries of Zagwe and more particularly, of Solomonide rule, the Church had been given the chance for uniquely significant growth. An indigenous church culture of the highest originality and beauty had been created. Churches and monasteries had, as their richest treasures, paintings and ancient manuscripts of the greatest value. A spiritual heritage had matured to be claimed not only by later generations in Ethiopia, but also by churches throughout Africa and beyond, even to the islands off the American continent. This was as far as the Ethiopian Church had arrived AD 1500, before the advent of Imam Ahmed Ibrahim.

2

MARITIME CONNECTIONS

EXPLORERS OF SEAS AND SOULS

Throughout the Middle Ages the Mediterranean Sea – with Rome, Constantinople and Alexandria – marked the core and, to some extent, the horizon of the Christian Church. In 1453 this perspective suddenly changed. An incredulous Christian world heard that the Muslims had taken Constantinople and that the Hagia Sophia had been turned into a mosque.

No nations were more deeply shaken by this news than Portugal and Spain, themselves only recently freed from Muslim control. They therefore became all the more involved when the Pope called for a new crusade against the enemies of Christianity. The small Portuguese nation – at this time no more than 2 million – was looking for a solution and found it in Prince Henry the Navigator, son of King Joao I, who had the vision and the resolve to find a new passage over the seas.

Gone were the times of using the manpower of oarsmen. Technical advances in ship design were experimented with and worked. Sails, sternpost and compass were the answer, and ever more sophisticated shapes and sizes of sails related to longer and finer forms of 'caravels' and 'galleons'. With the discovery of the potential of sailing ships, there were seemingly no limits to what could be attempted and achieved via the seas.

From the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and their peoples, the world outlook changed. Even before Columbus sailed westward, Portuguese ships, often with Genoese sailors, ventured south to Ceuta and to the Canary and Cape Verde islands. In Ceuta they met Arab merchants who knew about West Africa from their trade caravans across the desert. The sailors had already met Africans in Portugal. Black slaves were first acquired from northern Africa as early as the 1440s. With sail-fitted caravels reaching as far as the Upper and Lower Guinea coast, where the off-shore islands of Cape Verde and Sâo Tomé served as embarkation ports, the annual import of slaves to Portugal steadily increased. From 1490–1530 between 300 and 2,000 slaves were brought annually to Lisbon. They

2.1. Ethnic groups and key towns of East Africa.

supplied prestige and profit, and were employed in cities, in agriculture, in royal palaces, and on the ships. By the king's order, slaves were to be baptized and given Christian burial. Conversion to Christianity was seen as a key to social acceptance and advance. The slaves could also join one of the numerous religious fraternities associated with the convents of the Dominicans and Capuchins. At religious festivals, they sometimes attended as bands – dancing, singing, and playing.

Prince Henry prepared new generations of daring seamen to venture beyond the fearful capes along north-west Africa. After his death in 1460, others followed his example. Bartolomeus Diaz went beyond the Guineas and rounded the Cape of Good Hope. The ruthless Vasco da Gama went beyond the Cape and along the east coast of Africa to Mombasa in 1497–98. From there he followed the monsoon until he reached Calicut on the west coast of India.

The Portuguese were not only motivated by the hope of finding lucrative trade, but were also inspired by religious zeal, although at this time their missionary involvement did not resemble the modern missionary movement. It was rather an expression of the medieval Catholic Church in its Lusitanian form. In principle, it was directed under the exclusive leadership of the king, who acted as the Grand Master of the Order of Christ.

Royal Mission

Pope Alexander VI (Borgia), a Spaniard, had in 1493 divided the world assigning the West to Spain and the East, including Africa, to Portugal. This was the famous *padroado*, to ordinary people just a roll of parchment but to the Portuguese a sacred document, giving them legal right to govern the new worlds which they felt called to discover. Their king, Manuel 'the Great', 1495–1521, Grand Master of the Order of Christ, became the director-in-chief of his country's efforts to win the gold, and to save the souls of the dark nations.

For this national–ecclesiastical enterprise the king had at his side a missionary Tribunal, *mesa da conciencia*, consisting of theologians and members from the orders of knighthood. This group was a Portuguese anticipation of Rome's organization almost two centuries later – the Propaganda Fide. Under the personal direction of the king, the Tribunal met twice monthly to settle the numerous matters referred to it. It was an early 'Mission Board', on the threshold between the outgoing Middle Ages and the new era, dedicated to *conquista* in the name of Christ.

This enormous activity and daring exploration – historically speaking

comparable only to the exploits of space in our own time – was inspired by a vision of the *zeitgeist* and worldview of the period. Out of this milieu there emerged the special *conquista* idea of Christian mission – a new and unique phenomenon in Church history – and above all, altogether different from any modern concept which was developed in the nineteenth century by Catholic and Protestant mission societies. A Portuguese empire emerged along the coast-lines of Africa and India, and connected with this political conquest there was an idea of Christian conquest, of spiritual crusade and colonization.

It would seem that the *conquista* concept was the invention of the Portuguese Viceroy in Goa, Constantine of Bragansa. It implied establishing trade posts along the coastlines of the oceans and placing chaplains there, along with the traders, to guide them.

Vasco da Gama was on the lookout, he said, for 'pepper and souls'. Pepper and other spices he was to find plentifully to be brought as homage to the king in Lisbon. Souls were a different matter. The special *conquista* task was not so much to preach the Gospel but to induce the foreign peoples to accept Christianity as found and formed in the West. After the barest preparation – learning a pious gesture, 'the Sign of the Cross', and a formula about the Triune God – kings and aristocrats and the masses with the slaves could be incorporated by Baptism into the Christian Church.

WEST AFRICA

In 1458 Diogo Gomez led an expedition to West Africa. In the Gambia he came into contact with a Mandingo chief, Nomimansa, and conversed with him about religious matters. Following a theological dispute between Gomez and a Muslim cleric, Nomimansa expelled the cleric. The chief and others wanted to become Christian, and begged the captain to baptize them, but as he was not a priest he was unable to do this. When Gomez returned to Portugal, he persuaded Prince Henry to send out a priest, the Abbot of Soto de Cassa, to instruct Nomimansa in the Christian faith.

From the fifteenth century, Portuguese societies developed in the Gambia. Settlers married into local families and established small communities, with a church and houses imitating the Portuguese architectural style. A number of churches were built, including one up the Bintang creek called Geregia, a corruption of the Portuguese word for church: *igeresa*. These churches with their communities were served intermittently by visiting priests from the Cape Verde islands (which maintained a staff of twelve friars) or from the convent at Cachau on the Rio Grande, about eighty miles

south. But these groups rapidly lost their wealth and prestige, and their Portuguese connections became very tenuous. Some of their descendants emigrated to the Rio Grande, with its Cachau convent, perhaps to preserve their Catholic heritage and their faith.

From 1470 the Portuguese built forts on the 'Gold Coast' (Ghana) at Axim and at Elmina. Dutch, British, French, Germans, and Danes followed. In 1471 Portuguese caravels arrived on the west coast and soon anchored at Mina ('the Mines'), the future Gold Coast. They had brought a few missionaries of the Portuguese Order of Christ. A chapel was erected and the missionaries were prepared to administer daily mass. Preaching and catechization did not seem to be all that necessary for soon there was something more surprising, an apparent miracle. The missionaries had brought along from Portugal wooden statues of the Holy Virgin, and of St Francis and St Anthony of Padua. In the hot and humid climate the face and hands of St Francis changed colour from white to black. The Portuguese governor claimed that the saint was now revealing himself as the patron saint of the Africans.[1]

Before too long there was a mass movement to the baptismal font, sons and wives of chiefs together with a few black nobles. On one occasion the chief of the Efutu people and 1,000 of his men were sprinkled. Yet, having been baptized one had to keep to the faith, as a former female slave, Grace, found to her dismay. She could no longer say the *Ave*. Instead she held that her dead father came during the night to eat small loaves of bread which she had left for him. She was brought to the inquisition judges in Lisbon and was condemned to perpetual captivity in the prison of the Holy Office.[2]

The colonists all brought goods from Europe: muskets, gunpowder, brandy, and trinkets of various kinds. These were exchanged for gold, and later also for people – men and women collected along the River Volta or in the forest belt. The forts were built of stone or wood, surrounded by solid walls and turrets with cannons. Most were sordid places of boredom and whoredom, alcoholism, yellow fever and death, and thus there was much for the chaplains to do. The Danes opened a school for mulatto children in their 'Christianborg' fort, and a soldier was assigned to teach the youngsters from a Danish primer and the Danish hymn book.

One of the first chaplains was Thomas Thompson, 1751–56, sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. An educated and widely travelled man, he sent four African students to England, hoping to train future leaders. Among them was Philip Quaque, who spent ten years in England, 1756–66. He worked as a schoolmaster and pastor at Cape Coast till his death in 1816. Others also studied abroad and returned to the chaplaincies; J.

Capitein, an African ex-slave trained in Holland, working in the 1740s for the Dutch Reformed Church at Elmina; F. P. Swane, a mulatto with a Ga mother, trained in Copenhagen, becoming catechist and teacher at Christiansborg in the 1740s; and Christian Protten, another mulatto, working with the Moravians first in the West Indies and then at Christiansborg, 1756–69. In 1788 some fifty mulatto and African children from the Windward and Gold Coasts were attending schools in Liverpool.

The coastal forts, symbols of European power, were an altogether closed world, tiny dots on the immense West coast, having no contact with the inland peoples. Until the Europeans arrived, the ocean was a vast forgotten expanse, beyond which some thought the realm of the dead was located.

The British and the French put forts in Whydah, Dahomey, and after 1721 the Portuguese followed their example with a fort, 'Nossa Senhora do Livramento'. The rulers of the place quite possibly did not recognize the ugly irony of the pious name. Far away in Lisbon the king and queen were always prepared to provide for the eternal salvation of their subjects. They sent two priests to the country, and Queen Donna Maria especially commissioned them to convert the African king. They did this with unwavering promptness, informing King Angonglo of the Queen's wish that he be baptized and become a Catholic if he wished to live and die in the true law of God. The king seemed pleased, and declared himself ready to be baptized without delay. The two priests realized the immense potential of the king's readiness – the conversion of the whole population of Dahomey and neighbouring areas – but they had rules to follow, and informed the king that a certain time of catechetical preparation was required. With the assistance of their interpreters, they spent a week translating the Ten Commandments into the local language, looking forward to the great day. Unfortunately, however, they did not proceed fast enough to convey the message of the fifth commandment. The king's brother, to forestall the danger of a royal baptism, poisoned the prospective 'baptisand'.

An individual example of early Catholic missionaries on the West Coast is the life and death of the Spanish Capuchin, Fr Seraphin de Leon, later called 'Senegal's Apostle'. Together with thirteen other Capuchins, he left for Senegal in 1646. Of the fourteen Capuchins, he was eventually the only survivor, a hermit monk in a village on the present-day Sierra Leone coast. He was a remarkable example of Capuchin meditation; to the faithful he became known as one who, in his prayers, was bodily lifted into the air – 'levitation'.[3]

The Christian Gospel came to Africa by ship, over the oceans. However,

there is some evidence of daring attempts, characteristically by Franciscans, to bring the message via caravans through the desert. From the beginning of the eighteenth century there are accounts of Franciscans leaving from Tripoli via the Nile and from there finding their way as far as the kingdom of Borno (now in north-eastern Nigeria and adjacent areas of Chad). They were attracted as Professor Richard Gray says, by a 'Christian mirage'.[4] A mirage it remained and we cannot follow this up in detail.

From Sâo Tomé and Príncipe, the nerve centres of Portuguese slave traffic in the Lower Guinea region, the Portuguese could dominate the import of slaves, not only from Kongo but also from the so-called 'slave rivers', including the Benin and Forcados rivers. In characteristic Portuguese manner the slave trade was intertwined with the hope of converting the king, called the Oba, and his population to the Catholic faith. The benefit of conversion was explained to them. Baptism, it was suggested, 'would bring him [the Oba] guns as well as grace'.[5] In providing these advantages the local salesmen were directed by the king in Lisbon who, it seems, attended to every detail himself. In December 1514 he ordered three chasubles for those missionaries who were leaving for Benin: one of the chasubles was of purple satin, with a centre stripe of black damask, another of purple damask with a stripe of green satin, and the third was of camlet with a stripe of Bruges satin. Two albs completed the priestly wardrobe.

This finery could not ensure the attention of the king. The missionaries found that, optimistic rumours to the contrary, the Oba almost invariably managed to avoid foreigners. Father Angel was fortunate however and in receiving him the Oba generously declared that he would build a church for them and provide the missionaries with his own interpreters so that 'they might explain to him the mysteries of their religion'.

All this royal amiability came to an abrupt end in 1665 when the Spanish Capuchins, with astounding audacity, contrived to get a glimpse of some of the mysteries of the Oba's own religion. In the royal palace the Capuchins drifted along in with the noisy crowd, only to find that they were to witness a display of human sacrifices: five men and five animals were to be decapitated on a table with impressively sharp scimitars. When suddenly the foreigners were detected, the master of ceremonies attempted to throw them out, but the Spanish missionaries were not to be that easily dismissed. Fr Felipe de Hijar describes the drama:

> We ... stepped into the middle of the courtyard and begun speaking aloud to the king and the chiefs of the evil they were doing in making such sacrifices, of the state of perdition in which they stood, that the devil whom they served was deceiving them, and so forth.[6]

At that the Oba's men 'rushed furiously upon us and swept us through the courtyard with great violence'.

This attempt was followed by repeated new ventures, until after a change of Oba in 1710, an Italian Capuchin mission was established in Benin city. Fr Celestino d'Aspra gave three years, 1710–1713, to his unpromising task. Nothing is known of his work and with Fr Celestino the Benin mission wound up.[7]

KONGO AND SOYO

In the 1470s Portuguese sailors reached the mouth of the Zaïre River, eager to make *conquista* for their king. In 1497 Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope with a squadron of four caravels and 150 men. They began to explore the East Coast of Africa, from Natal to Malindi. Then, with the aid of monsoon winds, they steered across the Indian Ocean to India, where Goa became the centre of government and church in the Portuguese empire.

During their expansion, the Portuguese dotted both the west and east coastlines of Africa with Portuguese place names: Cape Verde, Mina (the 'Mines', Elmina, the 'Gold Coast'), Sâo Tomé, Algoa – Delagoa (*to* Goa and *from* Goa), Natal, and Mombasa. In all of this the sailors were looking for a face and a king, for Prester John's kingdom, somewhere inside the continent of Africa. Following this lead, the Portuguese were eventually to arrive in Ethiopia.

Beginnings in Zaïre

In 1483 Diogo Cao returned to Portugal, and took along four Kongolese to learn the language of the white man and to serve later as the first interpreters in Kongo. It was on Diogo Cao's second visit in 1491 that evangelization could begin.

The meeting on that coast between canoe and caravel, between traditional ritual with its *nkisi* and Catholic ritual with its crucifix, was one of momentous significance, with almost cosmological overtones. Who were these strange creatures arriving in their enormous vessels, big as whales? They spoke of God, and referred to the world of the ancestors; they obviously hailed from the realm of the departed, for they had the paleness of the dead. In that moment on the seashore of Soyo, two worlds met – or tried to meet – and the encounter opened up opportunities for understanding and misunderstanding, for co-operation and hope, for enslavement and despair.

On board the caravels landing at Soyo – the coastal district of the kingdom of Kongo – were five priests, missionaries of the St Eloi monastery in Lisbon, Portuguese artisans and the Kongolese who had been baptized in Lisbon after catechetical instruction by Father Vicente dos Anjos. This Father had already picked up some of the Kikongo language from his catechumens while still in Lisbon. He was now one of the priests on board. The young Christian Bakongo and this Father thus formed an initial group of communication making understanding between the two worlds to some extent possible.

On Easter Day 1491, the *Mani Soyo* and one of his sons were baptized, in the presence of a crowd of some 25,000 people. The baptism on this occasion could not be followed by the Eucharist for unfortunately the ship with the altar-stones on board was delayed and the altar could not function without these blessed stones placed in the altar. On 3 May 1491 Nzinga Nkuvu, the most important person in the kingdom, was baptized with the name of João together with six leading noble men. To emphasize the significance of this act, Nzinga Nkuvu gave an order that all idols – or 'fetishes' – were to be brought together and burned.

The baptism of these high-ranking figures was accompanied by a psychological phenomenon important in itself but even more so because it was to be re-enacted in future generations, a sign of continuity, of 'the long duration' in the spirituality of the Kongolese people. Two of the men who had been baptized together with the king could report that they had seen identical dreams of a beautiful woman (later identified as the Virgin Mary) who told them that, as baptized, they were now invincible. She urged the king to see to it that his whole kingdom became Christian. But this was not enough. Another miraculous phenomenon was the discovery of a stone in the form of a cross they believed had fallen from heaven. It was carried in procession to the church. The role of dreams as confirmation of a striking spiritual experience can even now be seen throughout the history of the Christian Church, in Kongo and in the rest of Africa.

The baptism of the king was soon followed by that of the queen and of one of the princes, Mvemba Nzinga, baptized Afonso. To the guardians of local tradition this was too much. The energetic thrust of the foreigners inevitably provoked a vehement pagan reaction, and in 1495 the recently baptized noblemen, including young Prince Mvemba Nzinga, fled to the adjacent district of Sundi, while the old king returned to his harem and his ancestors.

This temporary move to Sundi and the return from Sundi a decade later were important. African history includes many such examples of victorious 'returnee', and as one of these, Mvemba Nzinga could use the Sundi

experience, when as *Mani Kongo* he set out to lead his kingdom on Christian lines. In the exile at Sundi two Portuguese priests, Goncalve Vas and Rodrigue Anes, accompanied the young prince, becoming his teachers in general Western education and in the Christian faith. When King Nzinga Nkuvu died in 1506, Mvemba Nzinga, strengthened by ten long years of refugee experience, established himself as the new king of Kongo.

The king and his bishop

Mvemba Nzinga is one of the greatest lay Christians in African Church history. Eager as he had been to learn from his Portuguese missionaries at Sundi, he was determined to give the youth educational opportunities. He built a school for 400 boys, and soon a school for girls, led by his sister. Although inclined to his task in the royal traditions of the Kongolese, Mvemba Nzinga was also anxious to lead them in the new ways. Count Pedro Nsaku ne Vunda was appointed to guard the baptismal water; from time immemorial, his clan had guarded the holy water, an interesting example of the continuity of symbols. Destroying the traditional *nkisi* in large bonfires, the king and priests replaced them with another sacred symbol, the crucifix, and the chiefs received crosses for their protection. To the king and his generation, Christianity represented *ngolo* (power), concentrated in these sacred objects.

In 1508 the king of Portugal sent Mvemba Nzinga fifteen missionaries, Canons of St Eloi, most of whom found the climate very difficult. In 1509, the Church in Kongo was brought closer to the church in Portugal and in Rome when Mvemba Nzinga sent his son, Henry, to Lisbon for further studies. During the decade of his father's exile in Sundi, young Henry had been instructed by the two Portuguese priests accompanying the family on their flight. Without doubt Henry spoke Portuguese at this time. In Lisbon he learned Latin, and the king there wrote to the proud father in Kongo that the young man spoke it quite well.

After following his progress for a decade, the Portuguese king, with Papal dispensation, had Henry consecrated as 'suffragan' bishop (officially 'of Utica', in North Africa) at the tender age of twenty-six. No letter or other written statement by the young bishop has survived in the archives of southern Europe. The only record we have of this nature is a signature of 1514. Henry returned to Africa, and his years of ecclesiastical office and activity, however much curtailed by failing health, certainly made an impression. The very fact of the young prince's consecration to the episcopal office must have strengthened the self-assurance of the Kongo Church. The

co-operation of father and son, king and bishop, helped considerably to raise the status of the Church at Mbanza Kongo. Bishop Henry died in 1531.

The Portuguese missionaries found a keen promoter of their religious concerns in King Mvemba Nzinga. Occasionally he would preach in the chapel, and thus present the new message more effectively than when it came through interpreters. The king also showed his personal concern for the priests. In 1534, with the help of della Rovere, Nuntius in Lisbon, he wrote to the Pope suggesting modifications of the rule of celibacy. In the letter, the Nuntius referred to the uniate Maronites in Lebanon, suggesting this as a precedent for the priests in Kongo.

Mvemba Nzinga's realm was an independent African kingdom, and at first he corresponded in Portuguese with King Joao of Portugal in terms of brotherly esteem and confidence. Eventually he became deeply disappointed, embittered even, by the Portuguese slaving activities. Toward the end of his reign, four to five thousand slaves were being exported annually. He saw his country being depopulated by devastating shipments of slaves either to mines on the Gold Coast or across the ocean. A constant problem was that of the inexorable rule of *Padroado*: His Holiness had once and for all assigned Africa to the Portuguese – and that was that! When, in 1534, the Kongo Church was placed under the bishopric of Sâo Tomé, established that year, the situation did not improve.

At the time of Mvemba Nzinga's death in 1543, half the population of Kongo had been baptized, some two million people, the result of missionary activity inspired by the king of Kongo, and ultimately directed by that distant authority, the king of Portugal, Grand Master of the Order of Christ. A creative venture was the arrival in 1548 of five Jesuit fathers. They started a 'college' at Sâo Salvador, but were forced by the king's displeasure to leave after five years of devoted work. They moved to Luanda in Angola and established a college which became characterized by their competence and educational ambition.

From Kongo's point of view, the pretensions of *Padroado*, centred on the slave-dealing island of Sâo Tomé with its Portuguese bishop, were a perpetual burden. The Kongolese were therefore relieved when in 1596 Rome evaded *Padroado* by naming Sâo Salvador, formerly Mbanza Kongo, as an episcopal see, with its own bishop. King Alvaro II (1587–1614) could now extend his contacts with the outside world by sending his own ambassador to Rome. But it was a difficult task: the ambassador, on leaving for Rome, was captured by Dutch corsairs, and did not reach the Holy City for four years. On arrival in 1608, he was so exhausted that he died on the day of his scheduled presentation to His Holiness.

Relations with merchants in Luanda and slave dealers of Sâo Tomé made matters untenable. In 1655 a devastating war culminated in the famous battle at Ambuila. The Portuguese army from Angola crushed the Kongo forces and the proud city of Sâo Salvador, with its cathedral and its eight churches, was virtually destroyed, a traumatic blow to the Kongo people. King Antonio I Afonso was beheaded, together with his chaplain and relative, the first black Capuchin, Francisco de Sâo Salvador Roboredo. Civil war and rapid decay followed, and soon there were three contenders for the throne. A turn for the better came with Pedro IV in 1696. He was determined to restore the glory of the capital, Sâo Salvador, but did not succeed until 1709.

The Capuchins in Kongo 1645–1835

The Portuguese authorities insisted that according to their *Padroado* rule only missionaries of Portuguese nationality were acceptable in Kongo. However, King Garcia II (1651–61) had a mind of his own – he was determined to suspend this ecclesiastical monopoly. He was helped by a combination of world political factors offering an opportunity for change. In 1645 Portugal was at war with Spain and Angola was under Dutch occupation. This was when the first non-Portuguese missionaries, all Italian Capuchins could, despite Portuguese protests, slip into the country. Once inside they soon attracted other members of their expanding communities, all prepared to travel in the rural areas, a novelty at the time.

The missionary period in lower Kongo after 1650 was dominated by the Capuchins. Their order in Europe was a rapidly growing reform movement, within the Franciscan family. In the first half century they reached a membership of 3,700 and were soon prepared to send missionaries to the new continents. In 1622 the new Catholic mission organization in Rome, Propaganda Fide, with strong Capuchin representation at the centre, began to plan to send their men to Kongo. This Capuchin mission was in fact the most extensive evangelization effort in Black Africa prior to modern times. From 1645 to 1835 no less than 440 friars were working in Kongo/Angola. The climate was not beneficial. More than half of these men died after only a few years or months in the country, but this did not frighten them, new recruits followed unhesitatingly. These were men who in a time of worldliness and war found strength in meditation and a disciplined prayer life.

Baptizing a people

In the last twenty-eight years of the century, the Capuchins achieved surprising results in terms of numbers of baptisms. Thirty-seven ‘preachers’

together registered a total of 341,000. Of these, two had each baptized 50,000, one 30,000, another 20,000, four 14,000 each, and eight 10,000 each.[8] How can the large numerical claims of converts be understood? This question must be answered in an historical perspective, relating the situation in its context to both the Latin Christianity of the period and to traditional Kongo culture. There was a tolerant and an inclusive approach to the problem of conversion in Africa. It was made all the more acceptable, as fundamental religious concepts were expressed in Kikongo, all of them related to Kongo cosmology, such as *Nzambi* (God), *nkisi* (holy), and *moyo* (spirit or soul). Usually they followed the example of their ruler. At his baptism a herald would announce what was expected of the crowd, and the masses assembled in the market places would queue up to the baptismal font. Yet there were exceptions. The day after the ruler's baptism at Ngobila, Fr Caltanisetta asked him to have the herald announce that all were to be baptized, but the ruler refused, feeling that each one should be free to decide for him or herself. The energetic Caltanisetta strangely took this to mean that he could begin baptizing everybody 'without distinction'. But he had overstepped his mark.

> As the people did not know the Sacred Baptism, they fled into the bush and it was in vain that we pleaded with them to receive Baptism, by which the sons of the Devil would become Sons of God and inheritors of Holy Paradise. Thus I could not manage to baptize more than 248.[9]

After the ruler's baptism in Nzonzo, 'fetishists' spread the rumour that those who consented to baptism would suffer sudden death. This led to determined opposition to the missionaries' efforts. Rumour could, of course, help too. It promised bliss to those who came forward to 'eat salt', one expression for Baptism. (The Catholic ritual included salt on the tongue.) Preparation for baptism was often left to the Kongolese interpreters. These were married laymen, all from noble families, and some trained in Portugal. They would teach by singing the Biblical or doctrinal sentences to the illiterate groups. Children and youth were the first to adopt the new learning, singing the phrases to the adults at home or in public places.

The first Portuguese Kongo catechism was available in 1556 – the first book ever to be produced in a Bantu language. It was used almost exclusively for slaves imported from Kongo to the plantations of Sâo Tomé. In 1624 Fr Matheus Cardoso's *Christian Doctrine* in Portuguese and Kikongo appeared. The missionaries soon followed Cardoso's method of singing the text of the doctrine in a simple and familiar rhythm. At Sunday worship the people repeated the sacred terminology of the new religion,

learning such Latin phrases as 'Ave Maria', 'santissimo sacramento', and 'Salve Regina'. During the 'Antonian heresy' period, Fr Lorenzo da Luca met the self-named St Isabelle, who baptized and gave absolution, using a few powerful words repeated with gusto: 'In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti'.

Occasionally the missionary would be able to welcome a 'Prefect' for an inspection tour. Whether in Kongo or in Luanda, the visiting Father would ask the faithful to demonstrate their knowledge about the two fundamental and sacred matters: to make the Sign of the Cross, and to say the names of the Persons in the Trinity. These were obviously regarded as the Christian's 'iron ration': the ritual gesture, and the dogmatic declaration. They were simple, but universally recognizable symbols of the unity and the continuity of Christianity. Preaching in the chapel could refer to them, and they could be used for spiritual insight and meditation. In addition to the Trinity, there was also the Virgin Mother's image, and often the statue of a local saint, preferably St Anthony, the healer from Padua.

Soyo spirituality

During the eighteenth century the Kongo Church slowly but inevitably faded away and in the end only a few sad traces and ruins remained, leaving the impression that it had perhaps throughout been nothing but an illusion, a pious phantasmagoria in the bush and never more than a thin veneer over a groundwork of solid traditional religion. It is therefore all the more significant that a methodological shift of approach to the problem has been suggested and accomplished. The impact of the Christian movement in Kongo 'varied enormously over time and space', between the different districts and from one period to another.

Professor Richard Gray has concentrated his attention, not on the Kingdom of Kongo as such but on one district within the kingdom, Soyo, with its capital Mbanza Soyo and its harbour Mpinda. In focusing the analysis on this one area located just below the Zaïre estuary, soon a dominant power in the kingdom, Gray is in a position to present a surprisingly vivid and convincing picture of Christian devotion and allegiance. Here the Capuchins had an almost unrivalled influence. Moreover they managed to elicit from the king of Portugal an admission that the ruler of Soyo was an independent prince. With the deterioration of the Kongo kingdom as such, Soyo acquired a position of its own and its Church a role of its own.

Two factors combined to achieve this: one, the diplomatic role of the

Capuchins on behalf of Soyo, achieved 'with at least a touch of that skill and charity' which they had clearly demonstrated on a wider scale in contemporaneous Europe; two, the ready response of the elite and the people to the basic ritual design of the Capuchin staff. This was seen in the role of the Christian calendar and the festivals of the Christian year. The ritual on these occasions bound together ruler and subjects in enthusiastic displays of worship and processions. As a matter of course the ruler of Soyo took the lead showing what seemed total devotion. Apart from the ordinary festivals, the Church in Soyo developed two saints' days of special local significance, the feast of St James on 25 July and of St Luke on 10 October, both commemorating not only the witness of these great saints but also of national victories on these dates, all, as Gray has noted, contributing to a 'routinization of piety' at ground level.[10]

Two groups of lay leaders were seen at work supporting ruler and missionaries. One consisted of the interpreters as teachers and catechists, eight or ten in number, men of noble birth, mostly relatives of the ruler, thereby emphasizing the local church's character as a court religion. The second consisted of 'the slaves of the mission', who maintained a hostel and served as medical aids in the hospital; they also accompanied the missionaries on their visitation tours of the district. While others may have harboured fears of certain risks of sorcery in the capital and in the district, these men could afford to be totally fearless, for they were privileged with stronger protection than any sorcery, in the holy medals awarded them by the powerful Capuchins.[11]

Capuchins and the king

It is necessary to quote a few Capuchin missionaries in order to help root out the impression that these Catholics devoted themselves exclusively to wholesale mass baptism, leaving their new converts at that. Nothing gives as vivid a picture of Kongo Church life in the 1690s as the diary of Fr Luca da Caltanisetta, the Sicilian Capuchin. King and nobility were at the centre in his notes: he mentioned the common people only as baptized numbers which are surprisingly high. One day he baptized 254, another day 269, for 1698 he entered a total of 2,373. When visiting Mbemba, he harvested 205 in one day, and remarked that the village was 'inhabited by people who were refugees from Ngonzo because of the wars'. Following Joseph C. Miller's research in the region, it is possible to understand how the village masses turned to the missionary and to baptism. Miller emphasizes the role of the refugees, those coming

> from marginal lands who sought protection and sustenance in those same villages during times of drought. These helpless new arrivals joined war captives in disadvantaged groups of kinless residents constituting a despised lower stratum of society similar to 'slaves' in western societies.[12]

Caltanisetta remembers that there was a daily evening service at Soyo with a 'Litany of Our Lady'.[13] Three times a week this was followed by 'the Discipline' (penitential self-flagellation), and by the Holy Rosary on three other days. Friday morning included also the 'Crown of Five Wounds'. Holy Week was of course the great celebration of the year, when Andrea da Pavia claims that 'all the ceremonies performed in Italy were also followed at Soyo'. On Maundy Thursday they processed with Crucifix, Crown of Thorns, and 'chains' (for flagellation). Holy Saturday had Blessing of Fire, of Water, and Incense with the Paschal Light. The faithful brought a great number of their own calabashes of water to be blessed. 'They then drank that water with great devotion' and each danced home carrying his calabash. At the 'Gloria' in the Mass they beat drums, played instruments, and fired a salvo of guns. The recording missionary admired this display of devoted participation. 'I claim that these African people show more piety than the Europeans.' This Blessing of Water and the carrying home of calabashes was a ceremony recreated three centuries later in Zionist charismatic worship on the Rand and in Swaziland. *Plus ça change* ... ('the more it changes, the more it remains the same thing') is an apt French phrase for these long-term durations, the transfer of new meaning to old symbols. Both early Catholics and modern Zionists displayed the immemorial need for purification and renewal, for Life and Power.

Andrea Pavia was impressed by the people's devotion to their deceased, especially on the 'Great Day of the Dead'. All the participants sang their prayers in Kikongo, and carried 'lights' which lit all the eight churches at Soyo. In surplice and cape the priest led the procession to the tombs where all took part in singing responses. 'The whole night was dedicated to these devotions.' The next morning each came with their baskets of gifts on behalf of the dead. 'We had ten tons of gifts to be distributed afterwards', presumably to the poor.

With the king and nobility, the missionaries had to tread warily. At Nzonzo in 1698, Caltanisetta reported that the local 'duke', Dom Miguel, felt piqued by the Capuchins as they had excommunicated him and 'thereby not shown due respect'. He insisted that they owed him an apology. Caltanisetta was not intimidated for he had Canon Law on his side and informed the duke that 'he had fallen in excommunication No. 15 of the Bull *De coena Domini*', yet if he were to mend his ways, he would be absolved from the

punishment.[14] In addition to the king and dukes, the missionary was dependent on the interpreters, who rendered the messages of the monks into the local language. Latin words were mysterious and impressive, but the interpreter's Kikongo brought God's word closer to man's heart. These men were gifted linguists, and soon picked up not only Portuguese but some Latin phrases as well, and could thus serve at Mass. Placed between two cultures, the interpreter became a trusted adviser of the missionary, warning him, when necessary, not to overstep his mark. As the ultimate badge of honour, the interpreter was buried next to the missionary. This was a distinction which made his lay position in the Church particularly attractive: one of merit in his short lifetime, and an assurance of good company for his long dramatic pilgrimage Beyond.

Unfortunately, although the Capuchins came to Kongo with the very best of intentions they had little awareness that the encounter with the Kongolese was delicate, requiring tact, humility, and generosity. Caltanisetta's diary revealed the closed European mind which was so offensive to the African.

> At Mbanza Zolu I sent word to the king to tell the fetishists to stop their dances and these diabolic ceremonies. They replied that they could not stop. Then I said he had to catch them and chain them or else I would come myself and catch them. At that they left . . . I beat the heads of two idols one against the other and threw them into the fire. At that, these ignorant people showed their sadness and defiance, and almost in tears with depression they withdrew, not wishing to see their filth being burnt.

The bishop had additional problems. Having moved to Luanda, he found little time for visiting Sâo Salvador: the trip took fifteen days each way. He also complained that he could not find the necessary number and quality of clergy. When the first Capuchins were sent to 'Nigritia' (Africa), the great majority died, only to be followed by succeeding waves of eager colleagues, ready for similar sacrifice. But the toll in Capuchin lives had been heavy. In the nineteenth century West Africa was known as 'the White man's grave', and this expression was no less true of seventeenth-century Kongo. The bishop also felt it almost impossible to train Africans for ordination. There thus remained the special Luanda category of the 'Coloureds' (*métis*). After hasty preparation, some of these were ordained, but not all of them were very devoted.

In the seventeenth century the great Catholic missionaries went to Asia: Matteo Ricci to China, Alexander de Rhodes to Cochin-China, and Roberto de Nobili to India – with their imaginative approach to mandarins and sannyasi. They dealt with 'religione de cultura', having long and venerable

traditions and supported theologically by a Propaganda in Rome with its famous 'Instruction' of 1659, the 'Magna Carta' of the Propaganda Fide.[15] Here the Cardinals asked from the missionaries 'intellectual elasticity' and adaptation which 'would imitate the example of Jesus and the Apostle of the nations'.

> Beware of any effort or advice to the peoples devised to make them change their rites, their customs and habits as long as these are not clearly contrary to religion and good custom.[16]

This concerns Asia and the nations and peoples of Asia. What about Africa? What was the difference? Many felt at the time, and others did so during the succeeding centuries, that Africans 'did not have a religion', that their worship, their concerted cry to God was no more than superstition. Africa and its religious quest was at the time too little understood to permit a similar approach from the Africa missionaries, with well-known consequences.

Kimpa Vita – Beatrice of Kongo

This attitude of Westerners left a void in the hearts of men and women, particularly in those who had readily accepted the White man's God and his unassailable truths. It was then that a mere woman, born out of the people, appeared on the scene at Sâo Salvador – Kimpa Vita or Donna Beatrice. Frail and only twenty-one, she had a vision and a message which soon captured the masses and still does so today.

The drama, *Beatrice of Kongo* by Bernard Dadie of the Ivory Coast, was acted by distinguished West African actors when first performed at the *Festival d'Avignon* – the old city of the Popes – in July 1971. It brought home to participants and onlookers alike the depths of feeling in the drama once enacted in real earnest 250 years earlier in old Kongo.

The student of modern charismatic movements in Africa recognizes at once the characteristic features of her personality and her claims. Simon Kimbangu, Isaiah Shembe, William Wade Harris, George Khambule, or sweet old Ma Nku – all belong to the same family. Donna Beatrice appears as a close relative to them all, a revered great-grandmother – although she was still young when burned to death for her alleged crime.

In Beatrice's case, there was a Precursor, an old woman called Maffuta. In 1704 she had a vision of the Madonna who told her that Her Son was saddened because down there on earth, the king was no longer staying at Sâo Salvador, but at Kibangu in Sundi. In her hand she held the proof of her revelation – a stone she had found in the river, in the likeness of the head of

Christ. 'Come down from the mountains', she said, 'and rebuild Sâo Salvador, the capital of kings'.

Soon Donna Beatrice, the young prophetess, appeared. 'Donna' indicates that she was of noble family. In the Kongo villages she was rumoured to be a healer of the sick, like Jesus of old, and was known to give children to barren women. She had a child of her own, given to her in a supernatural manner. Barro, her consort, called 'St John', shared her life but obviously in a somewhat subdued manner. Her initial experience of a near-death was regularly repeated: once a week she would 'die', disappearing in order to speak to God – and then she would rise again. She could foretell the future, and a glorious future at that for Sâo Salvador. The tree-trunks would be changed into gold and silver, and under the stones would be mines with gold, silver, and gems. And there would be quantities of the richest silk and other cloths. This *cargo* theme is of great interest, being rare in African charismatic experience.

Though a woman, Donna Beatrice called herself St Anthony, referring to the great Franciscan saint of Padua, revered by the Capuchins. He had appeared to her in the characteristic brown habit of the monks, and had entered her with his power and soul. With the authority of her extraordinary personality, she, like the Capuchins, ordered the people to burn their *nkisi*, and not only the *nkisi* but also their crucifixes. Her *idée fixe* was to call for the people's return to Sâo Salvador, thus dangerously challenging the authority of the king.

This was too much for the guardians of order in the realm, the King and his Council, and the Capuchin Fathers looking on in horror at this display of blatant heresy. The Council was called together and they condemned Beatrice to death. On 2 July 1706, she and her consort were burned to death at the stake. Many of her disciples, 'Little Anthonys', went about the countryside spreading her message. After the fire, they would with bated breath assure their listeners that the burning place had turned into two deep wells, with a beautiful star appearing in each.

This woman cannot be dismissed as a mere curiosity on the fringe of Kongolese Church history. She had the intuition and courage to intervene during the deep crisis of her nation and her Church. She insisted that it was her Church, too, and that she had a responsibility for it.

An epilogue

To the masses the Christian religion consisted above all in the initiation rite of the new religion, Baptism, and possibly in participating in certain feasts

and fasts which still survived as a cultic reality. Increasingly the king was seen as the embodiment of *nkisi*, mediating what the people needed, power, rain and health. He appeared as the head of what must be termed a Christian ancestor cult with its centre in the burial grounds of the kings and with Nzinga Nkuvu – João I – as the traditional hero of the cult.

The nobles had a monopoly on certain prestigious manifestations of Christianity: literacy in Portuguese and membership of the Order of Christ, the Portuguese-inspired Church Order. There are also among the nobles certain pretensions of Christian marriage. The wealthier among nobles could maintain *maestri da igreja* or catechists who looked after chapels, shrines and hospices. Even late in the nineteenth century there were communities of 'Slaves of the Church', descendants of those who had served the missionaries in the old days.

The king of Sâo Salvador, Garcia V, 1803–30 had inherited and kept alive his precious epistolary contacts with the royal court in Lisbon. He would plead with his royal colleague: 'Oh, my brother, king like me', hoping to be given European priests to celebrate his wedding to Queen Isabel. As head of the Order of Christ he also needed a priest to bless the uniforms of the Order with which he invested his dukes and other officials.

When at long last, in 1814, Father Luigi Maria of Assisi did turn up at the court of Sâo Salvador, the king was overjoyed, asking the Pope to make the missionary 'a bishop or a cardinal'. Father Luigi spent eight months in Kongo. In this time he managed to baptize altogether 25,700 people, adults and children, all prepared beforehand by ever-present catechists, and 5,000 for the confessional and the Mass. This was a melancholic numerical decline compared with the situation in the 1780s when a bishop and sixteen fathers on a tour through the Kongo had rebuilt dilapidated churches and baptized 308,000 or when between 1759 and 1774 Cherobino da Savona had succeeded in baptizing 700,000.

Luigi's successor, Father Zenobi Maria of Florence arrived in Luanda in 1816, instructed by the Propaganda Fide to organize and develop the Church in Kongo. He found few things to encourage him. 'I have not found any fruit' of the work done, the danger being that people with great speed were going to Hell.[17] In 1819 Bishop Joao Damasceno found that all were '*sine duce*, *sine luce*, *sine cruce*' (without leader, light or cross).

In the period 1645–1835 no less than 440 Capuchins, the great majority of them Italians, arrived in Kongo. On 7 May 1835 the last of them, Prefect Bernardo da Burgio left Luanda and Africa together with his Kongolese Brother Bernardo de Sâo Salvador. Under new conditions, however, the

Catholics were to return to Kongo at the end of the century. Their claim then that by returning they were making 'a reprise' was not without cause.[18]

ANGOLA

Luanda and beyond

South of Kongo was the vast expanse of the savanna kingdoms, some parts of which came to be known as Angola. When the Jesuits had to abandon their work at Sâo Salvador in the middle of the sixteenth century, they discovered new and promising fields further south on the Atlantic coast. A team of two Jesuit priests and two lay brothers saw that an island off the coast was of strategic importance for colonial conquest combined with evangelization.

In 1575 Luanda became a city, virtually a result of Jesuit foresight and planning. From this place, for two centuries they exercised a vast influence over the future of Angola, particularly in education. At first they carved out big land holdings for their organization, (*donatoria*), and had ambitious dreams of a theocracy in the region. These plans were not to be realized in Angola, although in Paraguay their Jesuit colleagues made a similar attempt somewhat later. At the turn of the century, Luanda had a population of about 40,000 Africans, 6,000 Mulattos, and 4,000 Whites, many of them *degredados* (prison convicts) from Portugal.[19] In this amorphous situation, the Jesuits provided what there was of pulse and structure, concentrating their services in a college and other schools in Luanda. Here they trained an African clergy and a *mestizo* administrative class. They earned the dislike of the colonial leaders by acting as the protectors of the interest of the Africans.

Another woman: Queen Nzinga

The people of Sâo Salvador viewed the Kimbundu highlands, including the dynamic kingdom of Ndongo, with special interest. In contrast to the complicated list of Kongo kings, here was a princess, called Nzinga, 'whose personality dominated the Angolan scene for the next half century'.[20]

Portuguese threats forced the princess and her Kimbundu people to flee east to Matamba. Here this resourceful, powerful woman created a new kingdom, with an elite army which she trained and commanded herself. Together with other kingdoms in the region, Kimbundu and Matamba faced the unrelenting Portuguese slaving expeditions. The princess was adept at

politics, and did not hesitate to go to Luanda, to meet the Portuguese governor. She offered peace and trade on her own terms of exchanging ivory for salt and cloth. The royal visit to the emerging coastal city is of special interest for the Church historian. Here, after a year, Nzinga decided to join the Church, a momentous decision of long-term importance for her subjects. Having been welcomed as a princess with proper Portuguese pomp, she was baptized by the Jesuit fathers into the Catholic Church. She was now to be called Donna Ana de Souza, a family name which she shared with her godfather, the Portuguese governor. During her visit to Luanda she may have contacted the Dembos Christians, north-east of Luanda. There most of the chiefs became Christian and at baptism were called *Dom*, and some of them had their own household chaplains.[21]

All these ecclesiastical stratagems, however, did not abate Portuguese slaving incursions into the highlands. Donna Ana then turned from local wars to international power politics. When, in 1641, the Dutch landed in Angola, taking Luanda, she signed a treaty with them, although they were known to be dangerous heretical Protestants. She hoped in this way to end the Portuguese regime in Angola. But the Ndongo and Matamba peoples, hidden in the mountains, had to learn the harsh lesson that international intrigue is a hazardous gamble. In 1648 the Portuguese were again on the scene. Donna Ana, not to be perturbed, accommodated once more, being 're-converted', this time by the aid of new arrivals in the country, the Italian Capuchins. Here it is the changing conditions of the royal elite rather than the reactions of the masses which the historian can follow. One can at best conjecture from later statistical tables the rapidly multiplying effect of an initial royal example for the villagers.

Attempting to make Luanda into a shining model of Christian service, the Portuguese agencies were at the same time engaged in an ever-increasing slave traffic – 8–10,000 exported in an average 'good' year. 'The whole economy of Angola was geared to the slave trade for over 250 years.'[22] The harbour of Luanda became the most flourishing centre for the trade to Brazil, with the exchange of fiery rum, sometimes called 'Demon Rum'. Any qualms that the slave dealers may have felt were assuaged by the thought that prior to leaving the Luanda harbour, the unfortunate slaves were baptized, and their eternal salvation thus guaranteed. Participation in the three annual religious feasts St Sebastian's Day, Corpus Christi, and Assumption Day, further assured this guarantee. In 1760, 200 years of Jesuit service to Angola came to an abrupt end. They were all torn from their college, schools, and charitable institutions – and dismissed.

Pious ideas from Lisbon were eagerly transferred to Luanda. This

happened with the Santa Casa da Misericórdia, or under its official name, The Brotherhood of Our Lady, Mother of God, Virgin Mary of Mercy, founded in Lisbon in 1498 and spread throughout the Portuguese-speaking world, to Goa and Nagasaki and particulary to Bahia in Brazil. In 1576 Luanda had its share and the cause was promoted by Bishop Mascaranhas. In 1680 seventy brothers were registered in Luanda. They were known to look after a hospital with 400 sick annually. All this required money, and Luanda of course had the answer to that one: the proceeds from the sale of 500 slaves annually were paid to the Misericórdia. But the Luanda Misericórdia never really caught on, and by 1750 it was 'totally decadent'.[23]

PROTESTANTS AT THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

We are concerned here with two distinct African communities, their relationships to the Afrikaner farmers, and their religion. The Khoikhoi were indigenous to the Cape region while the slaves came from abroad.

The Khoikhoi

It is sometimes taken for granted that it was Jan van Riebeck's arrival at the Cape, in 1652, that signified the beginnings of Khoikhoi–European contacts. This was not so, the beginnings of these contacts were much older. Bartholomew Diaz and Vasco da Gama had pioneered the route touching at the Cape on the way to the East and on the return voyage, for occasional and intermittent visits. An increasing number of Portuguese, Dutch, French and British ships followed. Occasionally, a young Khoikhoi would be taken on board ship to Britain, Holland or Indonesia in order to pick up a European language.

With van Riebeck's arrival the Dutch – a group of 126 persons – came as settlers to the Cape, where they built a fort. To the Khoikhoi, van Riebeck became 'a symbol of good will'.[24] The Directors of the East India Company in Holland insisted on principles, and one principle was that the Khoikhoi were free and independent. They were to be paid wages (in the form of rice, bread, tobacco and alcohol) and on a temporary basis only. Even if some whites referred to the Khoikhoi in the same terms as slaves the Khoikhoi still retained much of their freedom, and had their own language and customs.

The young Khoikhoi girl, Eva, surprised the van Riebeck family with her linguistic ability. She became an interpreter. Mrs van Riebeck taught her 'Christianity' in order to become 'the first Christian native of South Africa'.

The two women, the governor's pious wife – a new-comer to Africa – and the young Khoikhoi girl collaborated. She adapted herself to European life and culture to the extent that she could say she had 'a Dutch heart inside her'. She was baptized. She had a sister and Eva taught her sister how to pray to the Lord, 'to which all natives listened with tears in their eyes'.[25] She married a Danish doctor, Peter van Meerhoff, who died less than four years later. It is however difficult to avoid the impression 'that the conversion of [the] Khoikhoi did not rank high on the list of the Cape Church's priorities.'[26]

In 1713 the Khoikhoi community was hit by a devastating smallpox epidemic which drastically reduced the Khoikhoi population from over 200,000 in 1652, to a level that barely escaped annihilation. Towards the end of the eighteenth century tensions between the Dutch farmers and their Khoikhoi and slave servants took on violent forms. In 1788 at Swellendam 200 servants led by millenarian visions 'burnt their Dutch clothes, and killed their white animals, prophesying the end of the world and threatening to kill all whites, after which they would inherit their goods'.[27]

The slaves

The slaves came from abroad, brought for the Dutch farmers on the directions of the Dutch East India Company in Holland. A first lot of slaves were brought in 1657 from Guinea and from Angola while later supplies were mainly from Mozambique and Madagascar as well as from India and Indonesia. In 1793 the European population – men, women and children – at the Cape numbered 14,000 while the slave population was 14,700. One observer commented that, 'having imported slaves every common or ordinary European becomes a gentleman who prefers to be served rather than serve.'[28]

The urge for freedom was ever present in the slave population. In order to obtain 'manumission' or emancipation, a slave should be baptized and know the Dutch language. After being baptized a slave could not be sold. Not only did the masters risk losing their control over Christian slaves but baptism would give the slaves access to Churches and preachers who could reduce their dependence on their 'owners'. The effect was that the number of slaves baptized was minimal. The general rule was that the European farmer never spoke to the slave about religion and only very few slaves were placed in a position to embrace Christianity. One exception was the witness of the Revd M. C. Vos who had spent some time in Europe and there had been influenced by the desire for missions. These few notes refer

to the background of what was to become the Cape crisis in the 1830s when slavery, after pressure from British missions, was outlawed.

The Moravians

In the village of Herrnhut, in eastern Germany, the Moravians had built a tightly knit community, a model for similar communities in other parts of the world. They sent missionaries in every direction, to Greenland and Labrador, and to Nicaragua and the Cape. They all went out in faith, with a song in their hearts and on their lips. George Schmidt (1709–85) was one of the early members of the movement, joining the Moravian group in Holland which sent him to the Cape in order to convert the Khoikhoi. In 1737 he arrived in South Africa. He spent only seven years in the country before being evicted as a 'heretic' by the Dutch Reformed *predikants*. Yet, in that short period he managed, against overwhelming odds, to gain a precarious foothold. Half a century later, his Moravian successors could proceed from this hard-won base.

Schmidt acquired a small farm, Baviaanskloof, in the district of Swellendam. It was later called Genadendal, and under that name became known as the model mission station in the country. He met two Khoikhoi men who could communicate with him in the Dutch language, and he soon taught them the 'Three R's' and the Jesus Story. In a year's time he had gathered a group of twenty-eight people on the farm. Together they dug water furrows, planted vineyards and gardens, and sowed fields with tobacco, wheat, barley and oats. Through careful planning, Schmidt managed to buy six oxen and some pigs, and they were given a number of goats. The daily work gave him opportunities for teaching the Gospel. As the wheat was threshed, he told about the seed which must fall into the ground and die. Building a wall, he would explain that the houses must be built on the rock, not shifting sands. The day began and ended with common worship, the evening prayers including a short address based on a Bible text. The group of twenty-eight was soon divided into seven prayer circles according to age and sex, following the example of the Herrnhut 'choirs', or, evangelistic cells. Here was a pattern which, through the related Wesleyan 'classes' was to be of seminal importance for nineteenth-century evangelization in South Africa.

Contacts with headquarters were few and far between. Schmidt was ordained by an official letter dated 27 August 1741, sent by his director, von Zinzendorff in Prussia. The following Sunday, as he rode with a faithful Khoikhoi co-worker, he came to a stream. He decided then and there to baptize his friend, now to be called Joshua:

> Do you believe that the son of God has died on the cross for the sins of all men? Do you believe that you are a damnable man by nature? ... Are you willing through the grace of the blood of the Saviour, neither to shrink from disgrace nor persecution and to profess the Saviour before all the world and to remain faithful to him until death? Do you wish to be baptized?[29]

During the next few weeks another four were baptized, also 'in running water'. In the evenings he would read to them from Zinzendorff's solidly theological 'Berlin Discourses' and often explained major ideas from the Epistle to the Romans. But he met with opposition. As news of these developments reached Cape Town, there were strong objections. This German missionary *uitlander* had not used the prescribed catechism; the Zondereind River, where the baptisms had taken place, was not within his parish, so they were illegal and his five converts must be regarded as not having been baptized. The *predikants* now felt they had a doctrinal weapon to use on this irresponsible German. Schmidt could not even get help from the Governor, who had inspected the Moravian settlement and had been greatly impressed. To the *predikants*, support from the Governor, only a layman in the Church, was not sufficient. Schmidt was placed on a ship and sent back to Europe, never to see his flock again. Before leaving, he handed his Dutch New Testament to Magdalena, one of the converts.

SOUTH-EASTERN AFRICA AND MOMBASA

The Portuguese did not limit their travels and activities to West Africa. Having landed at Mpinda in Soyo, and at Luanda in Angola, their caravels continued south and east. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Vasco de Gama rounded the Cape in 1497 and proceeded along the East Coast of Africa. At the harbours of Sofala, Inhambane, and Quelimane they met Arabs and 'Swahili' in their dhows from the North, also searching for gold and ivory. These were men with long experience of the continent and its trade, and with remarkable knowledge of the river highways and extensive inland routes. In 1505 the Portuguese captured the port of Sofala, using it as stop-over place for connexions with India and its spice markets.

The Portuguese presence along the East African coast, wide-flung in plan and brutal in execution, proved eventually to be singularly futile. In essence, the attempt was a *conquista* variation of medieval crusading exploits, applied in this instance to the Eastern waters. Its purpose was to establish on the rims of the Indian Ocean a 'Portuguese Imperium'.

The study of the economics and political history of this part of Africa is an effective antidote to the popular idea that for centuries people had been

happily living here in undisturbed isolation from the rest of the world – until at last the missionary arrived as the agitator. Recent research has shown that, on the contrary, these countries had over the centuries been building up varied and far-reaching contacts with the outside world. The Indian Ocean and the monsoon winds had provided the essential route for travel. Alluvial gold from the reefs and river-beds of Zimbabwe together with copper, pottery, and ivory formed the basis for economic and cultural exchange, as evidenced in cloth from India and objects from as far away as China. 'Large quantities of imported glass beads as well as Chinese, Persian and Syrian china, glass and porcelain, dating back to the fourteenth century have also been recovered in the "Great Enclosure" of Great Zimbabwe.'[30] Rumours of these riches spread far and wide, leading to challenging questions: who was the king of this gold-producing country somewhere inland from the East Coast? Was he perhaps the mysterious 'Prester John' whom the Portuguese had been searching for in vain along the lower reaches of the River Zaïre?

Meeting the empire of Mwene Mutapa

The parallel between *Mani Kongo* and *Mwene Mutapa*, between the King of Kongo and his royal colleague in Zimbabwe is challenging. With little ado, Nzinga Nkuvu of Kongo was baptized only a few weeks after the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries. On the other side of the continent, seventy years later, Gonçalo da Silveira, SJ, was sent to the Emperor *Mwene Mutapa*. It took him about three weeks to persuade and prepare the renowned *Mwene Mutapa* for Holy Baptism. This Jesuit was hand-picked for the purpose, being of a noble family and having spent some time with the Portuguese Viceroy in Goa.

Dom Sebastiao was baptized on 15 January 1561, with his Mother, now Donna Maria, and a number of his courtiers. Around 400 of his subjects followed the royal example. But as rapidly as the royal baptism, came the denouement in pagan reaction. Less than a month after the baptismal jubilations, the *nganga* convinced the King that Gonçalo was a spy and that the baptismal waters were a magic potion which would destroy the recipients. Seven strong men were sent to strangle Gonçalo in his hut.

Like the Arabs before them, the Portuguese were attracted by the prospect of finding gold in the realm of *Mwene Mutapa*, the 'Golden Emperor'. His kingdom became the special sphere of interest for the Dominican monks sent out to strengthen Portuguese rule and Catholic faith. In the Mutapa succession crises of 1628–33, Fr Luis do Espirito Santo put

pressure on one of the contenders, Mavura, employing unusual methods for a religious. Through an 'insolently bold' action, he gathered an army of 15,000 men against the competitor's force of 100,000. With 250 Dominican muskets, his troops annihilated the enemy. After the event, he wrote jubilantly to his Provincial in terms revealing the outlook and operations of this generation of Portuguese missionaries.

> With the help of God and by the prayers of our Beloved Lady of the Rosary, our little army was victorious. Our army then proceeded to Zimbabwe, the royal residence, where I built a chapel and placed a crucifix and a statue of the Beloved Lady of the Rosary to whom I dedicated the chapel. I celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving and then promoted an uncle of the defeated king to be the Lord of the realm. After he had become king I coveted to convert him to our holy faith. I devoted eight months to this daily task until it pleased God to move the king's heart so that he received the holy water of Baptism.[31]

The royal example was followed by the courtiers. Mavura, with the baptismal name of Felippe, reigned for twenty years, not much more than a Portuguese vassal, dependent on Lisbon. He was eager to follow Portuguese ways, and sent one of his sons, Dom Miguel, to Goa. There the young man was received as a novice in the Dominican Order, and eventually gained a Master of Theology and became a teacher in the Theological Faculty in Goa.

At Felippe Mavura's death in 1652, he was succeeded by another son. The identification of religion and politics was again symbolized: the new *Mwene Mutapa*, baptized Domingo, was well-groomed for his high office by a combination of coronation and baptism.

On the presupposition that Papal *Padroado* and Portuguese *Conquista* enterprise had made these regions of Africa theirs, the Portuguese carved out large areas of land for individual Portuguese landlords (*praseiros*). Agriculture demanded great numbers of cheap labourers, preferably slaves.

The East Coast slave trade

Slave trading was an old, brutal business in these parts, which the Portuguese took over from the Arabs. The Church orders had their own slaves, and at least in the beginning felt that their slaves were better off than during their previous days of freedom. There was also a pious distinction about the sale, the same as in Angola: baptized slaves must not be sold to Muslims. At precisely the same period as William Wilberforce raised his prophetic voice in England against the slave trade and slavery in the world, Prelate Fr Amaro de S. Thomas in Mozambique declared that slaves must

not be sold to Muslims, for if they were, 'the gates of heaven would be closed to them because then they would be deprived of their chance of being baptized in the hour of death'. A 'Pastoral letter' threatened excommunication to those who sold slaves to pagans or 'Moors', as their Christian faith would be endangered. In the eighteenth century, the slave trade with its rapidly increasing profits became particularly cruel. Fr Francisco M. Bordale wrote in 1835: 'The outrage and horrors in the oppression of the Natives – crimes committed here without punishment – are the causes of the threatening depopulation of the country.'[32]

Dominicans and Jesuits

Two Catholic Orders were at work, Dominicans and Jesuits, including some outstanding personalities. The greatest of them all, St Francis Xavier, SJ, that incomparable *conquistador* of souls, spent six months in Mozambique and on the east coast of Africa in 1541, waiting for the monsoon winds to take him to Goa and South India. The two great Orders were often competing. Because of tensions between them, spheres of interest were created for each, similar to modern Protestant 'comity' agreements. But in the dominant political and economic centres of the country, Mozambique, Sena, and Tete, they shared the work. The Dominicans worked inland, and the Jesuits with the Tonga people along the Zambezi. Both were subject to the direction of the king of Portugal. At first this hierarchical arrangement was mediated through the Governor and the Portuguese Archbishop of Goa. In 1612 Mozambique was released from dependence on far-away Goa, and could regard itself as relatively independent, although still under the king in Lisbon. In the following decades, Goanese merchants continued to play a role through their trading centres along the Mozambique coastline.

The king in Portugal sent his directives to the Governor and the Vicar-General in Mozambique. If the black king was amenable, his brother king in Lisbon could show his pleasure by a personal gift, such as a habit of the Order of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Church and State were inextricably tied together in this *conquista* system. The Portuguese occupied the coastline with its harbours, established forts, and administrative outposts along the rivers.

The *conquista* ideology led to a concentration of pastoral attention to the Portuguese and Goanese elements, and also to the baptism of slaves before they were exported overseas. The people were assimilated into the Church by a hasty method of mass baptism, although officially it should occur only after at least twenty-five days of catechetical preparation. Experience in

matters of Church discipline enforced a rule whereby baptism of adults was deferred until their hour of death.

The Jesuits, with their world-wide connexions and experience, borrowed a catechization idea from their colleagues in Goa: a catechism with sung questions and answers. It soon proved to be even more popular with Africans. Catechumens would come singing to church, on their way home, on their way to work. One could hear them singing the answers in their canoes, and mothers could now more easily teach their children the precepts of the Christian faith.[33] A worthwhile task would be to follow up catechetical developments in Jesuit archives with regard to Goa and Sofala.

Searching for Prester John

Wherever the Portuguese landed along the African coast, they looked for a passage leading to 'Prester John', that Christian king somewhere in Africa – or Asia – whom the medieval crusaders had tried to trace and find. As soon as they met the Kongolese, one of the Portuguese captains steered his ship along the Zaïre river, searching for the mysterious king. The rapids and falls on the river soon put a stop to this attempt. On the Mozambique side, the missionaries widened their horizons to the Shire River and Lake Malawi. Here, hopefully, was the highway to Prester John, and the Jesuit Aloysius Mariano was sent to find a way along the coast to Abyssinia.[34]

The Portuguese king and his empire needed gold, slaves, and spices, and it was to acquire these wares that Vasco da Gama, Albuquerque, and others ventured eastward. On the way, they touched at the harbour of Sofala, the golden village; visited Kilwa with its black sheikh and met the Swahili-speaking people at Mombasa and Malindi. At Malindi, da Gama and his men found a number of Indians, with four ships. It was even possible to make personal contacts with them, for one of the Indians spoke Italian: 'India now appeared deliciously close.'[35] It was here that St Francis Xavier dwelt for months, in 1541–42, waiting for a ship to Goa in India.

Fort Jesus at Mombasa

The Portuguese befriended the Malindi population, and with them took Mombasa in 1591. Two years later they put up their fort as a sign of conquest, and as a token of their determination to make this a Catholic stronghold, the station was called 'Fort Jesus', a pious denomination. Francesco da Gama, Vasco da Gama's grandson, placed Augustinian

monks as vicars along the Kenyan coast, at Faza, Pata, Lamu and Mombasa. In 1597 Mombasa had a monastery and there were soon 4,000 Christians.

The king of Mombasa acceded to Portuguese requests, and sent his son Yusuf, a boy of seven, to Goa. He returned in 1630, an adult with a new identity: a Christian name, 'Dom Jeronimo Chingulia', and a Portuguese wife. The joy over the convert was short-lived. Already by the following year the young man came into conflict with his Portuguese masters, and on Assumption Day he pushed his dagger into the Portuguese Commandant, reverting to Islam and taking back his name of Yusuf ibn Hasan.

A terrible challenge to the young African Christian community ensued. How deep was their commitment to the faith in Jesus the Christ? A few figures about personal decisions in this utmost crisis represent something of an answer. After centuries of oblivion the complete *processus* of the martyrs was found in Rome, a record of the ecclesiastical inquiry held in Goa, India, during 1632–33, and published in 1980 in Latin and with an English translation by Dr G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville.[36] A total of 250 African and Portuguese were massacred in the town and became martyrs; only four priests and one layman escaped.[37] Another 400 preferred to be sent as slaves to Mecca.

It is vain to speculate on the causes of this military disaster. Climate and incompetence have been blamed. 'The Portuguese, indeed, in their inability to co-operate with either Arab or African were their own greatest enemies.'[38] There were new Portuguese attacks, but the Omani Arabs from Arabia came to the help of their fellow believers, and by 1729 Fort Jesus was definitely in Muslim hands.

Across the Indian Ocean

With the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean, the uneasy, ever-changing balance of power in the region had been seriously disrupted. Arabs, Omani Arabs, Indians, Zimba raids from inland, and Oromo raids from the north all threatened the people. With the Portuguese retreat to their stronghold of Goa, the Omani Arabs increasingly dominated the coast until in 1840 – 'a climacteric in the history of the East African coast line' – Said, the Omani ruler, moved from the Arabian peninsula and settled in Zanzibar. This was a date and a decade which would open a new chapter in the Christian approach to East Africa, but this time under very different conditions.[39]

In the meantime other budding colonial powers from the West had

emerged on the far-flung islands of the Indian Ocean. The Dutch, touching at Mauritius in 1598, established themselves at Batavia, Java, comparable with Portuguese Goa in India.

The French occupied Reunion in 1638 and with the help of their trading company managed to gain a foothold at Fort-Dauphin in Southern Madagascar. After an initiative from the Propaganda in Rome, the Lazarists began work in 1640. Characteristically the two French Lazarists who arrived that year were accompanied by two Malagasy, which naturally facilitated communication with the people. The seamen from Madagascar had somehow turned up in France and were baptized there. One of the young men was instructed by no less a person than Vincent da Paul, the saintly founder of the Lazarists: ‘I use images to instruct him, and it seems that this serves to catch his imagination.’ Thus prepared the young man was baptized by the Pope’s nuncio.

Illness soon decimated the number of French missionaries, but new recruits followed. For their converts in the island the missionaries managed to found a Christian village, near Fort-Dauphin. They also produced a bilingual catechism – French and Malagash. The importance of catechization was emphasized by a catechetical question whether one could be blessed without following the Catechism, to which there was a very definite answer: ‘No, never, because we cannot be good if we do not learn the Catechism.’ Then what does one learn in this catechism?: ‘All that is necessary to go to Paradise.’ There was also information about Purgatory with vivid ideas about the horrors of the place: ‘a continuous fire which torments violently’.[40]

ETHIOPIA: REVERSAL AND WELL-NIGH CATASTROPHE

The Muslims and Imam Ahmed Gragn

Islam had a long history in Ethiopia. With Christians in command in the northern highlands, the Muslims pressed forward from the east, especially in the Sidama and eastern Shewa areas. They claimed to have ruled seven Muslim kingdoms, each with a sultan. Even in the Christian highlands, there were a few Muslim colonies, who had to give tribute in gold and silks to their Christian overlords. The province of Hadya even had to annually provide a maiden to be baptized and become a Christian on passing the frontier. The Muslim rule covered a much larger territory than that of the Christians, but while the latter was composed of a comparatively concentrated power in the North, the Muslim areas – only superficially Islamized – were much more divided. Yet the international Muslim fellowship helped

their cause. Muslim traders had extensive connexions with Arabia and the Middle East generally, and links with the whole Islamic world through slave-trading and pilgrimages. For long periods the relationship between the two communities maintained an uneasy balance of power, often, however, suddenly disturbed.

Imam Ahmed B. Ibrahim, called Gragn (1506–43), a young warrior from Hubat near Harar, revolted against the humiliating yoke of tribute-giving. He was brought up as a family slave and later liberated, soon establishing himself as a warrior of great promise. He found allies among the Somali and the Danakil. Eventually 5,000 Nubians also came to his rescue. It was rumoured that people had seen visions about the young Ahmed: Was he not the *Imam* of the Last Times? Yes, he was the chosen vessel destined to deliver his people. He stood on the dividing line between the Middle Ages and the New Era, with his Turkish allies providing the modern weapons.

The impact of his army was devastating. There were 3,000 men in full armour, 20,000 with white shields, and a similar number of archers. The 5,000 cavalry had brocade uniforms and blankets covered with gold; their helmets glinted like mirrors. 'Imam Ahmed rejoiced and shed tears of joy.' He bought arms from the Catalans at Zaila, and the Turks provided him with additional muskets and even cannons. He was prepared for a 'holy war'. Muslim women, too, joined the army. 'When their men attacked, they hurled themselves into the battle on their mules, and when the enemy had been routed, they exclaimed: "I took four Christian women", and others " . . . five or six".'

Latent conflict and hatred between Muslim and Christian flared up in a blaze which laid waste the kingdom. It took Ahmed only twelve short and terrible years to destroy most of the Christian culture built up over hundreds of years. Guns, cannons and lighted torches set fire to the roofs of the churches, and soon everything inside burned: precious books, illuminated manuscripts, vestments, and sacred vessels.

At the famous Debre Libanos, dedicated to the memory of the great St Tekle Haymanot, and one of the glories of the Church, the monks insisted: 'If they burn our church – our pilgrim centre – let them burn us too.' The great majority of them threw themselves into the fire, 'like moths into a lamp'. Monasteries badly damaged or destroyed included Bizen and Abba Satios in Tigray, not far from Massawa; Abba Gerima, some five days from Massawa; and many in the Lake Tana region. At the Hallelujah monastery, the St Mary Church was in ruins. This large centre had held ninety churches under its jurisdiction. All were destroyed. Now only a few hamlets remained.[41]

In the wake of the disaster came rumbles from the south of a vast population movement, that of the Oromo, nicknamed 'Galla'. At first there were sudden and sporadic military thrusts toward the north, increasingly a threat and a challenge to the Christian Church as well as Islam. We will return later to the role of the Oromo.

For the Christian king, Libne Dingil, the Muslim massacre was a terrible blow, and for his people a traumatic shock. Toward the end of his struggle, the king appealed to the European power which had earlier contacted him – the Portuguese. As related already, the Portuguese had been looking for Prester John, the mysterious Christian king, said to be found in the interior of Asia or Africa. Here he was now, Prester John in person, needing their help. In 1540 Libne Dingil died after ruling for thirty-two years. He was succeeded by his son, Galawdewos (1540–59).

In 1541 a Portuguese fleet arrived at Massawa, with 400 men under Christoph da Gama, son of Vasco da Gama. They too had muskets and cannons and finally, in 1543, Ahmed and his men were defeated, with Ahmed killed in battle. Galawdewos faced a devastated country and destroyed churches. The very soul of a proud people, with their great Solomonic dream, was grieved. Many Christians had renounced their faith to become Muslims. When they later returned to their church, a book of penitence, *Mesihafe Qedir*, was produced for them to learn the way back to their Christian faith.

Help in need – indeed too much of it

King and people had been saved at the very last minute, and they felt indebted to their brave Portuguese helpers for military assistance. Over 100 Portuguese soldiers stayed on in the country and formed a settlement of their own in the north. The king and the Church of Portugal sent their own bishop, Andre de Oviedo, presumably to shepherd the Portuguese, but as it transpired, also designed for other matters related to the future of the Church in Ethiopia. The fact that he was a bishop implied a challenge to the Coptic patriarch in Alexandria and his representative in Ethiopia.

Gone were the times of the Council of Florence with its 'ecumenical' vision and concern. This was the period in the Mediterranean of Counter-Reformation and Inquisition, and the Portuguese clergy were part of a narrow system. Coming to Ethiopia, the priests were in for a shocking discovery: Prester John was not the genuine article. In fact, he was a heretic. This obviously had to be put right.

The Portuguese sent four Patriarchs to Ethiopia. The first, in addition to

being uneducated, assumed a spurious authority. Before too long he was exiled. The second similarly took for granted that as a Patriarch he had arrived to receive king and Church into the Roman fold. But the Ethiopian King Galawdewos ably defended their ancient connection with the Church of Alexandria. The third, Pero Paez, a Spanish Jesuit, arrived in 1603. He was an outstanding person, a highly cultured churchman, and an eloquent preacher. By his empathy, learning and tact he won everyone to his views and exercised strong influence on King Susinyos. This ruler highly honoured the sacred rites and customs of his people. He arranged for his coronation in 1609 to be held at Aksum, thus renewing the long chain of tradition broken three centuries earlier. He was personally much involved in the ongoing theological debate at the court on the 'two natures' in the person of Christ. Pero Paez convinced him of the error of Unionism. In 1622 the king took the final step of accepting the Roman faith. That same year Paez died. He was succeeded by Afonso Mendez who was consecrated patriarch of a now supposedly Catholic Ethiopia. His appointment soon proved to be an altogether unfortunate choice. Narrow and conceited, he was bent on doing a thorough job: the faithful were to be re-baptized according to the Roman rite; the 'schismatic' deacons, priests and monks were to be re-ordained; and the Ethiopian circumcision ritual and their feasts and fasts had to be abolished.

In a very short time Mendez managed to cause a public uproar and a bitter civil war. Susinyos had to come to the rescue of his people, and published a unique proclamation in 1632:

> Hark ye! Hark ye! We first gave you this faith believing that it was good. But innumerable people have been slain on account of it, Yolyos [Julius], Qeberyal [Gabriel], Takla Giyorgis [George], Sarsa Krestos, and now these peasants. For which reason we restore to you the faith of your forefathers. Let the former clergy return to the churches, let them put in their *tâbots* [altars], let them say their own liturgy. And do ye rejoice.[42]

Which is what they did; the whole nation rejoiced as they had never done before. Susinyos abdicated in favour of his son, Fasiledes. He saw to it that the Jesuits were banished, first to their one remaining centre at Fremona in Tigray and soon from Ethiopia altogether.

The intermezzo with the Portuguese was partly a move by the Ethiopian royalty to invite Western cultural influence. Instead, the anti-foreign reaction resulted in an isolation lasting 200 years. Far to the East, in Japan, and for almost the same length of time, the people experienced a similar kind of isolation. Also there, Lusitanian intrusion, under the guidance of St

Francis Xavier and his fellow Jesuits, led in 1637 to two centuries of hermetic isolation. In the islands of the East and in the highland strongholds of Africa, the Portuguese experience led to strong reactions. In both cases it took two centuries for these traditionalist societies to live down the confrontation with the foreigners. As late as 1770, James Bruce, a Scot and certainly far from being a Roman Catholic sympathizer was suspected at the Gonder court of being a Roman Catholic, possibly contriving to destroy the Ethiopian church.[43]

Two centuries of isolation from the West

In this period of isolation Ethiopia manifested a distinct religious geography. There were wide differences between the highlands, referred to as the 'Christian North' – Eritrea, Tigre and Begemdir – and the southern region, mainly Muslim and pagan. The south also had scattered remnants of an early Christian culture. They had survived the Oromo storm of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which swept away most of Christianity and Islam in the area. Also significant was an invasion from the north into the Wollamo province in about 1600. An adventurous squadron of 150 Tigray noblemen and their servants rode on horseback to the southern part of the country and soon transplanted their Christian customs, laws and values. This invasion epitomizes the general tendency of northern influence on the south. According to Professor Eike Haberland, Tigray and Shewa in the north-east and centre, however, remained the models for the southern peoples. Orthodox authority in the south waned at times. Haberland gives the following explanation: the very constitution of the Ethiopian Church made its continuance dependent on the rule of a distant Coptic Patriarch in Alexandria. This Patriarch sent the *abun* (bishop), who alone could ordain priests. When contacts with the north were severed for prolonged periods, the southern priesthood tended to disappear and priestly families soon changed into pagan clans. Mass was performed with difficulty, or not at all. Fasts and feasts survived, although their significance became obscured.

One reason for southern difference from the 'Christian North' was the dominance of its Oromo population, being one of the major peoples of Ethiopia. Nicknamed 'Galla' by their neighbours, they had come as a confederation of tribes in the 1520s to invade Ethiopia from the south. Their story illustrates the familiar theme in African history: that of migration and conquest in the struggle for survival and advance. From the south, they forced their way to two areas in the centre of the country, becoming Christians in the kingdom of Shewa, and Muslims in Wello province. From

the latter half of the nineteenth century, Ethiopian Emperors through the Orthodox Church, and Catholic and Protestant missionaries showed concern for the conversion of the Oromo. Their highly complex *gada* (age group) system was an institution of great interest. Its implications for the conversion of the Oromo would provide a fruitful topic for future research.

The tradition of 'wandering capitals' had begun during the Solomonic dynasty, with thousands of tents and huts huddled together to make up a royal camp. Later it became apparent that the country needed a permanent, well-built centre. It was Susinyos' son, Fasiledes, who for various reasons decided to make Gondar the new capital. So it remained for two hundred years. As it was situated north of Lake Tana, midway between Shewa and the coast of Massawa, once established, it enhanced the court's isolation. A number of palaces and beautifully ornamented churches were built there. Some of them were of the finest architectural quality, such as the Abbey Church of St Mary of Qusqwam, reminiscent of the Lalibela churches.[44]

Theological controversies in Gonder

The new capital of Gondar became the centre for sophisticated theological discussion. Contending parties engaged in fierce intellectual battles, quoting their authorities in the Cairo Patriarchate or in the two great Ethiopian schools of the Middle Ages: those of Tekle Haymanot and of Ewostatewos. The original conflict between the 'House of Ewostatewos' and of the 'House of Tekle Haymanot' (centred at Debre Libanos Monastery) during the fourteenth century concerned the Sabbath, lay leadership, and the role of Alexandria.

The ferment caused by the Catholics was an important factor in the continuation of the theological disputes during the reigns of Fasiledes (1632–67) and Yohannes I (1667–82). Both emperors were interested listeners and in each dispute, the final judge. More often than not the losers in such a debate were thrown into prison, there to meditate on their lamentable error. It is characteristic of the times that, at the court, the Ethiopian women also showed a passionate interest in the dogmatic controversies. They were later led by Queen Seble-Wengel who shared the literary and theological taste of her consort, Emperor Yohannes I, and her son, Iyasu (later emperor).[45] The overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian Church was never divided on the issue of Salvation, but only on the understanding of Christ's person.

Rooted in the Christological controversies of the early Church, the disputes were revived by Jesuit teaching on the two natures of Christ, and

by Emperor Susinyos' confession of the Catholic faith in 1622. Ethiopians fought to defend the Unionite tenet confessing one unique divine/human nature in Christ, *Tewahido*, brought about by the Incarnation. In the process, however, a new formula evolved and found support in one of the two Ethiopian monastic orders, thus causing a new conflict in the Church.

The followers of Ewostatewos stressed the unction, *qibat*, of the Holy Spirit in uniting the Divine and Human in Christ through this *qibat*, Christ became the Son of God and elevated to divinity. The dominating order of Tekle Haymanot saw in this explanation either subordination of the Son to the Spirit, or a danger of Adoptionism, which taught that Christ was elevated to divinity only at his baptism. The party of Tekle Haymanot argued that Christ was the Son of God by Grace, and that 'his elevation to the quality of a natural son of God was a result of the union of the human nature with the divine.'[46] These 'unionists' were called *Ye-Siga Lij* (Sons of Grace).

There followed several councils of priests, monks, and nobles. The disputes sought chiefly to do justice to the purely human acts of Christ. Gojjam province and the northern areas of Tigray and Eritrea generally supported the *Qibat* formula of the followers of Ewostatewos, while most of the Amhara nobility from the central highlands traditionally endorsed the teachings of the house of Tekle Haymanot. In 1654 Emperor Fasiledes tried to achieve unity by imposing the 'unctionist' (*qibatoch*) formula on the Tekle Haymanot party, but this only led to a rebellion of the 'unionists'. The next emperor, Yohannes I, continued the royal partiality of favouring the 'House of Ewostatewos', and the continuing ecclesiastical dispute gravely weakened the political unity of the kingdom. The accession to the throne of Iyasu I (1682–1706), called 'the Great', led to a period of imposed unity after the new king terminated the theological disputes by coercing the *qibatoch* group to accept the *Ye-Siga Lij* theory.

Peter Heyling and the era of the Judges

Foreign influence could not be altogether avoided. When the new *abun* arrived from Egypt in 1635, he brought a German medical practitioner, Peter Heyling, scholar and lay theologian. His medical skill made him popular, but his real concern was to rejuvenate the Ethiopian Church through translation of the Bible. He helped to translate St John's Gospel (and possibly other books of the New Testament) into Amharic, and published it in booklet form. This was a revolutionary initiative. '*Dawit*', or, the Psalms, and the book of Revelation were known and revered in the

sacred language of *Ge'ez*, but meeting the Gospel message in the tongue of the people was something new. In several northern monasteries the theological debate took on a new dimension of reality.

In 1652 Peter Heyling left Ethiopia, and on his way back to the West he was beheaded by a Turkish pasha. Through his Bible translation, his influence lingered on. Ethiopian evangelicals and the Swedish Scholar, Gustav Arén, tentatively suggest that the late nineteenth-century evangelical underground movement within the churches of Begemdir, Gojjam, and Shewa can be traced back to Peter Heyling and his Gospel translations.

The minds at Gonder were occupied not only by intellectual exercises. On the horizon there loomed messianic indications of a warrior martyr, corroborated by millenarian speculations. This concurred with traditions in Ethiopian piety leading back at least to the fifteenth century. It was thought that the name of this messiah, coming to save his people, was most probably Tewodros – the Gift of God. Warlords and emperors appeared, claiming to be the promised Tewodros.

Eventually during the eighteenth century, there was a disintegration of central authority, and the regional nobles (*rases*) took command over their particular areas. This was the time of the *Zamena mesafint* (the era of the Princes or Judges), referring to the parallel experience in ancient Israel in Judges 2:16. The Emperor lost much of his power, so did the *abun*, nominal head of the church. This situation lasted for about a century, until in 1855 a minor chief named Kasa Haylu fought his way to power and proclaimed himself King of Kings Tewodros. The time of the *Zamena mesafint* was at an end.

3

OVERVIEW TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

TWO DIVERSE MAPS

A theme

Two quite different maps can be drawn for the nineteenth-century Christianization process in Africa: one explicit, manifest and official; the other – no less important – related to clan and village involved in the cataclysmic changes which overtook African societies.

The first, the official map, covered 'mission fields', consisting of a great number of mission societies and mission stations, Catholic and Protestant, highly visible centres in the African landscape, with church, school, clinic, farm and printing press, together with staff houses. Such centres represented well-defined missionary programmes. From the station there were regular visits to the surrounding population by the Western missionary and/or the African catechists, by foot, on horse back, by ox cart, or by canoe.

In certain cases the mission station was seen as a point of departure for a strategic plan or dream, to reach farther afield. There were to be established so-called 'chains' of mission centres: six of them in a Methodist programme through Transkei designed by William Shaw; a Reformed chain along the south-west Namaqualand coast; or from Natal overland to Ethiopia; or across the continent from Mombasa to Gabon, devised by Johan Ludwig Krapf; or from Gabon to Mombasa, and planned by John Leighton Wilson. David Hinderer, CMS missionary in Yorubaland, Nigeria, was sure of his approach as he wrote in 1852:

> That we are aiming at the Missionary chain through Central Africa is no longer a question . . . Two good links we have already towards it – Badagry and Abeokuta and I am sure God will give us . . . Ibadan about two days journey NE, as a third. Next to that Ilorin may, by the providence of God, constitute a fourth, and a fifth will bring us to the Niger; and the same number again, if not less, to the Tchad, where we shall soon shake hands with our brethren in the East.[1]

These plans were characteristic expressions of their time, of the European fascinated by the map of Africa, such as it was, as yet unknown and unexplored, to be claimed in the name of Christ.

This missionary map could be analyzed with the material and the methods available, for a conventional mission history. There were the histories of the mission societies and the mission fields, there were the biographies, the hagiographies even, of the Western missionaries concerned: all this had to be compressed into the chapters of a mission history.

Yet, with this approach, producing a history where the Westerner, the foreigner, was the main focus and the African remaining outside the story, was the writer ever to arrive in Africa? As late as the 1960s there were still published ambitious surveys of Churches in certain parts of Africa where the African was – absent. In such cases, fundamental aspects of African history had been missed. One had overlooked population movements and migrations across the continent and their role in the diffusion of the Christian message, and what R.W. July has called 'Revolutionary Africa', meaning the nineteenth century prior to 'colonial Africa'.[2] This takes us to the second and more relevant map of Africa.

In the following pages the reader will meet an emphasis on vast and dramatic changes, in and through the adversities and opportunities, with uprooted refugee – groups and individuals – in 'the spreading chaos of the interior plains',[3] prepared to face and join the new religion. The refugee theme, which is a compelling dimension of this whole book, will provide a significant frame of reference also when we follow developments from the late eighteenth century onwards.

One will meet this theme in the effect of the volcanic outburst of the *mfecane*, initiated in the 1820s in Zululand and Swaziland, striking west into Transvaal, south into Eastern Cape and, above all, north beyond the rivers and along the lakes. Historians of South Africa have of late been drawn into a fierce struggle over the *mfecane* concept, supposedly 'a self-generated internal revolution within northern "Nguni" societies to the west of the Delagoa Bay'.[4] Very fortunately we are not concerned in this book with the *mfecane* concept as such. Our concern is with a series of refugee movements in African societies. Faced with this upheaval, groups and individuals fled wherever they could and in certain cases met with the men and women who conveyed the message of the new religion.

In southern Africa one significant sequel of the *mfecane* was, for our purposes, related to groups forming an early migrant labour movement, from northern Transvaal to the south-east Cape. To a large extent because

of generational conflict in their communities, these groups left their villages and moved southward to find work.

In West Africa one meets with returnee movements of liberated slaves, freed from slave ships on the way to the Americas, brought to Freetown and, after no more than a generation, prepared to return to their 'roots' somewhere on the West African coast or in the hinterland. These developments were at least as important for African Church history as any attempt by a missionary society to teach the catechism.

Two aspects have been indicated: the Western missionary approach in and through the 'stations' on the one side and on the other the overarching continental theme of migrations and population movements, leading refugees to a readiness to accept the message. There now remains to attempt a readjustment of the two. At various points of intersection between the two 'maps' or systems, a major transition (or 'conversion' if that term is preferred) takes place from the traditional community to the new fellowship and its faith.

In certain dramatic cases in the first half of the nineteenth century, the foreign missionary was already there to meet and welcome the victims of misfortune and adversity: with the Mfengu in Eastern Cape; with the bewildered survivors of the Transvaal refugee groups; with the early migrant labourers from north of Transvaal daringly moving in little groups over the highveld to Pietermaritzburg, Port Elizabeth or Capetown; and later the enterprising Tonga and Henga along Lake Malawi, meeting in the foreign missionary, his chapel and school, a catalytic influence which was to lift whole populations to a new level; in West Africa meeting the liberated slaves who landed at Freetown and thus bestowing a Christian identity onto individuals who later formed groups of 'returnees'.

Certainly, the mission societies and the missionaries – Catholic and Protestant – will appear on these pages, but with a difference. As far as possible grounded in the history of African communities and structures – more so than in Western denominations – this presentation will emphasize the African initiative, placed on the frontier between faith and faith, carried by young men revolting against what was seen as the pressures of older generations.

Another important – but most often overlooked – aspect of African mobility which we highlight is the fact that the first missionary on his arrival in a village was likely to find a group of young men who had already been influenced by the new message and already been inspired by it to congregate for prayer and hymns picked up on the way. These examples appear so often that we are sometimes tempted – perhaps irresponsibly – to suggest a law:

> That first missionary arriving in a certain African village there to proclaim for the first time the name of Christ – was never first.

Rumour from afar had already done its preparatory work: there were already some young men who by some chance visit outside had been intrigued by the new message and were anxious to acquire that new song, that new name, that new future.

A regional perspective

This study tries to understand the Christianization of modern Africa not primarily in terms of mission societies – whether Catholic or Protestant – but as part of the social reality represented by the different regions. This approach will be carried forward into the twentieth century but is of particular importance for the nineteenth.

From the point of view of Church history, the northern region was dominated by the Churches in Egypt and Ethiopia, while large parts of the map of Africa were vacant and void. Thus only from the end of the nineteenth century did modern missions start in Congo and East Africa. The Catholics knew, however, that they had been there before, in the 'Portuguese period'. They therefore tended to regard their modern missions in Congo and elsewhere as a *reprise*.

Planned mission work was a matter of concern primarily in two of the regions, West Africa and South Africa – together with the island world of the Indian Ocean, reached by British and French ships: Madagascar was at first dominated by British Congregationalists while the other two islands Mauritius and Réunion were served by French Catholics (Holy Ghost Fathers). The latter were to venture towards another island in the Indian Ocean, Zanzibar, which meant, eventually, contact with the East African mainland.

In a survey of the nineteenth-century African missions, Gustav Warneck, the German mission historian, estimated the number of Protestant Christians in Africa in 1910 at one and half million. No less than two thirds of these belonged to South Africa and again a large part of the South African Protestants were to be found in the Western Cape, termed in South Africa as 'Coloureds'. Compared with this concentration in Western Cape there were other parts of the country – Zululand, northern Transvaal and Ovamboland – where mission work had just begun. With a few notable exceptions, nineteenth-century South Africa remained a Protestant country.

From a Church history perspective nineteenth-century West Africa is another world altogether. For three centuries prior to 1800, West Africa had

been in economic and cultural contact with the West, from the time of the Portuguese to that of the Danes. Apart from early nineteenth-century efforts in Senegal by the Holy Ghost Fathers, the missions – Catholic and Protestant – focused on the Western coastline from Gambia to Libreville. Certain efforts were made to reach 'inland' but this was largely left for the following century. Certain crucial facts about West African missions of this period give this region its special character.

The Christianized Creole population held a position of its own. Together with African returned freedmen they became the African missionaries for the region seeking their personal 'roots' in the African populations along the coast and further inland. Other groups were formed by the 'Brazilian returnees', freedmen from Brazil who returned to West Africa there to establish Portuguese-speaking, mainly Catholic communities. Ethnic communities such as the Wesleyan Fante on the Gold Coast became a pace-setting Church.

Among the Creoles there was established the Fourah Bay College, 1827, to become for the whole of the West Coast the academic centre, eventually, in 1887, associated with Durham University, in England. The Niger Expedition of 1841–42 sent 145 Europeans and Africans to explore the River Niger, of whom forty died. This casualty proved once and for all that West Africa must be directed – and evangelized – by Africans, an idea already made imperative by the climate. African expectation and Western planning were combined in the consecration of Bishop Crowther. The debate over Crowther's episcopacy was a factor in the emergence of the so-called 'African Churches' in West Africa.

Three categories

Winning the 'nations' for the faith along with individuals was to follow – if it happened at all – by way of certain social categories of people. Naturally it is difficult to generalize for the conditions in the entire continent and the writer, while making these broad generalizations, is aware of some of the exceptions and variations. However, we highlight the following categories: the kings and chiefs; the young men; the slaves and other socially marginalized groups (the women will be a decisive theme for the twentieth century – 'a women's Church').

The kings and Christ

The more the mission directors in Europe knew of Church history, the more they emphasized as precedents the kings and nations of the early Church in

the European Middle Ages, as well as the fateful legacy of a Church that had vanished in different parts of Africa – North Africa and the Congo. The less these gentlemen knew of Church history or any history, the less concerned they could be with any prototype of the past, let alone from the Middle Ages. The towering example here is Cardinal Lavigerie who, drawing his inspiration from the examples of the early Church and medieval European Christian kings, sent out his missionaries to the lake-sides of Central Africa to found Christian nations with Christian kings. Some Protestants, too, as we shall see, held similar views, none more determinedly than the Lutheran Ludvig Harms of Hermannsburg, in northern Germany.

If the results of the attempts at winning the kings were meagre, this was not for want of trying. J. S. Moffat, Robert Moffat's son and a good Congregationalist, in a letter to the Directors of the LMS in 1888 emphasized the importance for LMS missionaries to spend sufficient time *enkosini* (at the king's place):

> It ought to be an absolute rule that each one of the missionaries spend three months in each year with the chief [in this case Mzilikazi], not flitting to and fro like a bird which leaves no traces or footsteps. I am certain that this will tell within an appreciable time.

A chapter, subtitled 'The Church at the Kings Way' (page 562) shows how the missionaries in the interlacustrine region had to follow some such ruler for the planning of their work. The king was 'the door' through which one had to pass and there was only one approach by which to get there. Anybody who tried to reach the country in any other way had to suffer for it. On his way to Kampala in 1885, the newly appointed Anglican Bishop Hannington chose another way than the accepted route, over the Lake: he was killed before ever arriving before the king. This can be compared with Coillard's attempt to visit King Lobengula in Zimbabwe. He took the 'wrong' road, was imprisoned briefly at Bulawayo and had to turn back to South Africa, losing nearly ten years in his efforts to establish a new mission field north of the Limpopo. But it was not only a question of a first approach. In Zululand two generations of missionaries tried to win the king with very little to show for it.

On the other hand a few royal converts did appear. For South Africa one notes Kgama of Bamangwato, Kama of the Gqunukwebe and Faku of the Pondo. And one should not forget Sechele of the Kwena, the only African baptized by David Livingstone. Very soon after baptism Sechele was placed under Church discipline but he kept on preaching and studying his New Testament for thirty-eight years until at long last readmitted to the fold.

Sechele's friend Moshoeshoe in Lesotho at least came close to being baptized.

While all this went on, Cardinal Lavigerie in Algiers was involved with the approach to the polygamous King of Buganda, Mutesa. The local Catholic missionary, he insisted, should not have denied outright to the king an access to the Church and its fellowship. Following the example of the early Church, the king should have been informed that he had before him a life-long preparation for Holy Baptism, as a catechumen of the Church and as a friend of the Mission. Accepted as a postulant or a catechumen, he could at the hour of death be baptized *in extremis*.

'Freed people'

The late eighteenth-century struggle for abolition of the slave trade, inspired largely by Anglo-Saxon Quakers and Evangelicals, resulted in 1807 in the [British] Abolition Act prohibiting all British subject from participation in slave trading. Thirty years later, a British Evangelical, Thomas Buxton, initiated a campaign against slavery and *for* 'legitimate trade' – referring mainly to products of palm oil and peanuts. Unfortunately this brilliant formula did not lead to a decline of slavery within Africa. Instead slaves became if anything more important than before, necessary as they were supposed to be for agricultural production, thus leading to a 'slave mode of production'. Although the Atlantic slave trade was coming to an end, the system of domestic slavery was as strong as ever.

In large parts of West Africa slaves had for centuries made up a majority of the population. In Cokwe society, Angola, 80 per cent of the villages were slave villages. Among the Tio and the Bobangi along the Zaïre river, the slaves formed the bulk of the population. At the end of the nineteenth century there were in one settlement 290 slaves and only eight free men.

This being the case on a large scale, one would like to know the numbers of those joining the churches from these social categories. Any generalization must here be built on solid local studies. In any case, the slaves and 'freed peoples' must be seen as part of a general category of marginalized groups, outcasts, aliens and refugees, on the outskirts of society, looking for a new identity and for some security in a world of social and economic destruction. In West Africa the slave trade officially came to an end in the first third of the twentieth century. In East Africa it reached its worst momentum in the 1840s and on his second journey David Livingstone saw terrible signs of 'this open wound'. At this time between 50,000 and 70,000 slaves were reaching the coast every year.[5]

A point of wide application can be safely made, namely that to a large extent it was the aliens, the foreigners, the uprooted, who were among the first to join the Church. They found a solution in the fellowship and concern of the local congregation. The Mfengu in the eastern Cape or in Transvaal belonged to this category. The upper reaches of Natal near the Drakensberg mountains had such 'riff-raff' communities.[6] Not those established in a seemingly solid, ethnic community but the uprooted – individuals and groups – were prepared to join the new fellowship.

There were theological dimensions to these decisions: to oppressed outsiders on the outskirts of society the surprisingly egalitarian message of the Christian hymn in the chapel was supremely attractive. The term *slaves* should be avoided for those groups who became part of the Church, as many thought of themselves as descendants not of slaves but of a *freed* people.

A youth movement

The nineteenth-century church in Africa, both Catholic and Protestant, was a youth movement. This claim can be demonstrated on a number of decisive points, to be corroborated by a theory of generational conflict in many African societies at the time.

The surprising corps of a thousand young boys at the Kabaka's court, Uganda, were perhaps aware of themselves becoming, before too long, *batangole* chiefs in the Buganda kingdom, but less aware perhaps of a fate awaiting some of them as martyrs for their new faith. They were young 'Readers' of a first generation setting an example to young men in the whole kingdom and in the entire interlacustrine region. The 'Christian village' population along the coast of the continent from Senegal in the west via Réunion and Mauritius to Bagamoyo in the east, enabled young couples to build up new Catholic societies in a pagan *milieu*, set apart because of their faith. Gangs of young men, leaving their villages along a wide latitude in the north of Transvaal and Ovambo, going south towards a 'Big Water' to work, were set on acquiring what a young man must have, a gun, and wealth for a future marriage. In the process they found not only a new rifle but also a new religion.

This is not anything unique for African history. It has precedents from earlier times in other parts of the world. The well-known Danish New Testament scholar, Professor Bent Noack, has shown that its roots can be traced to the early Church. The Gospel, he says, with a fine distinction in Danish, *blev hentet, ikke bragt*: i.e., it was, in the first place not brought, by

foreigners, but *carried* home by the people themselves. In order to grow the Gospel must not be imposed from the outside but must be planted by those who themselves belong to the situation. In the Middle Ages, in the mission history of Scandinavia well before AD1000, Christianity did not become rooted until the Vikings themselves brought the Gospel home from Christianized Britain and Byzantium. The kings, such as Harald Bleutooth and Olav Tryggvason may have wielded a vast influence but they could do this only because of a sufficient number of people on the spot, in Denmark and Norway, who had met the White Christ, and brought the Gospel with them back home. Thus, it was that the message could spread as rings on the water.[7]

The widespread movement of the young in many parts of the African continent had, initially, some issue of a generational conflict with the old, the elders and the chiefs. Established groups did not need to change. The young on the other hand had nothing to lose and something to gain by moving from the village, leaving because of various frustrations. Young men going away in gangs or groups, struck out and demonstrated the immense mobility occurring in African societies in this period of 'Revolutionary Africa'.

As if these indications of a wide youth movement were not enough, there was set in motion, more particularly in the Congo, not only a youth movement but a children's league of surprising range and proportion. This could happen in a society in disorder and disintegration: everywhere there were children referred to by the Westerners – missionaries and administrators – as 'orphans', until the definition of 'orphan' in a matrilineal society became a legal problem of some significance.

The Catholic Church in Congo – the Protestants were not tempted to follow the lead – had a theory, formed, as they felt, by hard experience: adults in Africa did not respond and could not be won for the faith. The only possible category to aim at was the children. To the Catholics at the time this was part of an international concern, from Mongolia to Congo, and their organization 'Holy Childhood' was founded with this in view. The Jesuits insisted, at least for the troublesome period of 1890–1912, on the formation of what they called 'farm chapels' for children: a Church in Congo had to begin with a generation of children. 'The Church could wait', until these children in their turn were to become adult members of the Holy Church. No prophecy proved more appropriate. The little boys trained by Fr Cleene and others at Boma in 1893 were, in fifteen years time, to become soldiers in the army but soldiers with a difference: they were successful voluntary catechists winning thousands for the faith.

A catechumens' Church

By characterizing the nineteenth-century Church as a 'catechumens' Church' one does of course not suggest that the great majority of converts remained catechumens. The aim of both Catholics and Protestants was to incorporate the individual and the groups, the masses even, into the fellowship of the Church through Holy Baptism. Throughout the century and well into the twentieth century, the overwhelming concern and activity of the local missionary and his African catechists was the daily instruction of catechumens. One cannot emphasize enough the extent to which that mission on the hill, in a more leisurely time than ours, became the orientation point of the masses, ever present in their minds and hearts.

While at first the length of time for catechumens' preparation, both on the Catholic and the Protestant side could be treated with a certain casualness, there was soon an ambition to lay down the law by which a minimum time was determined. On the Catholic side one of the leading missions, while outbidding the others, came to take an uncompromising position to which the others had somehow to relate. The debate continued into the twentieth century and, in the 1930s in Central Africa, attained a certain acrimony. From the outset Cardinal Lavigerie and his White Fathers laid down a rule in unyielding terms: four years, neither more nor less, devoted to the formulae of the faith, to the gestures and the rites.[8]

In principle the Protestant catechumenate was an introduction to the Bible. On the road to the Bible the catechumen was supposed to learn the alphabet and to read, the fundamental idea being that the individual, at least those of the younger generation, would be placed in a position to see for him- or herself what the Word of God said. The teaching included certain select pieces from the stories in Genesis and Exodus together with a synopsis of the Gospels. Certain more established Churches could refer to a Catechism – Martin Luther's or the Westminster Catechism – while other Protestant missions regarded a Catechism with distrust, the idea of such a book smacking of Rome.

However, there were complications. To some missions, with a background in nineteenth-century Holiness Churches, it was felt that an intellectual attainment through the Bible class was not enough. Their missionaries could decide how far the individual had arrived on the road of moral preparedness. One of the towering heroes of the nineteenth-century missionaries was François Coillard of the Paris Evangelical Mission, active in Lesotho and in the Lozi kingdom (south-west Zambia). He felt that he could determine when the individual Lozi had achieved a desired goal of

moral perfection. If not, the preparation period had to be extended *ad libitum*, to six years in some cases. In the end the Lozi decided for themselves, worn out by the great man's paternalism, and looked for other available alternatives: the 'AME' (African Methodist Episcopal Church) – at least for a time – or Rome. After fifty years in Bulozi, the Paris Evangelical Mission had gathered at six stations 181 Christians, including 16 per cent under Church discipline.[9]

AFRICAN RELIGIONS

In Africa religion was more than just religion. It was an all-pervasive reality which served to interpret society and give wholeness to the individual's life and the community. The village world and the Spirit world were not two distinct separate realms: there was a continuous communication between the two. Religion was a totality, a comprehensive whole.

Because of this inclusive character none of the usual terms or concepts with which we try to categorize 'religion' has been found satisfactory. One way out is to use the indigenous local term instead. The Baganda speak of *okusanika* – the whole web of beliefs, myths, customs and rituals which go to make up traditional Ganda religion. An old Muganda compared this *okusanika* with the new arrivals, the new *dini*, the book religions of Islam and Christianity coming from outside. '*Okusanika*', he said, 'is our skin, enveloping man and following him from birth until death, wherever he moves. *Dini* is by comparison like a suit of clothes', to be worn, he suggested, for respectability!

A chapter, however brief, on African religion belongs in an African Church history, not just as a background to be conveniently forgotten as the story of evangelization proceeds over the continent. It belongs there as an accompanying echo from the past and, perhaps, as a tempting exit in the future. The early converts, together with Christians of much later generations, could not but feel a relationship with certain forms and expressions of a religious past. We give a personal example, from the Church in Bukoba, Tanzania. One of the finest priests that we met there, E. L., told us that when at twelve years of age he had been baptized and reported this fact to his father, the old man replied: 'Wamala has blessed you' ('Wamala' being one of the 'greater spirits' in local traditional religion). These Christians of that first generation still could well remember the traditional prayers directed to venerated ancestors of the past.

In any case, there is no such thing as '*the* African religion', although there are certainly common traits between various local and regional forms. It is

with some of these that we are concerned in this rapid survey. However, by the very fact of speaking of 'traits' or 'factors', we are already artificially isolating certain ideas or phenomena of religion from its lush and fertile soil, from the social and political reality out of which it grew and developed. When claiming that God seemed withdrawn and remote, a *deus otiosus*, forgetful of the fate of the village, the clan and its people, we have maybe already tended to take too Western a view of things, as if the 'High God' concept would cover the essential nature of religion. Yet this was often a matter of perspective. Professor Evans-Pritchard has made the helpful observation for the Nuer that the different aspects, monotheism or polytheism, 'are rather different ways of thinking of the numinous at different levels of experience'.[10]

As Western missionaries made their first contacts with peoples in the west, east and south of the continent, some of them were impressed by this African image of God and attempted to adapt their message to it. The fundamental belief expressed in these concepts of the African God is that of creation and origin. Certain people such as the Dogon of Mali have developed an elaborate cosmogony and can refer to a complex cosmology. This goes for the west as well as the east and the south. The supreme being of the Akan is *Nyame*, of the Yoruba, *Olusun*. More than twenty-five languages in Eastern Africa, from the Lower Zambezi to Lake Victoria, know his name as *Mulungu*. West of these peoples, a group of languages called him *Leza* (or a cognate word). This name is known and used from the Yeye in the northern Kalahari, through the eastern and central districts of Zambia into Zaïre and Tanzania.

In South Africa there were varying traditions for the name of God, but Xhosa and Zulu agree in their use of *uThixo*, an appellation with Khoikhoi background. It took time for this name to become established and recognized. The second half of the nineteenth century saw a lively debate, from a linguistic and theological point of view, on the name of God. The controversial Bishop Colenso insisted that the right names were *uNulunkulu* and *uMvelinqgangi*, 'the Great-Great One' and 'He who was before everything else.'

In Tororo, near the Uganda–Kenya border, the riverine Nilotic people, the Padhola, had the concept of *Jok*, Creator, and of *Were*, a merciful good being. The father placed bread in the hut of the 'God of the courtyard', and as the whole family sat in a circle, he took a piece of bread and mixed it with the liver of a chicken. He then divided the bread into small pieces, throwing them towards the north and the south, the east and the west, and invoking *Were*, he said, 'Take this, eat it, and may you protect us from our enemies.' The

Mankessim shrine in Fanteland, Ghana, was tolerant. It had to be, as it was a centre for a great number of *abosom*, or deities, each with its special priest or priestess. Also among the Akan peoples, the *abosom* would inhabit a natural shrine such as a river, a baobab tree or rock, or take its abode in a man-made shrine, most of them of brass in a room of the priest's own home.[11]

In certain cases there was a preparedness on the part of marginal people or leading men and women to break with the guardians of the ancient cult. There were changes in the new society already prepared in the womb of the old society. Of special interest are a series of so-called 'territorial cults' studied in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia. A territorial cult was 'an institution of spirit veneration which relates to a land area, or territory, rather than to kinship or lineage groupings'.[12] There were different kinds of such cults, whether relating to what is seen as a High God – such as the Mwari cult in Zimbabwe, of which M. L. Daneel has made a penetrating study[13] – or the veneration of divinized human beings. The Mwari cult, beginning as localized worship, has taken on nation-wide significance, having gone through decisive changes.

Another development, particularly in the northern part of Zimbabwe, was the *Mhondoro* cult, where a spirit medium served especially prominent tribal spirits, such as that of *Chaminuka*. It became accepted as the 'Son of Mwari'. There two systems may originally have been seen as different: the important fact is the integrating process whereby they came to be seen as one. New developments took place. Thus a female personality, Kariwara Marumbi, enriched the tradition. She appeared at times of devastating drought. Her songs at Matonjeni changed history: there were five days of continuous heavy rain. The adaptability of the Shona people was also expressed at this time in religious terms. Marumbi's spirit is said to have established direct relationships with Mwari at Matonjeni. In the 1830s the Rozvi kings of the Shona were defeated by the invading Ndebele. But while these military and political changes took place on the surface of history, the cult at Matonjeni continued as before, albeit with its political function weakened.

The claims and commands of Matonjeni were a challenging reality in the lives of many. As of old, people on moon-lit nights went to the Matonjeni cave, bringing their gifts. They took off their shoes and greeted Mwari with the clapping of hands and the shout of his praise names: Mbedzi! Dziva! Shoko! They explained their various petitions about land or chieftainships, or, maybe, fundamental political change. The Voice answered in Ndebele or Rozvi, 'high-pitched as if in a trance': '[African] youngsters . . . have thrown away the African customs . . . I (Mwari) do not want to speak to these Europeanized Africans.'[14] European ways do not 'mend the country'.[15]

In the present century there have been conceptual changes with similar developments in a syncretic, adaptive direction. The new 'Mwari ve Chikristu' and traditional 'Mwari va Matonjeni', it is said, are one, because God is one. 'Jesus was a son of Mwari just as we are all sons of God.' Christ is represented as a great European *Mhondoro*, acting as a mediator at the apex of the ancestral hierarchy.

The M'Bona cult in Malawi and Zimbabwe has been interpreted by Professor M. Schoffeleers.[16] Following careful 'oral history' leading back to the fourteenth century, his studies trace a tradition among the Lundu people according to which a prophet and rainmaker, M'Bona, was innocently killed by the paramount chief. After his death M'Bona revealed himself as a powerful supernatural being to whom also the paramount chief showed his respect. The 'collective trauma' felt by the people over this outrage led to a martyr cult. In this area M'Bona's name is 'familiar to every inhabitant, man or woman, young or old, convert to Christianity or not'.[17] A shrine was erected and sacrifice made. There was a M'Bona pool, the water of which could turn red as a warning of disaster.

The faithful would see parallels between M'Bona and Christ, both providing food, both martyred although innocent. In certain versions of the story M'Bona was born to a virgin and there developed an interaction of the M'Bona cult and Christianity. In 1916 a leading headman told missionary Price at the Chididi Mission that the Christian God was more effective in bringing what a divinity must be able to produce: rain. 'We have no longer faith in M'Bona. Your God can give rain, pray for us or our crops will be ruined.'[18] There are other ways of adaptation: 'M'Bona is now said to be the "Son of God" (*Mwana wa Mulungu*) and the "black Jesus" (*Yesu wakuda*), who is the guardian spirit of all ethnic groups, and not just of the Mang'anja' community.[19]

Prayer is the very heart-beat of religion, also in African religion. Too little is known of traditional African prayer. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive anthology of traditional African prayer from different parts of the continent – edited, we suggest, by an ecumenical team of African scholars. Nothing could more convincingly unveil the life and concern of African religion. Prayer to the divinities is most powerful when accompanied by sacrifice and libations, the latter particularly common in West Africa.

In spite of prayer and sacrifices, illness and ill-fate will befall the individual and the community. The diviner will not hesitate and he will find the self-evident explanation: it has been sent by witchcraft. 'Witch-finding movements' will suddenly appear, accompanied by tragic self-accusations

for witchcraft by lonely, isolated or otherwise handicapped persons, not least women. This leads into the depths of African religiosity: it would seem that at present some of the 'Independent Churches' are more ready for dealing with these phenomena than the more polished, established Churches.

Monica Wilson, found parallels in Tanzania.

> Where God was scarcely distinguished from the shades he was thought of as being beneath the earth as they were, but as he is more clearly distinguished he goes up-stairs and dwells above ... In 1935 old [Nyakyusa] men – pagans – spoke of God beneath: young men – pagans – were beginning to speak of him as dwelling above as the Christians did. By 1955 the shift was complete, and to young and old, pagan and Christian alike, God dwelt on high.[20]

Nobody has brought out the dimension of continuity as strongly as Professor Robin Horton. His stimulating article 'African conversion'[21] and subsequent studies,[22] initiated an important international debate on these matters. With his background of brilliant research on the Kalabari of Eastern Nigeria, Horton made the point that with the development, through modern enlargement of 'scale', from a microcosm to a macrocosm, the world religions – Islam and Christianity – were reduced to the role of catalysts, i.e., stimulators and accelerators of changes which 'were in the air anyway'. With this 'thought-experiment', as Horton called his argument, he suggested that 'acceptance of Islam and Christianity was due as much to development of the traditional cosmology in response to other features of the modern situation as it is to the activities of the missionaries.'[23]

From the general view of nineteenth-century African Church history as developed in this book, it would seem that however stimulating this 'thought-experiment' may be and however tempting an overall causal explanation, one should not overlook the role of fundamental changes in social structure, more particularly with regard to population movements. Dr Horton's emphasis on continuity seems not to take sufficient account of the new inspiration from the Biblical message and its appropriation. One question to be raised is whether traditional cosmology and its 'High Gods' did in fact constitute a main attraction of the African religion as experienced both in the village and on a trans-ethnic level, or whether this experience was not rather to be seen as related to other aspects – the ever-present lesser deities, the concern with the ancestors and their fate after death, and threats from powers of evil, witches etc.

An observation in all parts of Africa would seem to be the view of Christianity as not only the way of New Life but also of the New Death. In a *milieu* where death was an ever present threat, the 'New Death' – i.e., the

new way of facing the threat and fact of Death – was recognized throughout the continent as something distinctly different. Men and women would appear at the door of the Mission with their question, 'how to die aright?', and there was an answer demonstrated not by an intellectual argument, but by the collective witness of the Christian fellowship in prayer and song, seen as something which no 'traditional' religion could provide out of its own resources, however prophetic.

Writing about the Catholic Church in Uganda, the Revd Dr John Waliggo has emphasized that 'prayers to and for the dead and the baptizing of the dying to assure them of heaven, had a great appeal to the converts'.[24] This was seen as something altogether different from the approach of the old evidence which 'suggests that the impact of Christian eschatology has been widespread and profound'.[25]

In writing this book dealing with a whole continent one is repeatedly reminded of the differences between conditions and cultures in the various parts of Africa. The differences between West, Southern and East Africa are striking, not to mention those between Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. This general observation induces a certain caution with regard to attempts at accounting for differences and changes using any single overall formula.

The exclusive use of the word 'conversion' is partly to blame for a certain confusion over this whole issue and we think more especially of the change of religion in a crisis brought about by population movements and similar transitions leading to a corporate decision to leave the old and to accept the new. Also for Africa one needs the advice given by that classical work on *Conversion*, by A. D. Nock, published in 1933. Nock made the distinction between 'conversion' and 'adhesion', the former being the deliberate turning from indifference with a realization that 'a great change was involved, that the old was wrong and the new was right', while the latter, 'adhesion' implies an understanding of the new as a useful supplement to traditional religion. Our understanding of the term is influenced by personal experience on the spot, in Bukoba in north-western Tanzania. There a first generation made their 'transition' to the new, thereby accepting modernity over against an 'uncivilized' past, while a second Protestant generation experienced a Pietistic 'revival' and thus could testify to a 'conversion' in a specific Pietistic sense. Instead of Dr Nock's term 'adhesion' we prefer the term 'transition' over to the new faith and fellowship, followed by the 'conversion' brought by the Revival.

THE WEST AND AFRICA: HUMANITARIANISM AND IMPERIALISM

Compared with the middle of the century, the last quarter of the nineteenth century presented a strikingly different picture. Prior to this period the populations were ruled by, and related to, African kings and chiefs, as well as to acephalous societies of different shapes and cohesion. Missionaries were few and far between but when they did appear they were seen as the permanent representatives of Europe in Africa. The last two to three decades brought revolutionary changes, politically, military and medically.

This was the time of the 'European scramble' for power and for imperial domination. This scramble was not just the result of a sudden stroke of the pen at the Berlin conferences of the Imperial powers. 'There were literally hundreds of European conquests of Africa, not one.'[26] Preceded by a period of 'treaties' whereby enterprising and ruthless explorers and officers made local chiefs place their mark to a treaty, there now followed a first phase of the scramble in the middle of the 1880s, with a second, decisive phase in the latter part of the 1890s which sent shock waves through the populations in the period 1895–1905. A vast change in the military and social climate of Africa ensued.

At the Berlin Congress of 1885, Europe's leading statesmen carved up the African continent into pieces, the bigger the better. In West Africa this could mean that the Wesleyan Minha community found itself cut into two, becoming on the one side of the border French-speaking Togolese and on the other English-speaking Gold-Coasters. The Bakongo, with their strong clan connections, found themselves divided between French, Belgian and Portuguese administrations. Before too long, and particularly in the 1890s, a frightening number of African kings and chiefs were deposed, deported or decapitated. A *pax* on European terms was established.

The change can be seen on the ground, in the villages, with regard to four factors: slaves, guns, rum, and paternalism in high places.

Slavery

Abolitionist attempts at outlawing the slave trade and slavery did not by themselves revolutionize the societies. Expectations of Western abolitionists that the slave trade could be replaced by 'legitimate trade', preferably in the form of palm oil and other agricultural products were not fulfilled until late in the century. In West Africa there were regions where up to two-thirds of the population were slaves; it is thought that 'all Yoruba palm oil exports

were produced and transported by slaves until the 1890s'. Local wars and conquests were followed by enslavement.

In the end, however, agricultural exports did provide new alternatives for both masters and slaves: the latter were now in a position to buy land and freedom: an agricultural revolution was under way. However, this turned out differently from what the Westerners had expected. 'It was not the British who made the revolution, it was the slaves. It was a peasant settlement, not a capitalist transition. It provided a pattern . . . for much of colonial Africa.' It also paved the way for the evangelization of the masses. The egalitarian message of the Gospel exercised its influence on both groups and individuals.

Firearms

A few figures illustrate the martial situation. By 1880 Buganda had received at least 10,000 guns. By the middle of the 1870s the Zulu had procured 20,000 rifles, just in time to meet the British forces: in 1879 they were able to inflict a crushing defeat on the British at Isandlwana. In Ethiopia, Emperor Yohannes was 'obsessed with guns', and his successor Menelik managed to checkmate the Italian forces at Adwa in 1896.

Yet, 'one has to ask how far it was death rather than the Europeans which really conquered Africa at the turn of the century'.[27] In the 1890s large parts of the local populations died of diseases in Ethiopia, in central Kenya, in Tanganyika, in Belgian Congo, in Angola and in northern Nigeria, culminating in disasters such as sleeping sickness, smallpox etc. Twenty years later these were followed by the devastating scourge of the 'Spanish influenza' throughout the continent. Likewise, the cattle-owning communities in the 1890s suffered terrible losses through rinderpest, from north to south across the continent.

To cap it all the musket and the rifle were followed by the modern Maxim gun assuring the attacker of the upper hand.

> Whatever happens
> we have got
> the Maxim gun
> and they have not

Rum

An unhappy problem was that of 'rum' or alcohol. Travelling along the Ogowe river in 1913, Dr Albert Schweitzer noticed how the villagers were

selling their timber to foreign traders and being paid in spirits instead of in cash. Most of the money for the sale of the timber was converted into rum. He also noticed ruins of abandoned homes. A fellow passenger said to him: 'Fifteen years ago these were all flourishing villages', 'Why are they so no longer?' asked Dr Schweitzer. In a low voice the fellow passenger answered: 'l'alcool'. Similar observations could be made elsewhere on the continent at the time. These are corroborated by statistical figures.

In 1890 Cotonou, in Dahomey (the modern republic of Benin), imported over 1 million litres of alcohol in three months. In Belgian Congo in the years 1893 and 1898 respectively, the imports of alcoholic drinks were between 1.4 and 1.7 million litres. In the period 1906–12 the overall imports in French West Africa doubled in volume. In the late 1890s Southern Nigeria imported nearly twelve million litres and this level was maintained in the period 1904–08.

One appreciates the bitterness with which Kenneth Onwuka Dike, the pioneering Nigerian historian, concluded:

> Little of permanent value came to West Africa from the 400 years of trade with Europe. In return for the superior labour force, the palm oil, ivory, timber, gold and other commodities which fed and buttressed the rising industrialization they received the worst type of trade, gin and meretricious articles.[28]

The example set in Africa by White colonialists was in keeping with these facts. Leading export houses of Marseilles, Hamburg, and Liverpool made enormous profits from these sales. Another observation could be made on the spot: too many colonial officials in Africa, of all nationalities, managed to become drunkards and alcoholics.

The missions, more particularly the Protestant ones, were engaged in a relentless war against the curse of drink, both within the Churches and in society at large. A Western teetotal tradition was transferred by the Protestants. Looking at the effects over a century of this campaign one must recognize that the results, limited as they were, were beneficial financially, medically and morally.

Missionary paternalism

Finally there must be a reference to missionary attitudes towards Africans, however difficult it is to generalize on this delicate subject. The period was one when Social Darwinism was making itself felt in society. At this time the missionary in his or her 'field' was, as a matter of course, in charge –

ruling his or her flock about to be incorporated into the Church. There was sometimes a tendency, more so in some cases than in others, towards a paternalistic attitude. This was no doubt meant as an expression of benevolent care and concern and accepted as such by a large majority of African disciples. However, in certain situations the missionaries' paternalistic attitude came to be seen as incipient racialism, comparable to that of the White population at large: such comparisons were made, some times to the detriment of both the missionary and his cause. In certain countries with a large European minority this attitude was more prevalent than in others, and many Africans, among them the Revd M. J. Mokone of Pretoria, the Revd Paul Mushindo of Zambia and the Right Revd Bishop Samuel A. Crowther of Nigeria experienced it in the last decade of the century.

MISSIONARY SOCIETIES

This book deals with the African response to the Christian message and with African initiatives in the conversion of the continent. There is a tendency in the book, perhaps, to neglect Western missionaries, foreigners in the land. Yet, they too, are vital to the story and we include a survey of nineteenth-century Catholic and Protestant missions and missionaries.

Catholic missions

France and the Catholic Church in France became the great missionary factor for a Roman Catholic presence in nineteenth-century Africa. One cannot emphasize this enough. Today, Roman Catholic missionaries in Africa hail from all corners of the world. This was not so in the nineteenth century. Until 1885, what there was of a Catholic mission in Western, Central and Southern Africa was all French (in the North-East, along the Nile, the Italians were appearing).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the French Catholic Church did not give occasion for much hope. The dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1773 by the Pope himself, Clement XIV, the French Revolution with its aftermath of religious persecution, anti-clericalism, the bishops' and priests' exodus from France and an overwhelming sense of crisis swept through the cloisters and the colonnades of the ecclesiastical establishment. In this despondency however, were a few shafts of light. A book written by F. R. Chateaubriand, one of the many French aristocrats who had fled to England after 1789, unexpectedly opened people's hearts to a concern for the Church and the cause of the missions. This book, *Génie de Christianisme* (published

in 1802), became a rallying cry to the Christian faith. It contained a chapter on 'The Missionaries', a romantic interpretation of what the Church had achieved in distant lands: 'Never did men of learning with their instruments and their plans for higher learning do as much as a poor monk walking along with his rosary and his breviary.'

There was also a shy, small initiative by two Lyon women, mother and daughter Jaricot, destined to become of immense importance for the financial support of missions, 'The Propagation of the Faith', of 1882. It was soon followed by the Bishop of Nancy's similar enterprise. With an eye for needs in China, Bishop de Forbin-Janson started the 'Work of the Sacred Childhood'. Building on regular small donations from the faithful, the two enterprises were to ensure for a century the financial support of missionary 'congregations' which emerged about the middle of the century in France. (A parallel on the Protestant side about the same time – the 1850s – is Basel's *Halbbatzenkollekte*, or, 'half-penny collection', initiated by the Basel financier, Karl Sarasin.)

Daring prophetic voices in the French clergy – Lacordaire, Montalembert, etc. – called the Church to renew awareness of its missionary task in France and beyond. The Catholic orders, not least the Dominicans, found their place anew in French society. A change in the spiritual climate could be sensed in romantic and Ultramontane influences in the Church, with a warmer piety and spirituality. The 'Sacred Heart of Jesus' and that of the Holy Virgin were at the centre. Marian devotions and pilgrimages influenced the concern for missions abroad.

This influence was particularly felt in regions with a long succession of spirituality. There was the diocese of Rennes, in Brittany, with its Celtic background and its tradition of adventurous exploits over the seven seas. And there was Alsace with the dominating influence, over almost half a century (1842–87), of the Bishop of Strasbourg, Mgr André Raess, who greatly contributed to making Alsace 'the classic country of missions' on the Catholic side.

A comparison of leadership structures

In attempting a comparison of the structures and leadership of Catholic and non-Catholic societies or 'congregations' in the nineteenth century, one is struck by a fundamental difference. In the nineteenth century, the modern Catholic mission congregations – the Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, or the Holy Ghost Fathers (the 'Spiritans'), the Société de Notre-Dame d'Afrique or the 'White Fathers', the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Society of

African Missions or the 'Lyon Fathers', and the Verona Fathers – were closely tied to the Superior General, whether a Cardinal or an ordinary Father Superior. It was taken for granted that the planning and execution of all work including even minor details, were ultimately in his hands. The Superior General, whether in Paris, Lyon, Algiers or Verona, was a dominating presence in the minds and prayers of the men on the spot in Africa, forming and transforming them.

In the case of non-Roman societies the responsibility of the Director and his co-inspectors was shared with, and sometimes overruled by, a large 'Board of Governors', – the constituted plurality of such a governing body being indeed unthinkable in the Roman Catholic case. It seems therefore advisable to characterize the leaders, whether autocratic or not, and the societies' leading bodies. This is an exercise all the more revealing as these great pioneers outlined the broad strategy and the local policy for the first missionaries, decisive for those who followed them until this very day.

The Holy Ghost Fathers

Upon entering France's missionary scene, François-Marie-Paul Libermann (1802–52), attracts our attention by the intense fire of his devotion to Christ and Mary. Possibly the most creative of Catholic mission leaders of the nineteenth century,[29] his personal development made him the great 'outsider' in the French Church and among its mission leaders. The son of a Jewish rabbi in Alsace who spoke practically no language other than Yiddish and Hebrew until he was twenty, Jacob Libermann – his Jewish name – was eventually led to doubt the faith of his forefathers. In 1826 he converted to Jesus the Christ and was consequently declared dead by his domineering, irate father. Here was a Westerner who in his own body knew what conversion was about and also knew the tradition of the Old Covenant. In Rennes and Paris – in order to practice the 'mystique of poverty' – he identified with seventeenth-century French spirituality in the tradition of the old 'Congregation of the Holy Spirit', founded in 1703 by Poullart des Places. Libermann can be seen as the last in the line of this French spirituality.

Psychological tensions caused by his spiritual struggle made the sickly young man susceptible to epileptic fits and thus, at first, considered unavailable for holy orders. Yet, in 1841 he was ordained priest and accepted as a leader by a group of like-minded devoted young priests including two Creoles, Fr Frédéric Le Vavasseur from Réunion, and Fr Eugène Tisserant

from Haiti/Santo Domingo. With his intense Marian piety, Libermann called his group the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Mary. In 1848, this congregation was amalgamated with the older, more established 'Congregation of the Holy Spirit', which gave the organization its name ('Holy Ghost Fathers', the 'Spiritans', CSSp).

Always sickly, Libermann would say: 'I am crucified personally, wherever I turn I never find anything but cross and suffering'. Mary dominated his thoughts. He devoted his congregation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary because he felt her veneration was particularly important for missionaries labouring in far-away places: 'If they do not give themselves to Mary they will be isolated'. His spirituality created an intense awareness of fellowship with Africa and Africans. He told his missionaries:

> You are not going to Africa in order to establish there Italy or France or any such country. Dispense with Europe, its customs and spirit. Make yourselves Negroes with the Negroes. Then you will understand them as they must be understood. Our holy religion has invariably to be established in the soil.[30]

This to him meant an African clergy with an indigenous hierarchical order. 'Saintliness rather than scholarship' was his watchword as he sent his men to Senegal, the 'two Guineas' and the islands of Reunion and Mauritius.

In the 1850s the Spiritans were a marginal movement, at first largely unnoticed by a French society preoccupied with the mounting tensions which were to culminate in the crises of the 1860s and 1870s. Libermann was followed as leader by the authoritarian Ignace Schwindenhammer, an Alsatian who dominated the scene for three decades, and later by the brilliant Alexander Le Roy. Like other missionary societies, the Spiritans aimed at the 'Inland' of Africa, but well into the twentieth century their fate remained with the difficult task along the West and East Coasts – the great exception being Bishop Augouard's opening on the Oubangi.

For Senegal with its Muslim *milieu* they conceived the idea of 'Christian villages', developed still further on the Indian Ocean islands and among the liberated slaves on the East African coast. These villages expressed the Spiritan policy for half a century until Le Roy, with his personal missionary experience in Tanzania and Gabon, achieved a radical change by placing congregations in proximity to local ethnic communities. Another modification along the road came in the educational field. 'The school in the bush' had seemed just right for Libermann's ideal of 'holiness rather than scholarship'. In the 1940s, the Spiritan educational secretary Fr J. Bouchaud, however, inspired a change to a system more attuned to the demands of modern times.

The Spiritans were fortunate in their missionary bishops: Augouard of Brazzaville and Oubangi, Vogt of Tanzania and Cameroon, Keiling of Angola and Shanahan of East Nigeria. Their greatest missionary was undoubtedly the Blessed Charles Laval of Mauritius. Two missionaries can be seen as representing two different poles of the Spiritan approach to the missionary task, Bishop Carrie of Loango and Fr Charles Duparquet. Placed on the Congo coast in a rapidly changing political situation, Carrie insisted on the virtue of *no* change: 'Change is always regrettable and particularly in Africa. It is disastrous for mission work. We repeat the prohibition of any change in the traditions, usages, regimentations and customs of the mission without our express authorization.'[31]

Not all the missionaries were concerned with *stabilitas loci*, the Benedictine ideal of stability of place and purpose. The most remarkable of the Spiritans, though sometimes difficult to handle, was the omnipresent Charles A. Duparquet, who moved around the continent, West, South and East, with surprising ease and speed. While the usual family background of the missionaries was farming, fishing and craftsmanship, Duparquet's family was of the '*noblesse de robe*'. He was the only son of a rich solicitor's family which lived in Normandy and owned ships in Marseilles; his genes may have induced this ease of mobility!

The White Fathers and Sisters

The difference between Libermann and Lavigerie of the 'White Fathers' could not have been greater. The one was meek and introverted, the other anything but. The archbishop of Algiers – later Cardinal – Charles Martial Allemand Lavigerie was the powerful, enormously active and dominating general of his enterprise. He sent his teams of missionaries to Central Africa working not from Paris or Lyon, but from his episcopal residence in Algiers.

Lavigerie had large perspectives, historically and strategically. Starting his career as a young Church history professor at the Sorbonne, he lectured on the Church Fathers in Egypt and North Africa as well as on the glories of medieval France. History was his *métier*, the shaping of the future his compulsive urge, i.e., how to 'resurrect' history, in African kingdoms under Christian African kings. His secret design, he said, was 'the Eventual Establishment of a Christian Kingdom' in the centre of Equatorial Africa.[32] At first that turned out to be a risky affair. As he sent his first teams of young missionaries across the deserts, he had the disappointment of learning that they were murdered in the attempt. But Lavigerie was not at a loss for