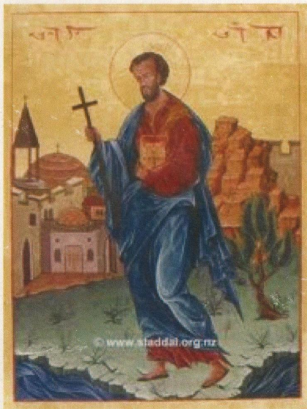


# KOINONIA



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32 Westminster Palace Gardens  
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## *Koinonia*

THE JOURNAL OF THE ANGLICAN &  
EASTERN CHURCHES ASSOCIATION

### Editorial

THIS number of KOINONIA surveys a wide geographical and temporal landscape. The fall of Roman Empire had a profound effect on the Church in lands as widely separated as Britain, Greece and Iraq. The experience of the Church in those remote times still speaks to our present condition. Counterintuitive as it may seem to our own culture obsessed with the here and now, Christians both today and tomorrow are one in the Body of Christ with Christians yesterday. At the same time, there are great gulfs of culture, language, and history that lie between us. In different ways, the articles in this number challenge and encourage us to bridge those gaps.

The Greek Church still worships and reads the Scriptures in the language of the earliest Christians. This is an enviable place to be in many ways, but the Greek of the Church is largely incomprehensible to present-day Greeks. As Dimitris Salapatias points out, however, using modern language in the liturgy does not ensure that modern believers understand the Church's way of life, its symbols and beliefs. Whether the Greek Church chooses to retain the ancient language of the liturgy or to 'transcribe' it into Modern Greek, a concerted programme of education is needed to help contemporary believers recover a deep understanding of their faith.

Even in present-day Greece, the Orthodox Church retains an 'establishment' profile within the nation. This was never a possibility for the Church in Mesopotamia. Erica Hunter, in a revealing survey of the history of the Church in Iraq, describes how Christians there have always had to come to terms with rulers of different faiths. In the same way that any link with Byzantium was dangerous for Christians



under the Sassanids, so now Christians are suspect because of their links with the West and are treated as interlopers in Muslim lands even though their presence antedates the rise of Islam! Despite the severe persecution suffered by Christians today, Dr Hunter yet hopes that Iraqi Christians will be sustained by the resilience and stamina which have enabled them to survive countless threats in the past.

Contemporary British Christians are also apt to feel despair in their own context of decline and corruption in the Church, the rise of materialism and neo-paganism, and our economic and security fears. Michelle Brown points out that Britons were in comparable circumstances following the fall of the Roman Empire, but the re-evangelisation of the Church by St Fursey and others enabled the renewal of both church and nation. She argues that the churches today need to re-learn the lessons that this history shows us: to live out the 'good news' of the Gospel as a radical transforming force; to engage in constructive ecumenical collaboration; and to recognize the need for a balance between activity and contemplation in our lives.

Tempted as we may be to assume that our own circumstances are uniquely challenging, each of our writers reminds us to our benefit that there is indeed 'nothing new under the sun'. Where others have been before us we can with courage go again, sustained by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the sacraments of the Church, and the fellowship and prayers of those who have gone before us in the faith.

The authors encourage us to be mindful of the lessons of our history and to learn from them; each writer reminds us of the need to delve deeper into the life of faith and to avoid the trap of superficiality. Knowledge of history and tradition do not in themselves confer on us understanding or wisdom. Instead, we need to be mindful of the teaching of the Fathers who insisted on the necessary connection between *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* – the title of the memorable study of Dom Jean Leclercq. The only Christian justification for our academic studies is that they equip our hearts to love: to love God, his creation, our fellow-creatures, and ourselves.

This number of KOINONIA will be the last under my editorship. I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity I've had to share in this work, for the generous contributions of many hands, and for the

continuing ecumenical commitment of the Anglican & Eastern Churches Association in a time of many challenges. Finally, it is a pleasure to be able to pass on the editorship to the able hands of Fr Stephen Stavrou, who will bring fresh energy and commitment to the task. May I wish all our readers every blessing in Christ.

— PETER DOLL

Many books and articles have been written explaining the importance of preserving and the value of translating the liturgical texts from Ancient Greek to Modern Greek. There are also grounds for maintaining the ancient language and there are also grounds for translating the liturgical language of the Greek Orthodox Church. The question, however, is which view one respects, prefers and wishes to follow and which stance will the Church support now and in the future?

First of all, before analysing this important issue, crucial for the future of the Church, we must consider the historical context in which it arises. The question of whether to translate the liturgical texts into modern Greek is not a new one. It has been discussed for many years and has been a subject of heated debate in the past. The issue is not simply one of liturgical language but also of the role of the Church in the modern world.

In this discussion, which has not yet become a crucial dispute (i.e. the question of whether to translate the liturgical texts into modern Greek), there are two distinct groups of supporters. Those suggesting the translation of the liturgical texts within the Orthodox Church state that modern Greeks (and by Greeks here I mean the people living in Greece, Cyprus and the Diaspora but also those who speak the Greek language) do not understand the language of the Liturgy or that of any other ceremonies within the Church. This inevitably leads to the absence of many believers, especially the youth, from the Ecclesial Body. Another argument supported by the same category of people is that the holy texts have been translated into most languages. So why can they

<sup>1</sup> Ephrem Lash, *Translating Liturgy*, [www.ancient.org.uk/TransLiturg.pdf](http://www.ancient.org.uk/TransLiturg.pdf), accessed 03/04/11, 10:00

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## Contributors

DIMITRIS SALAPATAS has studied Theology at the University of Athens, International Relations at the University of London as well as Byzantine Music in Athens and is currently undertaking a research on the Fellowship of Saint Alban and Saint Sergius and its contribution towards Anglican - Orthodox Relations, at the University of Winchester.

ERICA HUNTER is Lecturer in Eastern Christianity in the Department for the Study of Religions, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

MICHELLE P. BROWN is Professor of Mediaeval Manuscript Studies, Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London ([www.ies.sas.ac.uk](http://www.ies.sas.ac.uk)).

## Translating Liturgical Texts from Ancient Greek to Modern Greek

*Dimitris Salapatas*

MANY books and articles have been written explaining, supporting or disagreeing with the notion of translating the liturgical texts from Ancient Greek to Modern Greek. There are many reasons for maintaining the ancient language and there are also grounds for translating the liturgical language of the Greek Orthodox Church. The two opposite views are based on various ideas and beliefs which are important. The question, however, is which view one respects, prefers and wishes to follow and which stance will the Church support now and in the future.

First of all, before analysing this important issue, crucial for the future of our Church, it is essential to understand that translations are nothing more than 'approximations, always no more than attempts to convey in the grammar, idiom and vocabulary of one language what was originally expressed in those of another'.<sup>1</sup> This is the case especially when referring to the poetic and melodic language used for liturgical purposes.

In this discussion, which has not yet become a crucial dispute (*i.e.* there are views on this matter but it has not been such a great problem as to bring schism within the Orthodox world) but might in the future, there are two distinct groups of supporters. Those suggesting the translation of the liturgical texts within the Orthodox Church state that modern Greeks (and by Greeks here I mean the people living in Greece, Cyprus and the Diaspora but also those who speak the Greek language) do not understand the language of the Liturgy or that of any other ceremonies within the Church. This inevitably leads to the absence of many believers, especially the youth, from the Ecclesial Body. Another argument supported by the same category of people is that the holy texts have been translated into most languages. So why can they

<sup>1</sup> Ephrem Lash, *Translating Liturgy*, [www.anastasis.org.uk/TransLito2.pdf](http://www.anastasis.org.uk/TransLito2.pdf), accessed 03/05/11, 19.15



not be translated into Modern Greek? The opposite view has also a great number of supporters, who express the traditional notion of maintaining the original Greek text, which also proposes the protection and preservation of the Tradition as they understand it; the original Greek language is understood as playing an important part within Orthodox life. This is clearly a stance which keeps its distance from any kind of modernisation or change.

Here we will analyse whether the translation is to be supported or dismissed as a solution, in order to bring back to the Ecclesia more people, especially the youth. However it is crucial to point out that many aspects of the Orthodox Church's traditions and life are for many outdated, but due to this maintenance of its traditions it has kept its dogmas and beliefs untouched, even through difficult epochs. Faith and belief are important in order to follow and fully understand not only the Liturgical texts but the Church's life as a whole.

The Orthodox Church does not believe or insist on the theory which the Catholic Church has and promotes, *i.e.* the logic of accepting only the holy languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin), although it has changed its stance towards this since the Second Vatican Council, which allowed the use and translation of the Liturgy into other languages. (Following the pattern of the new edition of the Roman Ritual, particular rituals are to be prepared as soon as possible by the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority... These rituals, adapted to the linguistic and other needs of the different regions, are to be reviewed by the Apostolic See and then introduced into the regions for which they have been prepared<sup>3</sup>.)

Orthodoxy has always encouraged the usage of other languages, hence for example the translation of the Bible and many Church texts by the brothers Cyril and Methodios, sent from Thessaloniki to the Slavic nations. That is why it is difficult for the supporters of translating the texts to understand why the Church today cannot and will not try to translate the Liturgy from Ancient Greek to Modern Greek. However, in this case we are not talking about translating the original text to another language but transcribing it into the modern form of the same language. George Seferis named this procedure when he him-

<sup>3</sup> Walter M. Abbot, *The Documents of Vatican II* (London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), p. 159.

self transcribed St. John's Apocalypse, explaining how he did not wish to explain the Apocalypse but to transcribe it to the modern form of Greek.<sup>3</sup> Modern Greek is also called 'demotic'; Metropolitan Ierotheos of Nafpaktos explains that 'the demotic language cannot be understood as a foreign language'<sup>4</sup> to the original Greek of the New Testament.

What is essential is that the Liturgical language has a holy aspect because it is the language used in order to pray and communicate with God. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew states that 'even eminent philologists claim that the text of the Divine Liturgy happens to be one of the masterpieces of Greek Literature. For this reason the centuries have respected this text not adding a single jot or tittle.'<sup>5</sup> Even the Church Fathers, when writing their texts and liturgies, used the highest form of Greek and not the everyday language of their era. In addition, as my former Professor Fr. George Metallinos states, 'the language of one people is not merely a means used to just communicate and inform, but also a unique and irreplaceable institution (carrier) of its historical, spiritual and social fortune. Language in all of its timeless course and practice saves the culture of the Nation and it broadcasts it to the next generations, retaining its continuance.'<sup>6</sup>

Even if a translation or transcription is actually realised will this truly solve the problem? If I am to take into account the practices of the Orthodox Church in Great Britain I will have to give a negative answer, disappointing the supporters of the translation proposed. Past experiences show that even when many churches within the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain have the Liturgy in English, where

<sup>3</sup> Δεν γύρεψα να αποσαφηνίσω την Αποκάλυψη πράγμα που έκαμαν άνθρωποι εγκυρότεροι από εμένα: ήθελα να μεταγράψω το παλαιό κείμενο στη σημερινή λαλιά μας» I Apokalypsi tou Ioanni, *Metagrafi Giorgos Seferis* (Athens: Ikaros) 1975, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> "η δημοτική γλώσσα δεν μπορεί να νοηθή ως ξένη γλώ",

<http://www.tovima.gr/opinions/article?aid=328013>, accessed 25/04/11, 18.12

<sup>5</sup> The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain and the Very Reverend Archimandrite Ephrem Lash, *The Divine Liturgy of our Father Among the Saints John Chrysostom* (Nigel Lynn Publishing, Oxfordshire) 2011, p. viii

<sup>6</sup> "Η γλώσσα ενός λαού δεν είναι απλά ένα όργανο στυγμιαίας επικοινωνίας και πληροφόρησης, αλλά και μοναδικός και ανα αντικατάστατος φορέας της ιστορικής, πνεύματικής και κοινωνικής του περιουσίας. Η γλώσσα σε όλον τον διαχρονικό της πορεία και χρήση αποταμείει τον πολιτισμό του Έθνους και τον μεταβιβάζει στις επερχόμενες γενεές, εξαοφελίζοντας έτσι την συνέχεια του", Georgios Metallinos, *Sighist-Proklisi-Afipnisi* (Athens: Ekdosis Armos) 1991, p. 124



the prayers and the hymns are fully understood, believers and especially the youth do not attend Church. On the contrary fewer people follow the Liturgy in English than the one celebrated in the original Greek. Perhaps the problem may lie elsewhere. 'Many Christians have not been admitted through experience within the Church.'<sup>7</sup> That is why, also, they do not even know the common and simple prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer. Theological terminology as well is not understood, when for example a theologian talks about Economy within the Church, secular understanding dictates that the theologian is discussing a financial theory, while in fact he is explaining God's plan for creation.

A translation will probably give the opportunity to the faithful to understand the Liturgy intellectually, but when faith is not present then the true meaning of the words spoken, chanted or read will not be fully understood. If the necessity is to understand the Liturgy like a newspaper, where information is merely given to us, then unfortunately the true meaning of Christianity is not recognised. Christos Yiannaras states that 'access to the meanings of sacred texts is certainly a function of living and being within the epicentre of the ecclesiastical body and a spiritual endeavour – individual understanding of the signifiers is not enough.'<sup>8</sup> This reminds us of the Theology of the Holy Trinity. It is interesting to understand that while the Church has used human words and secular means (for example shapes and diagrams) to comprehend and explain what and who God is, it has not come close into understanding Him in full. We merely recognise and explain what has been shown to us by God. How could creation understand the Creator? It is naive of man to think that he could intellectually understand God, while at the same time he cannot figure out creation and the world which surrounds him.

Nikolaos Kavasilas points out that 'the man at the Divine Liturgy apart from any other means is sanctified with the viewing of the acts as

<sup>7</sup> "Οι πολλοί χριστιανοί δεν έχουν εισαχθεί βιωματικώς στην Εκκλησία", Fr. Lagouros Athanasios, *Ναι ή Όχι στη Μετάφραση της Λειτουργικής Γλώσσας*, (Εκδόσεις Τήνος, Athens, 2010), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> "Η πρόσβαση στα σημειώματα των ιερών κειμένων είναι οποσδήποτε συνάρτηση του εγκεντρισμού στο εκκλησιαστικό σώμα και άθλημα – δεν αρκεί η ατομική κατανόηση των σημειώντων". Giannaras Chr., *Το αίτημα του κακού*, (Εκδόσεις Ίκαρος, Athens, 2008), p. 182.

well'<sup>9</sup>, pointing out that by being there and watching what is happening in front of him suffices. When explaining about the Liturgy he emphasises how the participants and believers all represent the Divine Plan, 'Θειά οικονομία' of Christ, sanctifying them to receive the Body and Blood of the Son of God. A symbolism exists in order 'not only to think with our mind but to see with our eyes... This symbolism was created so the Divine Plan is not only given with words but also to our eyes... in order for it to have an effect on the soul, introducing within us not only the theory but also passion.'<sup>10</sup> It is imperative everyone understands the ontological meaning of the Liturgy and that, as St. John Chrysostom explains in his Homily 16 (On the Epistle to the Hebrews), the Liturgy 'despite being celebrated on earth, our service is in heaven and is of heaven'.

Another central point for the supporters of maintaining the Liturgical language as it has been for the past two thousand years is that by translating the texts the historical, theological, practical and traditional meanings of the words and phrases will not be able to be preserved; or even if they are they will have to be explained in many words or paragraphs in order to grasp why a specific word is used in a certain passage. It is, I believe, imperative to give a case study to underline the problematic issue which the Church will have eventually to solve. A good example of the various problems produced by a translation or a transcription process into Modern Greek is the distinction suggested by Origen when he explains St. John's Gospel. He states that there is a certain difference between 'ο Θεός' and 'Θεός'. 'The former means what we mean by God the Father, in other words it is effectively a proper name, while the latter means what Nicea will mean by 'consubstantial

<sup>9</sup> "...ο άνθρωπος στην θεία Λειτουργία αγιάζεται και με την θεά των πραττομένων", Archimandrite Ierotheos Vlassos, *Anatolika*, Vol A, (Athens: Iera Moni Genethliou tis Theotokou (Pelagias)) 1989, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> "για να μην σκεφτόμαστε μόνο με τον νου, αλλά και να βλέπουμε κατά κάποιο τρόπο με τους οφθαλμούς...επινοήθηκε αυτός ο συμβολισμός, ώστε αφ' ενός μεν να μη δηλώνει μόνον μη λόγια τα γεγονότα της οικονομίας, αλλά και φέροντάς τα εμπρός στους οφθαλμούς...ώστε να επιδρά ευκολότερα στις ψυχές, και να εισαχθεί μέσα μας όχι μόνον απλή θεωρία αλλά και πάθος", Nikolaos Kavasilas, *Peri tis en Christo zois*, (Paterikes Ekdoseis Grigorios o Palamas), p. 34-45.



with the Father"<sup>11</sup>. Translations can only paraphrase whilst trying to point out the intended meaning. This of course can be achieved through an explanatory sentence which should come after every word or sentence of the Bible. This phrase comes from St. John's Gospel (John 1:1), "Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος". The New King James Version translates the same line as follows: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' A Modern Greek translation of the same phrase, translated by the Metropolis of Dimitriadis in Greece (2001), reads: "Ἀπόλα πριν υπήρχε ο Λόγος κι ο Λόγος ήταν με το Θεό, κι ήταν Θεός ο Λόγος". The Latin Vulgata translation is: 'In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum.' As Father Ephrem Lash states, the Latin language is unable 'to preserve the distinction in the Greek between the word God with and without the definite article, since it does not have a definite article'<sup>12</sup>. English does not use the article in front of a name hence it is also unable to maintain the distinction found in the original text. So here we have just one example of how problems occur when translating to another language that does not have the same grammatical rules as the original text. However in the Modern Greek translation the article is kept and the distinction is obvious, as it is in Ancient Greek. This difficulty of translation brings me to the next point.

One strong argument that the supporters of translating the Liturgical texts into Modern Greek have is that the Bible has already been translated into most languages. This is not a modern practice, as one can easily identify in any book of Church History; on the contrary it is an ancient one which helped spread Christianity all over the world. One of the first examples of this achievement is of course the translation of Cyril and Methodios from the original text to Slavonic. Cyril (Constantinos) came up with the Glagolitic alphabet (also known as the Cyrillic alphabet), and with Methodios' and their students' help they achieved the translation of the liturgical parts of the Holy Bible and the

<sup>11</sup> Lash, Ephrem, *Translating Liturgy*, [www.anastasis.org.uk/TransLito2.pdf](http://www.anastasis.org.uk/TransLito2.pdf), accessed 03/05/11, 19.15

<sup>12</sup> Lash, Ephrem, *Translating Liturgy*, [www.anastasis.org.uk/TransLito2.pdf](http://www.anastasis.org.uk/TransLito2.pdf), accessed 03/05/11, 19.15

liturgical books. Through this sacred endeavour many things were achieved: millions of Slavs became part of the Christian world; they understood the Liturgy and the Bible; they acquired an alphabet and for the first time their language was written. These are the important results of achieving the translation of the liturgical texts into another language.

The Slavonic achievement is in no way the only such contribution of the Byzantine period. Others include the establishment of the Russian Church and the translation of the Greek text into the language of the West, Latin. It is evident that this has been an ongoing practice within Christianity, and specifically within the Orthodox Church, since the belief in the three holy languages has never existed in the East. That is why the view of Professor George Babiniotis is worrying, that we should not translate the Liturgy, since it is a mystery; words, he claims, lose their meaning when translated from one language to another. This has, however, been the Orthodox practice for centuries. Somehow this argument begins to beg the question, 'Which came first, the chicken or the egg?'

A question many ask is why the non-Greek Christian world should understand what is said and chanted in the Liturgy and the Greek world should remain in the 'dark'. It is a difficult question to answer when the practice of the Church is to translate the texts into various languages in order for the people to understand the Liturgy. Here however we come to the point stated earlier, that in the case examined in this paper we are not looking at translating the text from one language to another but at transcribing it to a more modern form of the same language. Perhaps a suitable approach which would mediate in this case and help towards solving the problem would be a translation not into 'popular' Modern Greek (known also as *dimotiki*, meaning daily life language) but into a higher form of Greek (*katharevousa*) which could be understood today would be a good start. Possibly this is the answer for both groups disagreeing on this topic. On the other hand it could be argued that those frequently attending Church services are in a position to understand the meaning of the liturgical texts. Additionally we are reminded of the ancient Greek saying "τα αγαθά κόποις κτώνται", 'The good things can be achieved only with great effort'. Nevertheless, it is obvious that both sides of this argument have a strong point to



make, but ultimately they base their views on the different opinions they maintain in order to explain their beliefs on the matter.

It is understood that, amongst other things which form a nation, notably tradition and religion, language plays a key part. Maintaining language is crucial to national identity, which the Greeks preserve via the schools under the auspices of the Church. 'As the biological life is passed on from generation to generation, in the same way the cultural life of one nation is passed from generation to generation.'<sup>13</sup> On the other hand we should not underestimate the reality that as humanity changes and adjusts to the modern world, so does the language used in all cultures. A plain example is the introduction of new words to our vocabulary, for example 'Coca-Cola', 'internet', 'car', which did not exist in biblical times. Others would claim that the modern form of Greek is much poorer than ancient Greek. In many ways this is a universal belief, but we should not dishonour our modern language which has evolved through many historical, cultural, sociological, political, philosophical and linguistic changes in the past 2000 years. Modern Greek has actually incorporated all of these variations. Disregarding this linguistic evolution inevitably results in the death of a language as a living organ which evolves and changes according to the factors stated above.

The philosophical and theological background is of paramount importance in the process of understanding the Church's view. The Church has practiced a certain way of life, of spiritual exercise, with diligence and effort. These are some of the reasons for maintaining the original language. Modernists argue that they do not have time to understand and study what is taught by the Church and that they should be 'fed' the information quickly in order to comprehend and play a role in the Church's life. However, although they expect this from the ecclesiastical society, as well as many other things, they do not realize how Christianity works. No one is born a doctor, a solicitor, a scientist, an historian. The same applies to Christianity. In order to live as a Christian one must put a great deal of effort into it. Then and only then

<sup>13</sup> "Όπως η βιολογική ζωή μεταβιβάζεται από γενιά σε γενιά, έτσι και η πολιτιστική ζωή ενός λαού μεταβιβάζεται από γενιά σε γενιά", Archimandrite Ierotheos Vlasos, *Anatolika*, Vol. A, (Athens, Iera Moni Genethiou tis Theotokou (Pelagias)), 1989, p. 97.

will someone appreciate the depth and richness of Orthodoxy and live according to the teachings of the Bible.

Each Christian has a personal responsibility to understand scripture and the Liturgical texts. As St. John Chrysostom explains in his Eleventh Homily,

I desire to ask one favour of you all... That each of you take in hand that section of the Gospels which is to be read among you on the first day of the week, or even on the Sabbath, and before the day arrives, that he sit down at home and read it through, and often carefully consider its contents, and examine all its parts well, what is clear, what obscure, what seems to make for the adversaries, but does not really so; and when you have tried, in a word, every point, so go to hear it read. For from zeal like this will be no small gain both to you and to us. We shall not need much labour to render clear the meaning of what is said, because your minds will be already made familiar with the sense of the words, and you will become keener and more clear-sighted not for hearing only, nor for learning, but also for the teaching of others.<sup>14</sup>

This last point is very important in understanding that prayer and church attendance is not to be understood individually but as a society of believers communicating with God. Language is just one part of ecclesiastical life which contributes towards a greater understanding of the Orthodox life. This is emphasised when referring to prayer. An Orthodox would not just 'say' his prayer but 'do' his prayer. The difference is that in order to pray a believer does not just say some words but uses all five senses.

What does one seek to gain from the Liturgy? According to Stanley Harakas, 'In the Divine Liturgy, we meet the real presence of Christ in the elements of the Sacrament and in the forgiving, elevating and fulfilling presence of Christ in our lives.'<sup>15</sup> This view emphasises that full understanding is not the essence of Orthodoxy. Let us not forget how the Church challenged and reacted to the Gnostic books which underlined the importance of knowledge, as seen vividly for example in the Gospel of Judas. The main ontological element of Christianity is not knowledge but salvation, which can be reached through knowledge's experience and belief. Knowledge on its own is not what the ecclesiastical tradition dictates.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/240111.htm>, accessed 28/05/2011, 16.12.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley S. Harakas, *Living the Liturgy*, (Minneapolis: Light & Life Publ. Co.) 1974, p. 26.



Any future change in the liturgical language within the Greek Orthodox world will produce many problems and issues which will have to be dealt with. These have already been expressed. Some reservations are understandable but others quite absurd. Byzantine music is an essential matter. What will happen if a translation is actually enforced? Ancient Greek and Byzantine music have joined harmoniously. However, through the use of Byzantine music in other languages (*i.e.* English, Arabic, Romanian and Slavonic) it is evident that minor differences will occur, but this is not a serious deterrent. Another view is that if the language will change then other traditions and features will also transform or disappear. Iconography is seen as a language, hence the saying 'one icon equals a thousand words'. Leonidas Uspenski notes: 'For the Orthodox Church the icon is a kind of story which expresses its dogmas and its commandments so well, as language... They are like a mirror which reflects the spiritual life of the Church and where through it one can judge the dogmatic battles of each epoch.'<sup>16</sup> Some also suggest that even the priest's vestments will have to change in order to comply with the dressing forms and habits of the modern world. However, although time has a different meaning within the Church, as stated by the hymns, we are not referring to modernising the Church in all of its aspects.

A modernisation process has certainly occurred, whether people accept it or not. When electricity was introduced an issue within the Ecclesia was whether each Church should adopt electricity and a sound system. Even though this is not an important issue, it was one which divided the hierarchs, and many theologians expressed conservative views on this matter, saying the Church should maintain its tradition by keeping the candles and by not permitting electrical devices. So it is apparent that changes occur within the Church and customs may alter. Even the hymns within the Ecclesiastical tradition have changed, starting from Kontakion on to Kanons or even the introduction of psalms and hymns which did not exist previously, for example the Lamenta-

<sup>16</sup> "Για την Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία η εικόνα είναι κάποια γλώσσα που εκφράζει τα δόγματά της και τις εντολές της τόσο καλά, όσο και ο λόγος... Είναι σαν ένας καθρέπτης που αντανακλά την πνευματική ζωή της Εκκλησίας και που μέσα απ' αυτόν μπορεί να κρίνει κανένας για τους δογματικούς αγώνες κάθε επόχης", Leonidas Uspenski, *I Ikona*, (Athens: Ekdoseis Papadimitriou), p. 15.

tions in front of the Epitaphios on Good Friday which were established in the fifteenth century AD. This highlights the Byzantine Liturgical evolution, which stopped after 1453 and the fall of Constantinople. Even so, Hourmouziou the Hartofilaks, Gregorios Protopsaltis and Metropolitan of Dirrahio Xrusanthos Prousis<sup>17</sup> brought change to Byzantine music in the nineteenth century, by introducing the new musical writing, minimising the symbols used, and thus making it less difficult to learn. This new notational writing is the one used today in the Greek Orthodox Church; nevertheless the musical tradition is maintained.

Will any future translation enable the believer to participate more ontologically and spiritually than superficially? A pragmatic answer has to be a negative one, since this cannot be achieved without the full understanding of the symbolic language used within the Church. It is a belief within the Ecclesiastical Body that teaching modern believers the symbolic language of the Liturgy is a better way of enabling their participation in the Church's mysteries and attaining salvation than a literal translation of the texts. It is important to identify that in this modern epoch the new catechumens are not people coming from outside the Body of the Church, but its members; they are the people who were baptised from a very young age but who have never been properly instructed within Christianity. According to Anthony M. Coniaris, 'Baptism is like the planting of the seed of faith in the human soul. Nourished and fed by Christian training, catechesis, in the family and in the church school, the seed of faith will grow to produce a mature Christian.'<sup>18</sup> This is an important point, similarly expressed by Likourgos Aggelopoulos, a very famous chanter in Athens, that the Church should teach its members the language of the Bible, as it did in difficult periods in the past, retaining in that way the Greek language. This could be the solution to this 'dispute'.

Analysing and emphasising the above arguments we come to understand that this issue will not easily be discarded by either parties. A balanced view regarding this matter is the one expressed on 14 April 2010, where the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece concluded that

<sup>17</sup> Mavragani Diamanti, *Sintomi Istoria Ekklisiastikis Byzantinis Mousikis* (Athens, 1999), pp. 52-53.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony M. Coniaris, *These are the Sacraments* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company) 1981, p. 26.



this subject will continue to be discussed in Synodical meetings and in collaboration with the Theological Schools and 'when this discussion matures and is considered necessary, it will enter the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece, which is the highest ecclesiastical administrative body, in order for it to be dealt Synodically'<sup>19</sup>. This I believe shows how the Ecclesiastical Body is willing to discuss and maybe adopt any change, if of course this is accepted by the whole body of the Church, a practice used since the first Apostolic Synod in Jerusalem.

I would like here to propose a personal opinion as a solution to this debate, which could be a starting point in the process of resolving this complicated matter. It would be wise, I believe, to form a group of scholars, theologians, teachers, professors, bishops and linguists who will form a new 'Septuagint' group, taking into account the original Septuagint, a translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew to Ancient Greek. The translation into Modern Greek produced by these specialised scholars will then have to be approved by a Synod, preferably the future Pan-Orthodox Synod, if it ever takes place, or even a Synod of all the leaders of all Greek-speaking Orthodox. This will be the first step in achieving a catholic acceptance of the translated text. It would avoid the negative results of the mistakes in the first translation of the Liturgical texts into Russian, resulting in a second translation and a change in the liturgical language after a period of time, as is now happening with the new English-language translation of the Roman Catholic Mass, intended to be closer to the Latin. Their argument is that 'a universal church should have the closest thing possible to a universal missal'<sup>20</sup>.

This is what I believe could work within the Orthodox World, where an agreed translation from a new Septuagint group could be achieved. This has happened in Georgia, where a team of four people has just finalised the translation of the four Gospels into Modern Georgian, using as a base the Ancient Greek and Ancient Georgian texts. This was done with the blessings and support of the Patriarch of

<sup>19</sup> "Όταν ωριμάσει η συζήτηση, και κριθεί αναγκαίο, θα εισαχθεί στην Ίεραρχία της Ελλάδος, η οποία το ανώτατο όργανο διοικήσεως της Εκκλησίας, προκειμένου α αντί μετοπισθεί Συνοδικώς", [http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/holysynod.asp?id=1187&ehat\\_sub=d\\_typou](http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/holysynod.asp?id=1187&ehat_sub=d_typou), accessed 15.15.2011, 16.42

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/12/us/12mass.html?\\_r=3](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/12/us/12mass.html?_r=3), accessed 21/06/2011, 18.33

Georgia, Elijah II. Maybe the Greek Orthodox Church could see this as a first paradigm and eventually follow it, when it sees that the right time has come.

In the event of the adoption of a single and approved transcribed biblical text, it could be used during the Sacred Services. Greece and Cyprus could learn from the diaspora. A practice in many ecclesiastical communities within the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain is the reading of the Apostle and the Gospel in both the original language and English. Maybe the Greek-speaking world could adopt this practice and read biblical texts from both Ancient Greek and Modern Greek. Also many of the translated texts can be written with Byzantine notation, as is the case in the Archdiocese of America, where Byzantine music and the English language have been combined. Many will argue that when a priest preaches he explains in Modern Greek the Liturgy and the Gospel. However, it has been suggested that this, in many respects, is not enough.

Another key point which could facilitate the resolution of this issue in the Greek world is the existence of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom in publications having both the original and the translated version, for example into English, as is the case with the reprinted book of '*The Divine Liturgy of our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom*'. In the preface of this new book Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain writes, 'This translation, undertaken under the leadership of the Very Revd Archimandrite of the Ecumenical Throne Ephrem Lash has been particularly well received, no doubt due to the clarity and rhythm of the language that the translator has used, whereby words and phrases which even experts in Greek liturgical scholarship have had difficulty in understanding and translating properly and accurately have been traced to their patristic origins and roots and have been rendered in a fashion that is both direct and meaningful.'<sup>21</sup> This shows how a small Septuagint group was formed in order to translate the Liturgy from the original Greek to English; maybe this can be considered as a good and practical solution. An interesting question could be why can't

<sup>21</sup> The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain and the Very Reverend Archimandrite Ephrem Lash, *The Divine Liturgy of our Father Among the Saints John Chrysostom* (Nigel Lynn Publishing, Oxfordshire) 2011, p. ix



this happen in the case of transcribing the text to Modern Greek? Would the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Gregorios be wrong to support such a translation into Modern Greek? Undoubtedly not. But it seems that the Greek world, including priests and laity, are indecisive at the moment to take action in resolving this matter, whether they are for or against any future transcription.

It is evident that there are two solutions to this serious issue. On the one hand we could have the translation of the Liturgical texts into Modern Greek, which would be a long and hard process. On the other hand we can retain the original text, which needs to be supported by the Church as a whole. The latter solution evidently means that the Ecclesiastical Body will have to teach not only the Ancient Greek language, in order for everyone to understand it better, but also its way of life, its symbols and beliefs. Then and only then will the Church see the fruits of its work revealed and accept that the issue analysed here is relatively unimportant. Education is key in this respect.

A change, however, will most probably occur, whether it begins in the Mother Lands or the Diaspora. Although I do believe that a choice should be given to each Archdiocese or Ecclesiastical Body whether to celebrate in the original language or Modern Greek, any decision taken should be accepted on a Pan-Orthodox level. Sacramental Intercommunion has to be preserved within the Orthodox World. This issue should in no way be seen as a new reason to have a future schism within Orthodoxy. Ecclesiastical life should be better understood, maintaining its richness and salvific purpose, whether this means the teaching of the ecclesiastical practices and traditions to the believers and maintaining the original Greek or the eventual transcription of the Liturgy into Modern Greek.

## Christianity in Iraq: An Ancient and Endangered Church

*Erica C. D. Hunter*

SINCE 2003, the numbers of Christians in Iraq, formerly estimated around 9% of the population, have been in decline, forming only 3% of the current population. Various factors: economic, political and religious have forced these communities to flee from their ancient homeland with the consequence being that real fears have been expressed about their survival. This lecture acknowledges the ancient origins of Christianity in Mesopotamia, as well as the rich contributions made over the centuries. It then investigates the impact of the Gulf War offensives on the communities and finally notes some areas of growth, notably in the Kurdish regions of north Iraq. It concludes by addressing the future of 'the church' in Iraq and by suggesting how the rich history of Christianity in Mesopotamia may provide a trajectory of survival.

For two thousand years Christians have worshipped on the soil of Mesopotamia, but the 'church of Iraq' has never been an 'establishment' religion. It has always lived under the dominion of political 'masters'. Sometimes very cordial relationships were forged, as was the case in the eighth century, between the Abbassid Caliph Mahdi (reigned 775-785) and the Patriarch of the Church of the East, Timothy I (incumbency 779-823). Both men were Aristotelian savants and, despite their robust upholding of their respective faiths, as evidenced in the epic two-day debate which took place in 782, maintained a truly cordial and respectful friendship. Timothy wrote about the Caliph, '[H]e is a lovable man and loves also learning when he finds it in other people' (Mingana, 60). Some four hundred years later, in 1287 Rabban Sauma left Baghdad to travel, on behalf of the Mongol Il-Khans, to Rome to petition the Pope, to Paris to meet Philip le Bel and to Bordeaux to meet Edward I of England. Acting as a Christian 'ambassador' for the Khans, Rabban Sauma was charged by his Mongol superiors to invite the European powers to engage in another crusade – against the



Mamelukes. En route to Rome, Rabban Sauma went by boat from Trebizond (Trabzon) to Constantinople where he had an audience with Andronicus II Palaeologus and also visited the Hagia Sophia, which he saw in all its Byzantine glory.

These are, of course, episodes separated in time and place, but not in the underlying discourse that illuminates the seminal role played by well-placed clerics as brokers — dealing with powers of different ethnic and religious persuasions:

Zoroastrian Sassanids were Persian (3<sup>rd</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries);  
the Islamic Abbassid rulers were Arab (8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries);  
the shamanic and later Islamic Mongol khans were Mongol (13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries);  
the Islamic Ottoman empire was Turkish.

Rather than being viewed as a weakness, this trajectory might in fact be a strength for the 'church in Iraq' and may provide a cue for its future survival.

### *Origins:*

The origins of Christianity in Iraq are shrouded in the mists of antiquity. However, *Acts* ii.9 mentions the residents of Mesopotamia amongst the witnesses to the Day of Pentecost. The title of 'founding father' traditionally has fallen on the shoulders of the apostle Addai (whom legend associated with the advent of Christianity further north in Edessa).

### *The Sassanid period: an emergent independent church:*

For almost four hundred years, the Christian communities — principally the East Syrians (Church of the East) and the West Syrians (Syrian Orthodox Church) — lived under the jurisdiction of Sassanids. In 225, Ardashir, the incoming Zoroastrian king found well-established communities in his realms with more than twenty bishoprics in the Tigris-Euphrates area and stretching eastwards, across Iran, to the Caspian Sea. These populations were supplemented by the influx of large numbers of Christians deported from the Byzantine realms — a result of

military incursions into Syria by the Sassanid monarch, Shapur I in 256 and 260. Many of these Christians from the Byzantine territories were Syriac-speaking and shared a language in common with their 'brethren' in Mesopotamia. They brought with them the legacy of the classical Hellenistic sciences (philosophy, medicine) that had a great impact on learning during the Abbassid era.

However, the Sassanid monarchs suspected that Christians in Mesopotamia nurtured loyalties with the Romans, *i.e.* the Rum or the Byzantines, because of their shared faith. When Theodosius I issued his declaration of Christianity as the official state religion of the Byzantine Empire in 380, this had major repercussions for Christians living in the Sassanid territories in the 'land beyond the Euphrates'. Although the two empires or 'mega-powers' were mutually suspicious and on numerous occasions engaged in acts of war, their boundaries were not hermetically sealed; trade and cultural contacts continued, as well as diplomatic missions.

Theodosius I sent his ambassador, Marutha of Maiperqat, to the monarch Yazdegird I (399–421) to request that the persecution of Christians be ended or, at least that there might be no future persecutions. As a concession to the Sassanid monarch, Theodosius I endorsed Isaac, the bishop of Seleucia, as the head of the Persian Christians. In return, Yazdegird I recognised the Christians as a minority group with bishop Isaac as a theocratic head; he was responsible for his community, collected taxes and represented them in state matters. For this privilege, the Sassanian monarch had a say in the appointment or could (as did happen) veto it.

Although the Christians 'across the Euphrates' were under a different and often hostile government to the Byzantine brethren, the major theological decisions of the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) that culminated in the 'Nicene Creed' were accepted. There was no theological distinction between Byzantine and Mesopotamian Christians at the end of the fourth century. The agreement to celebrate festivals as in the west, *i.e.* Byzantium, meant a conformity between the Christian communities of the two great world powers, and today the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed is still upheld by the different churches: Miaphysite, Diophysite and Uniate.

The opening decade of the fifth century saw the installation of Isaac as Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (the Sassanid capital) and con-



tinued diplomatic exchanges with Byzantium. In 417-8, Yazdegerd I sent Yabhallaha I (who succeeded Isaac on the latter's death) to Constantinople. A year later the bishop of Amida (modern Diyarbakir in Turkey), Acacius, visited the Persian territories on a mission from Emperor Theodosius II and was present at the Synod of Yabhallaha that was held in 420 at Seleucia-Ctesiphon. He ransomed 7000 Persian prisoners of war taken by the Byzantines and sent them back to the Sasanian territories. In 422 a new treaty was signed between Persia and the Byzantine Empire that guaranteed the freedom of worship to Christians in Persia.

In 424 at the Synod of Dadisho held in the vicinity of Hira, a renowned centre of Christianity now deep in Shi'i country near modern Kufa, the patriarchate was declared autocephalous or independent of the pentarchy of five patriarchates: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople, all of which were in the Byzantine territories. The 424 Synod witnessed the birth of the Persian Church separated from the 'western' Byzantine church on the grounds of political expediency. The evolution of the Persian Church into the 'Church of the East' was gradual. The Diophysite theology of Nestorius, Theodore (the Interpreter) of Mopsuestia and Diodore of Tarsus, as Sebastian Brock has pointed out, only became embedded in the late fifth and sixth centuries when the divisions between the Alexandrian and Antiochean theological traditions began to crystallize.

It was in this climate that the 'Persian' Church of the East became equated with the Sasanid territories, both politically and theologically. Any show of sympathy with the Byzantine Emperors had serious consequences. When Babowai sent a letter in 484 to Emperor Zeno, it was intercepted. The Sasanid monarch Peroz (459-484) was informed of his patriarch's vacillating loyalty to his church and the throne. Babowai received the death sentence. In the Sasanid empire, the interests of Church and State had become interwoven, and one may presume that there were influential Christians at court. Certainly the capital boasted various churches and monasteries, including a convent dedicated to Mar Pethion and the great church at Coche, excavated by Oscar Reuther in the 1920s. Of course, however influential the Christians may have been, they were always subordinate to the monarch and the Zoroastrian elite.

### Early Islamic (Umayyid) – Abbasid periods

When the Arab horsemen penetrated the eastern flank of Mesopotamia in 636 they met sizeable Syriac-speaking Christian communities in the heartland of the now Shi'i region, near the cities of Najaf and Kerbala. Hira was a thriving centre of Christianity. Later Islamic sources record that between the fifth and seventh centuries, the region boasted more than forty monasteries and churches, some of which were excavated by David Talbot-Rice in the 1920s and later by Hideo Fujii (Japanese Archaeological Expedition to Iraq) in the 1980s. In the last eighteen months, the excavation of a new runway at Najaf airport revealed the remains of another monastery. Hira provides very valuable witness for the condition of Christianity in Iraq at the time of the Islamic transition. An Islamic historian, Abu-l-Hasan 'Ali ibn Muhammad Assabusti (d. 1000), noted that on one of the holy days the Christians in Hira carried crosses and censers and were accompanied by their priests, watched by 'curious onlookers and amused Moslems'. In 1013 the bishop of Hira was elected as the Patriarch of the Church of the East.

In 762, the Abbassids founded their new capital, Baghdad. They also fostered a thrust of Muslim intellectual enquiry where, as part of the spirit of scientific discovery Greek works were translated into Arabic, often by Christian translators. The most famous of all scholars was the 'Nestorian' Hunain ibn Ishaq (d. 873), who came from Hira. A native Arabic speaker, he was trained in Syriac and Greek. Hunayn laid down the basis of accurate translation techniques and the foundations of scientific and philosophical terminology in Arabic; oversaw the translation of Aristotle and Plato; and, reflecting his medical training, translated the works of Hippocrates and almost the entire corpus of Galen. He served also as the personal physician to al-Mutawakkil (d. 861), whose caliphate corresponded with one of the worst periods of persecution towards the Christians during the Abbasid era and the deposition of the patriarch Theodosius in 849.

The Abbassids were international in outlook, encouraging discourse and dialogue and fostering education and learning in their realms, but it was a double-edged sword. Arabic was replacing the various dialects of Aramaic as the *lingua franca* of Mesopotamia. A sharper



consciousness of Islam was developing, expanding the original premise to include non-Arabic peoples. Conversions by force also took place, as the Christian *bedu* tribe Banu Tanukh experienced, apparently on the orders of the Caliph al-Mahdi. With a growing sense of Islam, areas of law and bureaucracy began to be Islamicised; the Islamic code of law, the *Sbaria* was undergoing a process of codification. On the economic front, extra financial exactions began to be levelled against the Christians – a valuable source of revenue. The aforementioned debate between Caliph Mahdi and Patriarch Timothy I took place. So staunch was the latter's loyalty that when Mahdi suffered defeat at the hands of the Byzantine Emperor Leo IV (777-778), the Patriarch emphasized the traditional enmity between the Church of the East and the Byzantine Orthodox church, which he termed 'rebellious and tyrannical'.

#### *The Mongol Il-Khanate (1258 – 1335) and Timur-Lang (1335 – 1405)*

When the Mongol forces swept into Baghdad in 1258, Hulugu Khan adhered to the traditional Mongol shamanic cults but was tolerant of other faiths, including Christianity. Hulugu's mother was Doqiz Khatun, a Christian princess who had been taken hostage by Genghis Khan and given to his fourth son Tolui when he defeated the Keraites, a Turkic tribe that had been converted (in part) to Christianity by Church of the East missionaries who were very active in Central Asia. The contemporary Armenian historian Stephannos Orbelian portrayed Hulugu and his mother as the 'Constantine and Helen' of the time – for it seemed that they founded a new pro-Christian dynasty (even if the Khans didn't actually embrace the faith themselves – they remained shamanic).

Under the Mongols, Christianity seemed on the brink of usurping Islam in the Middle East. In 1260 their armies, led by a Christian general, took Damascus; they were aided by other Christian forces, including King Hethoum of Lesser Armenia and Count Bohemund of Antioch. In Iraq, Christian festivals were restored. In 1279 the mother of the third Il-Khan (Tegudar Ahmad 1282-4) revived the Christian procession of the Epiphany that had ceased due to conflicts between the Christians and Moslems. The trajectory seemed assured with the

baptism – in Baghdad by a papal prelate – of the eighth Il-Khan Oljeitu in honour of Pope Nicholas IV. But with Oljeitu's conversion to Shia Islam in 1291, the Mongol benevolence that had been previously shown to Christians ceased and savage persecutions signaled a decline for Christianity in Iraq that would continue throughout the medieval period.

The nemesis came in the form of Timur-Lang (Tamerlane), a zealous Muslim of Turkish stock, who established his capital at Samarkand. In 1393, he seized Mesopotamia, leaving 90,000 dead in Baghdad alone. Compared to the 24 cities that had churches at the arrival of Hulugu Khan, the only churches that remained in Mesopotamia, apart from Baghdad, were in Mosul, Erbil, Gezira, Tabriz and Maragha. All these cities, with the exception of Baghdad, were concentrated in the northern regions of Mesopotamia (near the modern border with Turkey). This demographic pattern was one that continued until well into the twentieth century. Christianity in the southern regions disappeared – the communities were concentrated in the north, on the Mosul plain and in Kurdistan, between Lake Urmia (modern Iran) and Lake Van (modern Turkey). The Syrian Orthodox were mainly settled in Mosul and the surrounding villages. The East Syrians became essentially confined to the northern, mountainous reaches of Kurdistan.

#### *The Ottoman period (1516 – 1919)*

In the early sixteenth century, Iraq fell under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Turks, whose administration classified Christians in two categories: the Greek rite (*Millet i-Rum*) and the non-Greek or Armenian rite (*Millet i-Arman*). The former were the Byzantine Orthodox Christians, the latter the Armenians. As the main initiative of the Sublime Porte lay in extracting as much money as possible from their various communities, providing they paid their taxes the Christians in Mesopotamia were able to lead relatively untrammelled lives. In the Hakkari region of Kurdistan the restricted circumstances of the East Syrian communities reduced them to the status of subsistence farmers. Instead of being elected, the patriarchate of the Church of the East became a hereditary institution, a theocracy with the title of *Mar Shimun*, passing from uncle to nephew – the Patriarch was celibate (and vege-



tarian). He was the religious and secular head of the community, responsible for collecting taxes and internal legal jurisdiction. For all its shortcomings, the *millet* system provided a stable formula for its minority communities that continued until the Tanzimat reforms in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Ottoman period saw the introduction of various 'Western' Churches and the adoption of identities that were connected with the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia. In the sixteenth century, the Uniate Churches emerged from the Syrian Orthodox and the Church of the East; respectively taking the names Syrian Catholic and Chaldæan. The epithet 'Chaldæan' recalled an ancient race of Mesopotamian peoples and was the first in a series of 'ethnic terms' used by different Christian groups to anchor their heritage to the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia. The East Syrians would embrace the term 'Assyrian', no doubt enthused by the fabulous discoveries made by Claude James Rich at the ancient site of Nineveh in 1820. The early nineteenth century was, of course, also a time that saw the influx of Anglican and Presbyterian missionaries eager to revive and restore the forlorn and destitute 'Protestant' communities of the Church of the East. The Russians also made their presence felt, establishing an Orthodox mission centre, printing press and church at Urmia as well as parishes and schools throughout the region. In 1827 an estimated 20,000 East Christians crossed the border and joined the Orthodox Church.

### *The Assyrians and the Chaldaeans*

During World War I, the East Syrians decided to join the Allies against Turkey, in a vain hope to win an independent homeland, incurring the revenge of both Kurds and Turks. In 1918 the entire community left Kurdistan and descended to the plains of Mosul. Only about 50,000 survived; many thousands died *en route* of exposure and hunger in the terrible conditions. The Patriarch was murdered by a Kurd; six bishops were slain. The Assyrians became homeless refugees under the British mandate in Iraq and in the 1920s large numbers settled in refugee camps at Baquba, east of Baghdad where, during the Mandate period, many served in the British forces as the 'Assyrian Levies', earning an outstanding reputation for loyalty. They clung to the dream of attaining

independence in their old homeland and were unable to integrate into the emerging new Iraqi nation.

In 1933, responding to an ultimatum from Baghdad to abide by the law of the land or depart, 1000 armed men tried unsuccessfully to cross into Syria. Following massacres, largely instigated by the Kurds, the League of Nations accepted that the Assyrians should have a homeland outside Iraq. Various suggestions, including Brazil, Cyprus, Sudan and British Guiana came to nothing, but gradually relations improved with the government of Iraq. However, the patriarch, the Mar Shimun, who was educated at Westcott House, Cambridge, was stripped of his citizenship and deported to Cyprus, then settling in Chicago. The Assyrian Church of the East numbers about 15,000 in the United States, with congregations of 35,000 in Iraq and Iran and 15,000 in Syria and The Lebanon, as well as in Detroit, U.S.A. and Sydney, Australia.

The Chaldæan patriarchate was located in Baghdad in 1834 and since this time this branch of the church has been steadily growing in prosperity and power. Unlike the Assyrian, most of the Chaldæans until 2003 still lived in Iraq, concentrated in large cities: Baghdad and Mosul, and also villages on the Mosul Plain, especially Tell Keyf and Al Kosh. Other communities were in Aleppo (7,000) and Beirut (2,500) as well as in the United States of America, particularly concentrated around Detroit (25,000) and Sydney, Australia. As an obedient minority – and reminiscent of the pattern seen already in Sassanid times – the Chaldæan Church remained on good terms with the Ba'athist government. The former Deputy Prime Minister, Tariq Aziz, is a Chaldæan. However, for twenty years there has been a major exodus for a variety of reasons: the stringency of the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq following the First Gulf War in 1991; the Second Gulf War in 2003; and the subsequent aftermath that has befallen Iraq.

### *The situation in Iraq 2003 –*

Until 2003 an estimated 8-9% of the population of Iraq was Christian. Now the figure stands around 3%, the exodus of the population having been induced by fear and the real violence that has been leveled against the Christian communities. In mid-2006 the level of violence escalated following the bombing of the al-Askari mosque in Samarra. Since then,



the Christian communities have endured a never-ending cycle of violence. Sixty-six churches have been bombed (41 in Baghdad, 19 in Mosul, 5 in Kirkuk, 1 in Ramadi); innumerable citizens have been kidnapped and killed; several priests have been kidnapped and killed, the most notable being the Chaldean Archbishop Faraj Rahho in Mosul in February 2008, who died of a heart attack following his kidnap that killed his driver and several body guards. This level of violence escalated to an unprecedented degree with the killings that took place at the 'Lady of Salvation' Church in Karrada, Baghdad during Mass on Sunday 31 October, 2010. It was the first time that a congregation had been targeted while worshipping, thus transferring the violence from the individual to the collective: 58 faithful, including a 3 year old boy and two priests (Thahar Saadal and Wasim Sabih) were slaughtered. Seventy-five other parishioners were wounded. Eighty per cent of the parish was either killed or wounded. Father Nizaar Simaan summed up the situation in his sermon which he preached at the memorial mass at the Syriac Catholic Mission Mar Behnam, in London on 12 November 2010: '[T]his massacre that led to the shedding of innocent blood of the faithful must rank amongst the most despicable and cowardly act of recent events in Iraq.'

October 31 has become a memorable date for Iraqi Christians in the same way that the 9/11 Twin Towers attacks has become indelibly engraved in the minds of the American (and British) public. A *tsunami* of fear has swept through the Christian communities – each terrified that it could be the next target since Islamic fundamentalists are not selective of denomination. The response by 33 year old Uday Hikmet is typical. Three days after the massacre he and his parents packed and left Iraq, saying, 'We did not want to wait our turn to die.' The massacre at the 'Lady of Salvation' Church has meant that people are now terrified to go to Mass. Amidst all the insecurity of daily life in Iraq, attendance at mass offered Christians not only spiritual consolation but also community strength and support. It has also caused an exodus of Christians from Baghdad to safer environs – mostly to Syria, the only country outside Iraq that has offered them any sanctuary. Although there are Church of the East communities in Iran, East Syrians do not go there. From Syria, many apply for asylum in the United States, Canada, Australia, or Europe, where Britain and Sweden have large communities. An estimated 40% of refugees leaving Iraq are Christian

– a wholly disproportionate percentage. Those who cannot leave Iraq because of limited economic means go to Kurdistan.

#### *Kurdistan and the Christians:*

The Kurdish authorities have permitted Christians to return to Kurdistan, but this should not be interpreted as being automatically allocated to all and sundry. The 'right of return' is exercised on the basis of historic tribal and family affiliations, as is implicit in the UNCHR statement, 'In the three Northern Governorates of Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Dahuk, the rights of Christians are generally respected and a significant number of them have sought refuge in the region, in particular in the Governorate of Dahuk (*from where many originate*) [ECDH emphasis] and the Christian town of Ainkawa, near the city of Erbil.' The Chaldean bishop of Amadiya in Kurdistan has noted that several hundred Christian villages have been rebuilt in the KRG, together with schools and roads. Whilst His Grace has commended the Kurdish authorities for being helpful to the Christians, he has also drawn adroit attention to the Kurdish policy in stating that President Barzani had come to the aid of Christians, 'helping many of them to return to villages in Kurdistan that they had left 40 years before', *i.e.* ancestral homes that were vacated in the terrible purges of 1915.

The Kurdish parties have introduced strict security measures at their checkpoints and persons not originating from the Region of Kurdistan, depending on their profile, may be denied entry into the Region of Kurdistan. Despite the unification of the administrations in the Region of Kurdistan, the three Governorates of Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Dahuk continue to apply their independent entry and residency measures. The Fact-Finding Mission to Iraq's three Northern Protectorates by the Directorate of Immigration in Finland (October-November 2007), was told that 'all Christians were not able to enter the three Northern Governorates' and noted the statement of the Chaldean Culture Association that *everybody needed a sponsor* to enter the region. This was qualified by the comment that it is fairly easy to find a sponsor 'for an ordinary person without problems'. The sponsor must be a Kurd. Erbil now has international flights connecting it with Europe and the Middle East, but the KRG are wary of infiltrators – Islamic fundamen-



talism has reached their territories. A Christian must have historic ties to anchor a claim to residency, or otherwise economic 'buying power'.

During his recent visit to the U.K., the Chaldaean Archbishop of Erbil, Bashar Warda, discussed the situation of the Christians living in the KRG. He acknowledged that the Kurdish government has responded to the needs of Christians and set up emergency programmes to handle the influx of people, but the Archbishop stated, 'The political security that the KRG is providing for the Christian families alone is not sufficient'. They also need social and economic security, which the KRG cannot provide without help from the federal government. Gary Kent of The All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Kurdistan Region (APPG) pointed out, 'Baghdad should pay extra funds to the Kurds to allow them to help those fleeing from Baghdad and Mosul'. Archbishop Warda commented that the Iraqi government cares so little about the Christian families in the KRG that they had demanded European governments pay for their settlement! Of the KRG's demand, His Grace commented, 'it was a strange statement' and further stated, 'They are not some group who have emigrated from Europe. They do not come from Europe!' In effect, this statement by the Iraqi government clearly shows that they do not consider the Christians to be integral to the fabric of Iraqi society – even though there have been Christian communities living in Mesopotamia for nigh on two millennia!

Amnesty International's report, *Iraq. Civilians under Fire* (April 2010), pointed out that in the 'disputed territories' members of minority groups 'are increasingly becoming pawns in a power struggle between an Arab-dominated central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government'. The Christians are clearly caught in this situation with responsibility for their well-being being shuttled between the Iraqi government and the KRG. With no resolution in sight, in the meantime the mantle of responsibility for supporting the Christians who have managed to relocate to the KRG falls on the Church. The various churches do their utmost to help the faithful and would never turn anyone away, but their resources are limited, essentially dependent on the donations that they receive from various charities (ICIN and ACERO) and the expatriate communities. The Archbishop of Erbil has pointed out Christians in the KRG still lack economic security and are often very impoverished. Housing, food and health care in the KRG is extremely expensive, with rental tariffs in Erbil on par with London.

The KRG has no NHS and whilst there are modern medical facilities and hospitals, medical care is very expensive.

### *Summing: prospects for the future*

Article 10 of *The Constitution* establishes the state's commitment to assuring and maintaining the sanctity of holy shrines and religious sites. This is reiterated by the second clause of Article 43. However, what is 'on paper' is not carried out 'in practice'. Although there has been some abatement, the situation is still very dangerous, with the threat posed by extremist groups ever present. The configuration of these groupings constantly changes. Some groups, such as the *Mabdi Army*, have now secured seats in the Parliament, but as one Christian Iraqi told the newspaper *Sawat al-Iraq*, Christians could not be certain that 'some of the people threatening us are the people in the government offices that are supposed to be protecting us'. The Christian communities do not see any active campaign by the Iraqi government to stem the atrocities that they continue to experience. The Christians in Iraq do not have their own militias, but must rely on the police. However, as the statement above indicated, elements within the Iraqi police are complicit with the insurgents as seen in some of the bombings that have taken place. The extent of sympathy in government services with extremists is an unknown quantity. The Iraqi police are often powerless to prevent murders, abductions and bombings. Certainly the police have turned 'a blind eye' to the appropriation of Christian houses, and appeals for assistance have fallen on deaf ears. Individual members of the forces do collude with insurgent groups. The role between police and insurgents is ill-defined.

The circumstances of many Christians in Iraq is still very bleak, and is further stressed by the situation in Syria where many have relatives whose future is extremely uncertain in the present strife. However I cannot but hope that the Christians may be sustained by the great trajectory that has seen them through all the vicissitudes of the past two millennia. The lessons which history may teach the Christians, of resilience and stamina in the face of adversity are lessons that they have practised countless times. These may hold good for them, as might also the memory of mutual collaboration and enrichment that has taken

place between Christians and Moslems down the centuries, under various political entities and with different ethnic groups. This memory, as hard as it might be to sustain in the current dark days, demonstrates a capacity for co-operation and communication. Of course, it does depend on 'the other side' being receptive. However, hopefully this memory may sow a confidence and also provide courage to face the current circumstances and challenges. And finally, to return to my title 'Christianity in Iraq: an ancient and endangered Church', may the Christian communities of all the various denominations gain strength from being 'the Church of Iraq', an epithet that is reminiscent of the days of the 'Persian Church' in the Sassanid Empire. As 'the Church of Iraq', the various communities might undergird their various theological and socio-cultural differences with a declaration of national unity.

## St Furse and the Conversion of East Anglia

*Michelle P. Brown*

### ZION'S NEW NAME\*

<sup>1</sup> For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,

for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,  
till her righteousness shines out like the dawn,  
her salvation like a blazing torch.

<sup>2</sup> The nations will see your righteousness,  
and all kings your glory;  
you will be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

<sup>3</sup> You will be a crown of splendour in the LORD's hand,  
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

<sup>4</sup> No longer will they call you Deserted,  
or name your land Desolate. (Is. 62.1-4)

THESE prophetic words delivered by Isaiah to the children of Israel would have had a resounding relevance to the East Anglia to which the Irish missionary-saint Furse came to minister in the 630s. Their message of hope in the face of despondency and decline is just as necessary today.

Christianity had reached Britain earlier, when part of the Roman Empire – perhaps as early as the first century – and by the end of the fourth century had become the state religion of an extensive Empire, already beginning to collapse under its own weight and ambitions. Archaeological evidence shows that, rather like today, religious practices were, nonetheless, mixed. Christianity was the default mode, but many were motivated mainly by materialism, whilst paganism and supersti-

\* Annual Lecture to the Furse Pilgrims, Norwich Cathedral, 17 January 2009. The Furse Pilgrims came into being in 1997, the 1400th anniversary of St Furse's birth. Their object is to seek to encourage renewed interest in the life and times of Furse, with a deeper understanding of the spirituality of his era. Further information may be found at <http://www.fursepilgrims.co.uk/>. The editor is grateful for permission from Professor Brown and the Furse Pilgrims to print this article here.



tion flourished and other of the eastern mystery religions continued to thrive.

In 410 Britain's formal inclusion within Europe – the western part of the Empire – came to an end, with the withdrawal of much of the administrative and military infrastructure and the rupture of the international monetary system. What do you do in such circumstances? Well, once the hangovers had worn off, the response of the Romano-British was either to lapse back into local tribalism and the old nature-based religions or to attempt to perpetuate the status quo wherever possible. Wine and olive oil continued to be imported, along with the free table ware offered by Mediterranean traders as a sales incentive, even if the only ones doing well were the pound-shop equivalents in the forums of regional towns, where the rubbish tips were already beginning to pile up. The equivalent of the TA continued to man frontiers such as Hadrian's Wall and the Saxon shore forts that ringed the East and South coasts, assisted by mercenaries drawn from some of those very peoples whom they sought to keep at bay – the Germanic tribes.

Even the most optimistic Christian might have been forgiven for feeling somewhat anxious and depressed. Their fears for this life, if not for the next, were well-grounded, as mercenaries began to turn on their employers and their communities and escalating aggression was followed by mass-immigration, notably from the transit camps of Frisia to the ports of East Anglia and Kent – ever the front-line for incoming goods, ideas and peoples.

Within two to four generations the lifestyle, traditions and beliefs of Christianised, urbanised Roman Britain had degenerated into that of the Anglo-Saxons – rural subsistence farmers and a warrior elite, who owed allegiance to petty warlords and to a pantheon of Germanic deities who, at best, offered a hope for some of an afterlife of combat in Valhalla against the world-serpent of evil, which was doomed to failure.

If this posthumous incentive seems unattractive to us, the lures offered by those in control of the living may have seemed more tempting. For the lords of men were gold-friends, ring-givers who knew how to throw a good party, with the mead-tub brimming over and flesh aplenty. Such hedonistic delights might serve as temporary distractions from the perils of the battlefield or the birthing bed, if you were of sufficient social status to enjoy them. The lot of the slave or the struggling poor was another matter.

Seamus Heaney's translation of the Anglo-Saxon epic poem, *Beowulf*, gives a glimpse of the underlying nihilism of such an outlook:

*A newly constructed  
barrow stood waiting, on a wide headland  
close to the waves, its entryway secured.  
Into it the keeper of the board had carried  
all the goods and golden ware  
worth preserving. His words were few:  
'Now, earth, hold what earls once held  
and heroes can no more; it was mined from you first  
by honourable men. My own people  
have been ruined in war; one by one  
they went down to death, looked their last  
on sweet life in the hall ...  
the coat of mail that came through all fights,  
through shield-collapse and cut of sword,  
decays with the warrior... No trembling harp,  
no tuned timber, no tumbling hawk  
swerving through the hall, no swift horse  
pawing the courtyard. Pillage and slaughter  
have emptied the earth of entire peoples.'*

Such was the world in which Christians from Ireland, Rome and Gaul sought to reignite the torches of hope, rather than of genocide and destruction. Yet they recognised that there were some good things to be preserved from the traditions of others, and that uncompromising, unremitting in-your-face evangelism could serve to alienate rather than to attract.

When Mellitus, a member of St Augustine's Roman mission to Canterbury, managed to refound a cathedral in London in 604, probably on the site of Wren's St Paul's, he wrote to Pope Gregory the Great saying, essentially, 'They've got religions already. What do I do about it?', to which Gregory replied, 'If there's a party going on, join in; if there is a place where people have been used to laying their hopes and fears, do not destroy it, but embrace it and make it your own.' And so the festival of the Germanic goddess Eostre became the time for the commemoration of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection and ancient oak groves and Roman fortresses became the sites of Christian altars and shrines.



There was much in Scripture that was already familiar: Christ's first act of public ministry was to turn water into wine at the marriage feast at Cana, whilst the words of Psalm 36 might be speaking of the ideal Anglo-Saxon king and his people:

- <sup>5</sup> Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens,  
your faithfulness to the skies.  
<sup>6</sup> Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,  
your justice like the great deep.  
O LORD, you preserve both man and beast.  
<sup>7</sup> How priceless is your unfailing love!  
Both high and low among men  
find refuge in the shadow of your wings.  
<sup>8</sup> They feast on the abundance of your house;  
you give them drink from your river of delights.

When Bede described the decision of Edwin, King of Northumbria, to lead his people to convert to Christianity in 627, he did so in the following way, no doubt inspired by the accounts in Matthew and Luke's Gospels of God's care for even the smallest sparrow:

He [King Edwin] summoned a council of the wise men, and asked each in turn his opinion of this strange doctrine [Christianity] and this new way of worshipping the godhead that was being proclaimed to them. Coifi, the chief Priest, replied without hesitation: 'Your Majesty, let us give careful consideration to this new teaching. For I frankly admit that, in my experience, the religion that we have hitherto professed seems valueless and powerless. None of your subjects has been more devoted to the service of our gods than myself; yet there are many to whom you show greater favour, who receive greater honours, and who are more successful in all their undertakings. Now, if the gods had any power, they would surely have favoured myself, who have been more zealous in their service. Therefore, if on examination you perceive that these new teachings are better and more effectual, let us not hesitate to accept them.' Another of the king's chief men signified his agreement with this prudent argument, and went on to say: 'Your Majesty, when we compare the present life of man on earth with that time of which we have no knowledge, it seems to me like the swift flight of a single sparrow through the banquet hall where you are sitting at dinner on a winter's day with your *thegns* and counselors. In the midst there is a comforting fire to warm the hall; outside, the storms of winter rain or snow are raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in through one door of the hall, and out through another. While he is inside, he is safe from the winter storms; but after a few moments of comfort, he vanishes from sight into the wintry world from which he came. Even so, man appears on earth for a little while; but of what went before this life or of what

follows, we know nothing. Therefore, if this new teaching has brought any more certain knowledge, it seems only right that we should follow it.' The other elders and counselors of the king under God's guidance, gave similar advice. [Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Book 2, Chapter 13]

The hope of succour and reward in this life and of its perpetuation after death have always been incentives to embracing Christianity. Yet, as we know, there is so much more to it than this.

The real key to the successful reintroduction of Christianity to England, and to its survival in other western parts of post-Roman Britain, lay in living out the Godspell (Good News in Old English). This entailed investing in community, in worship, prayer and study, and in a radical social activism that often meant laying oneself on the line and moving beyond one's comfort zone.

For this was a time when Christianity was a radical, transforming force. A time when warriors, brought up in the boisterous ways of the mead hall to the strains of bardic recitation of glorious militaristic genealogies and the exploits of heroes of the like of Beowulf, might be induced to adopt pacifism – like King Sigebert of East Anglia who was summoned out of the cloister that he had embraced as a monk as the sole royal survivor capable of leading his people into battle against pagan forces. This he reluctantly did, but armed only with a wooden cross to serve as his defence against the barbarians bearing down with their battle-axes. King Sebbi of Essex, another seventh-century ruler, likewise renounced his earthly kingdom for the service of the kingdom of God as a monk, thereby risking assassination, as did any Christian leader who threatened to remake the fabric of society. Freeing slaves was one such threat, and the margins of some of the great Gospel books penned in England during the eighth century (such as the Lichfield / Llandeilu Gospels) carry the earliest medieval written records of such manumissions.

What, other than respect and nostalgia, might prompt Christians heading into the twenty-first century of the Christian era to revive interest in such role models and issues? Celtic spirituality is undergoing something of a revival. In the face of the relentless pace of society, its rampant materialism and its monolithic corporate identities and regulation, a tradition which strikes a resonance concerning the balance between active and contemplative, of the place of the individual within



the communal, of 'green' issues, approaches to conflict and symbolism, which underpins so much of our contemporary approach to communications, is bound to be attractive. Yet there is something of a danger of using the 'Celtic' label as a cover for a laissez-faire attitude and escapism, resulting in a 'cuddly Celtic Christianity' which bears little relationship to the tradition it purports to perpetuate. For example, anyone tempted to use the 'freedom' afforded by the Celtic tradition as an argument against discipline and structure should first acquaint themselves with the Rule of Columbanus and the many Irish Penitentials.

One of the major points of interest in the conversion of East Anglia for a modern Christian audience is the example it offers of constructive collaboration between representatives of different traditions of churchmanship in order to further their common Christian mission: Mellitus from Rome, Felix from Gaul, Fursey from Ireland, Cedd from Lindisfarne (not to mention other important contributors, such as St Etheldreda). The ecumenical implications of this are immediately apparent.

The 'peregrinatio' or voluntary exile for Christ which brought Fursey to East Anglia from Ireland and propelled him onwards to France, is a phenomenon which also has something to offer the present. It should be understood against the background of secular Irish law in which it represented the most severe level of deterrent, alongside capital punishment. To remove oneself, or to be expelled, from the social structures of kingship and kindred was to fall outside of any means of legal or economic support. You became, in effect, an outlaw, but were also freed of any attendant obligations, other than to the Lord, in the case of those religious who so chose. Such an option also freed one, in spiritual terms, from what early sources describe as one of the greatest of earthly sorrows: the attachment to loved ones and the fear and grief of separation in life or in death. Vanquishing such fears and recognising a more fundamental allegiance to God – to be part of something bigger – was part of the religious discipline and still has something to offer in terms of fostering the recognition that love can be sustained even when deprived of proximity and physical contact.

The course of Fursey's career is an interesting one, reminiscent of that of St Cuthbert, in that he obeyed a call to share his faith with others through teaching, preaching and pastoral ministrations, but that he seems to have felt himself frequently a victim of his own success. This

led him to withdraw to the seclusion and hardship of the eremitic retreat. Such periods were not an escape from the world, however, but times of questioning and purification before re-entering the fray with renewed vigour. The balance between active and contemplative modes and the recognition that there can be seasons for each is something which our '24-hour society' neglects at its peril. Steadfastness of purpose is, however, also a feature of Fursey's outlook. He conceived of a purpose and continued to work towards it. Nonetheless, he always responded to the work which God and man revealed for him en route. His own self-determined goal on earth was never achieved. He never prayed at the sites graced by Sts Peter and Paul, but this aim motivated and structured his journey and validated the work en route, assisted by prayer, meditation and study as well as good works. For Fursey it was perhaps better to travel hopefully than to arrive, and the failure to attain the appointed earthly goal did not subtract from the journey towards the spiritual home.

Finally, the virtues and visions of Fursey illustrate, in a succinct and vivid form, the vital interaction of the processes of sin, conscience, acknowledged responsibility, atonement, compassion and forgiveness. None of these are strangers to Christianity in the twenty-first century any more than they were in Fursey's time.

As our society moves ever deeper into materialistic secularism, neo-paganism or scientific absolutism, so the tide of despondency, discontent and despair swells, along with rising sea levels. Just as in the late Roman period and in the age of Fursey, people are looking for something from which to draw strength, hope and a sense of purpose.

In the London free newspaper, *Metro*, last week there was an item on a social networking site that offers support for fans of the movie *Avatar* who are so captivated by the vision of life on the planet Pandora, as part of the community of the Na'vi people, that they contemplate suicide because of its unobtainability in reality. If ever there was a need for us to blaze with the light of Christ in this world, to do his work here in the witness of our lives and in care for Creation, and to hold firm to the hope he has set before us for a transformed and transforming existence beyond, it is now.

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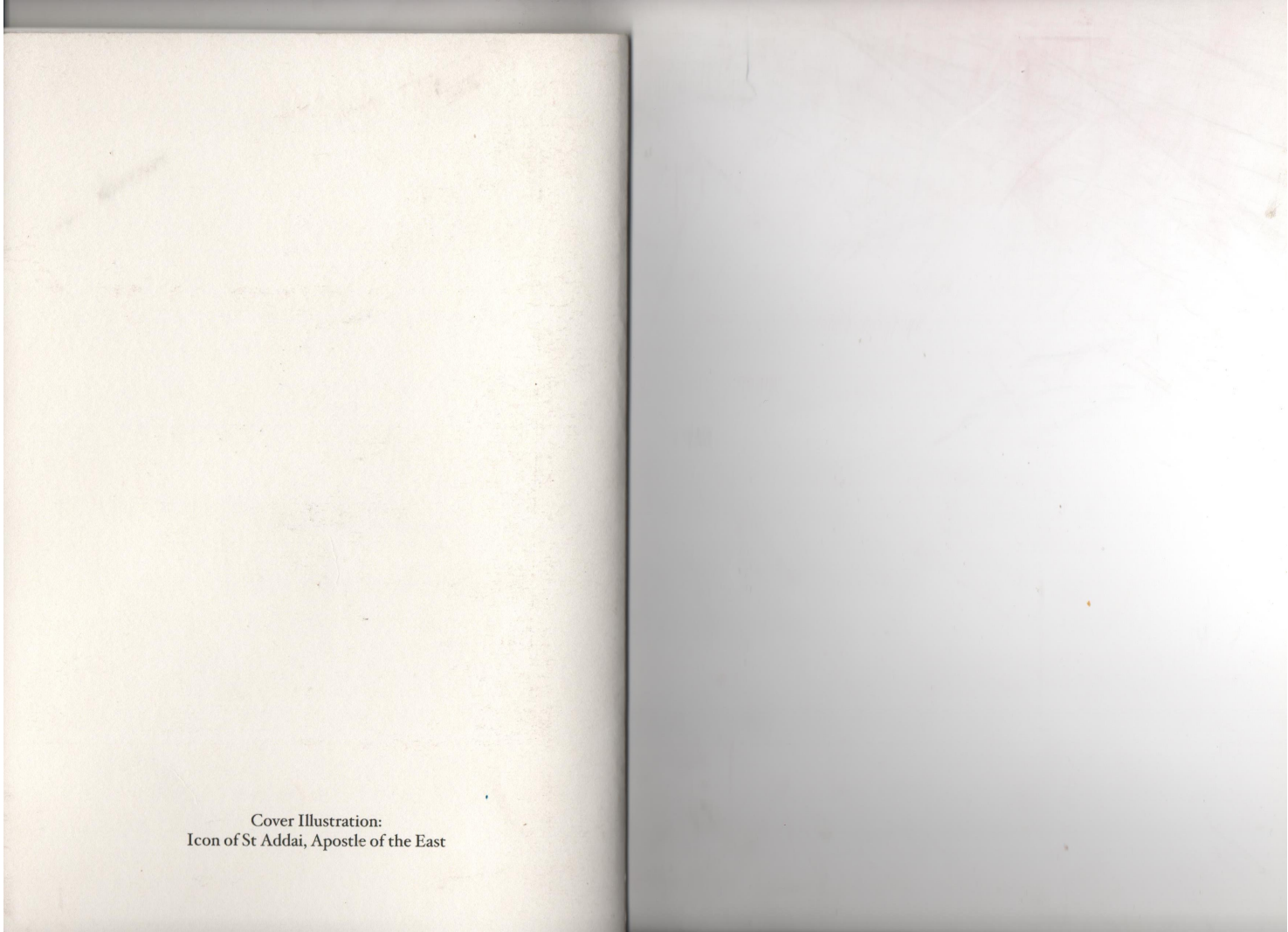
The Revd Andrei Petrine  
The Rectory  
52 Epping Road  
Toot Hill  
Ongar  
Essex CM5 9SQ  
Tel. 01992 524421  
email: a.petrine@mac.com

*Editor of Koinonia:*

The Revd Dr Peter Doll  
56 The Close  
Norwich NR1 4EG  
Tel. 01603 218336  
email: canonlibrarian@cathedral.org.uk

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Icon of St Addai, Apostle of the East