

presented in this kind of symbols, is Jesus coming, as we say, again. It is remarkable how the origin symbols, the various creation myths which the OT employed, cluster in the NT round the account of the paschal mystery (passion to Pentecost) and again in the *Revelation* account of the last things. Thus the NT shows us the end of things, already accomplished in the Christ event, still to be manifested at the *eschaton*, as a return to the origins. It will be, and now is, a victory over the monsters of the deep, the ancient dragon, the powers of darkness; a cancelling of the curse of Babel, of the curse of Cain (by blood speaking better things than Abel's), of the curse of Adam; a regaining of paradise and access to the tree of life; a new creation.

The use of these biblico-mythological symbols is indispensable for conveying the divine promise and the Christian hope. We saw above that the historical category was indispensable as a tool for liberating both man and God from bondage to the recurring and in itself meaningless cycle of nature, the rhythmic pattern discerned by myth. This liberation is the assertion of the proper transcendence of both man and God. But perhaps we can now say that a further liberation is necessary; both man and God also to be set free from history. It needs to be asserted that both man and God do transcend the in itself even more meaningless pattern of interminable chronological succession, which is the meaninglessness that perhaps holds a special threat for modern secular man, in bondage to the *saeculum*. The Bible uses history to set us free from myth, and more important for us moderns, it uses myth to set us free from history. This dual and total freedom is the achievement and meaning of the truth, the truth to which every word of the Bible bears witness.

## Marriage and Mysterion Reflections of a Bush Theologian<sup>1</sup> by Adrian Edwards, C.S.Sp.

'Europeans say', I remarked to Cosmas Daudu,<sup>2</sup> 'that a man with several wives cannot bring up his children properly.' 'That is not so', he retorted, 'my father had eight wives. In the evening, he would gather us round the fire, and begin to ask us what we would

<sup>1</sup>'Bush' in Northern Nigerian English has two meanings, the one geographical—away from towns or motor roads—and the other depreciative—boorish, ignorant, unskilled. I am a bush theologian in both these senses. I ask readers to remember my almost total lack of works of reference.

<sup>2</sup>Cosmas Daudu, as second catechist at the Tor Donga mission, in the Tiv Division of the Benue-Plateau State, often travelled with me and helped me with translations into Tiv. He has now an entry to a teacher-training college.

do, if things happened in this way or that. If we just tried to agree with him, he would not be pleased with us. He wanted us to think everything out carefully.' I did not offer any more of the empirical and ill-informed wisdom of Europe. Some time later, I heard Cosmas himself defending monogamy, 'For in the beginning God made one man and one woman in the garden there.'

Now, on reflection I think Cosmas had the better of the two arguments, and the main object of this article<sup>1</sup> is to claim that many of the difficulties with which Catholic moral theology finds itself occupied just now can be solved only (by 'solved' I don't mean neatly weighed and measured, but rather made meaningful in a wider context) by adopting Cosmas Daudu's approach, which seems to me not a precedent-seeking fundamentalism, but rather an awareness of the essentially symbolic nature of Christian ethics, and their orientation to the unity of mankind in the love of God. Or, to put it a little differently, Oscar Wilde's witticism about the Bible beginning beautifully with a man and woman in a garden but ending with the Book of Revelations is really quite sound exegesis, since the end of the Book of Revelations does take up the theme of marriage, presented by Genesis as at the root of the bliss and woe of Everyman and Everywoman, and show it as the transcendent sign of reintegrated mankind at the wind-up of history.

Cosmas Daudu was, I think, right against me, and I claim that this is simply an example of the necessary victory of a symbolic approach to moral problems over an empirical one. It will, I hope, be at any rate agreed that a number of traditional Catholic positions, particularly in sexual matters can only be defended on this basis; but whether this defence is compelling or not depends on what we understand by symbolism. Is making a symbolically meaning act obligatory against the protests of empiricism a case of smoothing the plumage and forgetting the dying bird, or is it rather a protection of the eggs both of the falcon of freedom and the dove of wisdom from being scrambled for immediate consumer satisfaction? But what then is a symbol?

Much of our difficulty in giving symbolism its proper place comes from our thinking of symbolism as something arbitrary and artificial. Partly, this is due to the habits of mind of that often-arraigned villain, modern Western man, but a good deal of blame must be laid at the door of those who, since about the middle of the eighteenth century have undertaken to renew the symbolic life of Western man by feeding him on daydreams, or inviting him to take a ride on the nightmare. Faced with such options, one begins to feel a good deal of sympathy with the proposition that

<sup>1</sup>This article is intended as a reply to that by Fr Jordan Bishop, O.P., in *New Blackfriars* some time ago ('Divorce and Remarriage', August, 1968). I do not feel competent to discuss the theological issues as regards the Council of Trent, Orthodox practice, and the like. Yet it seems that Fr Bishop has the right to a reply. I hope if he reads this, he will at least accept my greetings, for we have chosen what the old Irish called the 'peregrinatio propter Christum'.

man is seldom more innocently occupied than in making money; but, all the same, it can be a remarkably frustrating kind of innocence. No; in order to recover a sense of the symbolic, we do not need to set sail for Lotus-Eaters' Land or dive down to the Gates of Horn, but simply to become aware of how we do experience things. A valid symbol is the showing-forth of the real nature of a thing—it is to the empirical experience what form is to matter giving it order and meaning, both in itself and in relation to the wider patterns of value.

The obvious objection to what has just been proposed is if a symbol has this kind of objective value then all symbols should be universal ones, which is evidently false. I would reply that it is very rarely that a symbol is exhaustive of what it signifies, even in the case of an entirely valid symbol, and the number of partially valid, or arbitrary, and hence easily invalidated, symbols, is beyond counting. Yet, particularly in the case of symbolism with some sort of bodily basis, we can speak of symbols which are in some way universal, even if their universality carries with it something of that ambiguity, which is the very salt, surely, of human experience. Thus, Melville's reflections on whiteness have struck a chord in reflective readers for more than a century; but it has been left to a scholar of our own day, V. W. Turner, to take up Melville's themes, show how they are relevant in a small Zambian tribe with an elaborate ritual idiom of its own, and indicate the bodily basis of the meanings of whiteness.<sup>1</sup> The more personal a symbol is (I do not mean the more individualistic) the more likely it is to relate to the moral life of the individual and the community; it should not then be surprising that it is in sexual matters, where the personality is engaged with a completeness that does not happen in economic or strictly political questions that we find Catholic moral teaching at its most definite and its most symbolical.

My argument has swung back to marriage; as a good disciple should, I am trying to apply Cosmas Daudu's principle of the priority of the symbolic over the empirical to a case other than that for which it was originally formulated. Responsible Catholic theologians are now seriously arguing in favour of the ecclesiastical authorities recognizing the dissolution of sacramental consummated marriages, which have been real marriages without any antecedent impediment. Probably the advocates of such a change would be much more numerous, if it were not for the position of the Council of Trent, and the extreme difficulty of getting round it, or let's say, of showing that it does not exclude the dissolubility of consummated sacramental marriage. Yet, if to rely on teaching at

<sup>1</sup>See V. W. Turner, 'Ritual Symbolism, Morality, and Social Structure among the Ndembu' in *African Systems of Thought* (O.U.P. for International African Institute, 1965) and his *Chihamba, the White Spirit*, Manchester University Press. Possibly, both are included in his *The Forest of Symbols* (O.U.P.) which I have not been able to see. It has been Melville's fellow-countrymen rather than his own who have given this truly great scholar the academic recognition which he has merited.

the Encyclical level in the question of contraception is legalism, then to rely simply and solely on the authority of Trent in the matter of divorce is also surely legalism. And applying the 'Hard cases make bad law' principle here is surely another example of the woolly empiricism which Cosmas Daudu effectively dismissed at the beginning of this article.

For all the weighing of Bultmann and Ambrosiaster and so on, Fr Bishop's basic argument is the personal happiness of a multitude of people. This is most certainly an honourable argument; perhaps I could even develop it a little further, by arguing that the present marriage law of the Church penalizes a great number of people who have failed, by no means necessarily through their own fault, to build a happy marriage, by tying that failure round their necks in preventing them from another attempt. This is a formidable case, and can only be rejected by setting marriage in a rather different framework from that of the advocates of divorce, who seem to see marriage *in se* as an abstraction drawn from a galaxy of couples each striving to achieve fulfilment at the level of their altruism *à deux*, or *égoïsme à deux*, as the case may be.

Now one weakness of this way of seeing things is a weakness common enough in European moral discourse. Oneself and the other and others and the world are seen as so many *tabulae rasae* for the *achievements* of the will. These are the ethics of Faustian man, and we are all slightly Faustian, or if we should be expressly Christian, Pelagian. Could we have a way of thinking which was much more attuned to *acceptance and passivity*? Godfrey Lienhardt has in fact shown us that such a world-view does prevail among the Dinkas in his fascinating *Divinity and Experience*.<sup>1</sup> For a European his public personality, at least, is built up by his decisions, his *actiones*; but for a Dinka (who, admittedly, does not conceptualize his personality as we do) the self is built up by what happens to him, his *passiones*. Hence, an important part of Dinka religion consists in recognizing and duly respecting the various forces which are building up his individual and social personality. Such a process, of the recognition and respectful acceptance and fruitful use of the extra-personal elements which claim entry into one's self, seems to me to be a characteristic of much African moral psychology. This has analogues in the non-Faustian stands in European thought. Would it be unreasonable to see the kingship in Shakespeare as a *passio*, imprinting itself on all who come close to it, yet still allowing very different kinds of individual choice? Again, Freudian psychology does sketch out an image of man in which the initial situation of constraint and dependence can be transformed into a life of love and work. If we try to make sense out of that riddling dictum of Engels, that 'Freedom is the consciousness of necessity', the happiest meaning is that freedom is not to be found either in building

<sup>1</sup>O.U.P., 1961.

a fence around oneself, or in simply drifting with the tide, but rather in accepting and making personal the meaningful signs which culture and nature offer. True, such an ethic does not seem particularly encouraged in officially Marxist states, where a positivistic Prometheanism, set to forge the new man by constructive labour, seems officially favoured.

Mention of Marxism may suggest that the Liberal-Marxist confrontation between individual and social man is surely un-deadlocked at the level of the sacraments. What has already happened in Christ for all men can now happen in each man. Every one of the baptized can help to build the post-parousiac society. The Bible shows us marriage as a modality of the existence both of undisintegrated first innocence, and of mankind healed and reintegrated at the Great Wind-up, but it also shows all manner of marriages and marriage problems in the in-between. Yet all these marriages, whether marvellous, mended, or muddled, do surely gain in meaning if we juxtapose them with Adam and Eve in the garden, and the Bride coming down from Heaven. If we think according to the literary forms of the New Testament, particularly the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Johannine writings, we can begin to see that the heavenly analogies of earthly realities are not just bungling comparisons of the incomparable, *but rather the specifying power of the earthly order*. Thus the Bridegroom-bride metaphor is not just the minimal ineptitude for describing something which is really quite different; the metaphor is abstracted from human experience not to wither up, but to be transformed into a new reality which it can transmit back to its origin. There is a sense then in which the 'not yet' of the Parousia is already present in, and shaping the individual marriages of the 'just now'. We can then think of the great sign of marriage having a priority over individual marriages, because it is the sign as it stands in regard to the Beloved City as a whole which gives particular Christian marriages their participation in the sacramental life. This is surely very different from the simple denial of any individual rights by totalitarian thought.

I have earlier tried to sketch out very briefly views of life oriented to the *acceptance of the given*, rather than to the active shaping of a presumably amorphous world. The way in which marriage is a 'given' in this sense, rather than an achievement, needs far more development than I have tried to give it here. Three approaches may be suggested: the foundation of marriage in human biology; the symbolic role of marriage as the most complete image of the Trinity and the Incarnation; and the notion of indissolubility as reflecting man's capacity for total commitment. And one other approach could be evoked here—via the Christian doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. This doctrine is something very different from the capacity to revoke past actions at will. The forgiving of a sin

does not destroy its continuing causality, but is rather the giving of a positive aspect to this continuing causality—we can never simply ditch the past as though it had never been, but we can draw new things from it. If this applies to sins, surely much more to sacraments. A wish never to be tied by one's past actions is simply a refusal of a coherent existence. And I think that this sense of givenness is of particular value in our understanding of the sacraments, particularly at the present time when we are trying to balance an overly objective sacramental theology by stress on them as foci of inter-subjectivities. Perhaps this in turn needs to be balanced by an awareness of them as *inter-objectivities*—not simply generated by community consciousness, nor plonked down from Up There, but working in, and cutting across the boundaries of the here and now, both at the individual and the ecclesial levels. It is the fidelity of the Church to the New Covenant—her truthfulness to her Bridegroom—that ensures the objective truth of the sacraments, and it is their objective truth that gives them their trans-cultural intelligibility. We ought not, as we so often do, set the different aspects of truth against each other.

In other words, what I am trying to articulate is the symbolic nature of much of Catholic moral teaching. 'Symbolic' is an over-worked word, perhaps analogical, or even anagogical, would be better, since we are faced particularly in sexual matters with moral teaching which cannot be shown to flow from the kerygma, nor can it be justified in terms of social satisfaction—nor can it be shrugged off as so much legalism. (If you do, you have to shrug off the Catholic Church as a whole). The only explanation of Catholic teaching on such matters as the excellence of virginity or the indissolubility of sacramental marriage which will ultimately hold water is that we have here the world of heavenly forms invading and trans-signifying the world of social institutions. Not surprisingly, these values are perceived in the Church intuitively rather than analytically. To those who think in the fashionable style of the existential-cum-sociological, and for whom symbolism is arbitrary and external, rather than an epiphany flowing from the real form, such moral teaching, particularly when defended by very unsatisfactory arguments, seems simply the survival of the values of an agrarian, 'baroque' society.

I have tried to suggest the very general outlines of a way of thinking about marriage as being primarily a gift rather than an achievement, an enrichment of individual lives by its very setting in the fullness of the Church. In this framework, the indissolubility of sacramental marriage can begin to appear as something other than legalism, or a survival from an agrarian society more concerned with the keeping-together of the family estate than with individual happiness. On this view, the social character of Christian morality does not mean a commitment to the multiplication of

individual satisfactions here and now. Between the Incarnation and the Parousia, the word and the sacraments are gathering mankind into a tremendous *Gestalt* or total pattern of freely-accepted inter-related meanings. In particular, sacramental marriage is not simply a one-to-one relationship, but an entry into the great sign of matrimony cutting across time and space.

But what comfort can these lines of argument bring to people involved in a sacramental and shipwrecked marriage? Only perhaps this, that such a marriage, hopelessly burned-out as regards husband and wife, may still be fruitful for the building-up of the total sign of marriage in the Church, if one or both of the partners is still drawing on the continuing graces of the sacrament. The resurrection makes diamonds from the ashes of love.

## The Falling Number of Confessions—Development or Deviation?—I

by Piers Linley, O.P.

As a result of the changes inaugurated by Vatican II our eucharistic experience is now very different from what it was a few years ago. But what about our experience of the sacrament of Confession? Here the shift during these same few years has rather been simply from experience to non-experience. Though statistics are hard to come by and motivation difficult to establish, it seems certain that the number of confessions has fallen.

Now this is not a shift inaugurated by Vatican II. The Council reaffirmed the value of this sacrament and reiterated the principle laid down in Canon Law that priests should 'show themselves entirely and always ready to perform the office of the sacrament of penance as often as the faithful reasonably request it' (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, c. III, Abbott translation, p. 561). It seems clear that this does not mean merely the provision of regular times on Saturdays and on the eves of feasts but also urges that priests should respond unhesitatingly to a spontaneous request to hear a confession. Beyond this the Council did not go except to recommend a revision of the rites and formulas of the sacrament—a revision that has not yet been carried out. The falling number of confessions has been brought about, therefore, by the decisions of individuals. This growing feeling within the Church that the sacrament need not be received so frequently must be recognized and respected. It must also be