

# Cultural Continuity and a Scottish Tradition

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by Fergus Kerr, O.P.

Can the university—even a radically reformed university—really carry the burden of providing our society with ‘memory and mature purpose’, as Dr Leavis keeps hoping? Remembering some of his more recent essays while staying in fairly remote parts of Scotland this summer, I began once again to reflect on how much the schools fail to do and yet could so easily undertake (as a handful of rare teachers have always done)—if only we could unlearn the attitude to language that has prevailed from the beginning of public education a century or so ago. Gaelic steadily declines in the Hebrides, the vital remnant of the Scottish *Gaidhealtachd*, and the Buchan dialect in the north-east of Scotland is losing its vigour. In both cases the schools are where the native speech dies. If this is a matter of conscious political decision at all, it is only because we submit to the priorities of the commercial system and allow our conception of language and life to be dictated to us by that. Seeing a language die out doesn’t bother the man who regards language as simply a means for exchanging ideas: for him another language can easily be substituted. But if language is, as Dr Leavis says, what creates ‘the human world of values and significances and spiritual graces’, then it is surely clear that ‘exchanging ideas’ is much less than an adequate description of the place of language in human life. *Hard Times*, which came out in 1854, surely is the moral fable for our time Dr Leavis has so long insisted it is: bland and dulcified as it now is, Mr Gradgrind’s Utilitarianism still shuts out what Sleary’s Horse-riding represents. ‘Louisa, never wonder’, Mr Gradgrind said to his daughter. But wonder is the most essential response to reality and a language surely begins as a people’s way of wording their sense of the place in which they dwell. Any given language is the tradition—the living and developing tradition—springing from the original sense a people had of its place on the earth. All significance must derive from the significance a place must have had for a people, whether it meant security and home or seemed eery and alien, or whatever. And the experience the tradition acquires over generations—which any language contains—operates much more at the level of primary feeling and emotion than of concepts. It is a whole world of feeling that perishes with a language. I want to explore this idea a little by reflecting on the present state of the folk-culture of the north-east of Scotland.

## *The north-east of Scotland*

The north-east of Scotland consists mainly of the counties of Aberdeen and Banff. It forms a remarkably homogeneous unit,

isolated by mountain ranges from the west and the south but open to the sea on the east and the north. Aberdeen was far closer to Bergen than to London before the railways came. It was by sea that most of the traffic to and from the region took place until well into the nineteenth century. Indeed, my grandmother, now in her eighty-ninth year, has left the north-east only once in her life and that was to go by steamboat from Aberdeen about 1905 to visit an older sister married and settled on Tyneside. So much has changed in the last fifty years as regards patterns of communication that it is difficult for us now to imagine how much a region like the north-east of Scotland felt far nearer the Continent than either England or even the *Gaidhealtachd*.

The history of the region is strange enough. Mons Graupius, where Agricola defeated the Caledonians in A.D. 84, would now be located by scholars in Banffshire. Severus also reached the Moray Firth lowlands, but neither of these campaigns left any permanent mark on the land or the people. The tribes of the region belonged to the great Pictish confederacy that occupied and dominated the whole of the country north of the Forth-Clyde line until settlers from Ulster had come in sufficient numbers to outwit and subjugate them. The Picts are a puzzle, though research has thrown a good deal of light on them in the last twenty years or so. The Romans it was who called them *Picti* ('painted' or more likely 'tattoo'd'); the Gaelic-speaking settlers who finally conquered them called them *Cruithne* (a name that must surely be connected with the word *cruithneachd*, 'corn'). In 685 the Picts were still strong enough to defeat and drive back the Angles of Northumbria who had marched up the east coast as far as Forfar, and in 741 they seem to have succeeded temporarily in stemming the spread of the colonists from Ireland. But in 843 the Picts collapsed and disappear from history at this point.

It is clear from Adomnan's *Life of Columba*, written of course from the Irish point of view and towards the end of the seventh century, that the Picts had as structured and cultured a society as any other people in these islands at the time. They were certainly Christian. For all their determination to keep the Angles out of their land they were perfectly ready to learn from them. About 710 the Venerable Bede himself drafted a long letter in reply to the Pictish king who wanted information about Roman liturgical customs and also to hire some church builders from the south. This sounds like a programme to create a truly Pictish form of Catholicism to rival the Iona-centred Irish Christianity in the lost lands in the west. There can be no doubt that there were Pictish monks and bards even though nothing remains of their work. We know very little about the native language, or languages, except that some of the Picts must have spoken a non-Celtic, or rather pre-Celtic and non-Indo-European language, while others spoke a Celtic language more like the Breton and Welsh group than Irish. The Gaelic-speaking Columba

certainly required an interpreter when he visited the Pictish king in 565.

But if there is no Pictish saga cycle or religious poetry extant, the superb symbol-bearing monoliths richly scattered all over the ancient land of the *Cruithean-tuath*, from Shetland to the Forth with a particular concentration in Aberdeenshire, bear witness to the taste and sensibility of the patrons and the superlative skill of the sculptors. The latest of the stones are cross-slabs but the iconography (abstract designs and animal forms mostly) remains predominantly secular to the end. It has been argued by the leading scholar in the field that some of the designs in the great illuminated gospel-books of Northumbria and Ireland owe something of their inspiration to the Pictish symbol stones (see Isabel Henderson, *The Picts*, 1967). The cross-slab from Nigg is certainly very like the Chi-Rho page in the Book of Kells. But a culture embodied in monoliths, like a culture sustained in songs, cannot easily reveal its power and quality to the eyes of a generation accustomed to see culture in terms of books.

The end of Pictland came very suddenly. In 843 the king of *Dál Riada*, the Irish colony west of the mountain range known in Gaelic as *Druim Alban* ('backbone of Scotland'), somehow established a claim through his mother to the Pictish throne by the Celtic law of tanistry, and the two kingdoms merged—peaceably according to the Irish records though another source speaks of his ruling the Picts happily for sixteen years after he had exterminated them (*delevit*) and brought about their *destructio*. The Norsemen were all over the west of Scotland and the east coast of Ireland at this period and perhaps that affected the union of the Picts and the Irish settlers. These latter, *Scotti* as they were called in Latin (from a Celtic word for 'marauder'), had been crossing over from Antrim and settling in Argyll since the fifth century. The ruling house of *Dál Riada* in Ulster finally moved across the sea and established a new *Dál Riada* in Argyll (= *Earraghaidheal*, 'portion of the Gael'). But it was the middle of the ninth century before they were able to break out of the area in the west to which the Picts had managed to confine them, and to overrun the whole country, which then became known as *Scotia* in Latin and *Alba* in Gaelic. By the late ninth century, then, a single language and culture prevailed from Cape Clear in the south-west of Ireland to Kinnaird Head in the north-east of Scotland (from *Ceann Cléire* to *Ceann na h-áird*). As the place names prove, the Gaelicization of the Picts was very thorough.

The north-east was certainly Gaelicized. Some of the place names even suggest that it was regarded as the jewel of the ancient Irish empire. The burgh of Banff, for instance, stands on the estuary of the River Deveron and the adjoining parish of Boyndie has its Boyne Burn. The medieval forms of these names corroborate the theory that Banff gets its name from Banbha, a goddess-queen in early Irish mythology and itself a poetic name for Ireland, while obviously

Boyndie and the Boyne owe their names to the famous Irish river-goddess *Bóinn* or *Boanda*. The Deveron (Dovern in the old spelling) and the parallel River Findhorn some miles westward have in fact been analysed as sharing the common radical *ern* (Erin, another name for Ireland), with the prefix *dubh* (black) and *fionn* (white) respectively. The name of the ancient town of Elgin in the neighbouring county of Moray is obviously the Gaelic *eilg-innis* ('noble island', another synonym for Ireland, according to Dinneen). For that matter the name 'Moray' or 'Murray' itself is connected with the royal house of Connaught. Though Gaelic cannot have been the normal language in such places as Banff and Elgin for much of their history, transformed into royal burghs as they were in the twelfth century as part of the Anglo-Normanizing monarch's attempt to infiltrate and subdue the north, there can be no doubt that the names are as Gaelic as almost all the other place names north of the Forth-Clyde lines except in the specifically Norse areas.

#### *The north-east tongue*

The north-east was not to remain Gaelic for long. Assuming the Irish did not exterminate the Picts in 843 but only expropriated them, it is hard to judge how long it would have taken for the natives to learn Gaelic and lose their own language. The process can hardly have taken less than a generation, which would mean that the population of the north-east might all have been Gaelic-speaking by the year 900 or so. There is really no parallel to give us any guide. The Pictish language simply disappeared altogether without even leaving traces in Gaelic (we know enough to be able to spot such elements). Is there any other instance of a subject people learning the language of their overlords without changing it? The simplest explanation would be that the Picts were massacred and the land settled with Irish colonists. At all events, Macbeth, who was of course a good king as well as a good Catholic and the last effective Gaelic ruler of Scotland, was defeated and killed at Lumphanan in Aberdeenshire in 1057 and from then on, for better or worse, the de-Gaelicization of Scotland began. By the end of the twelfth century the coastal burghs of the north-east must have included enough English-speaking officials and merchants to challenge Gaelic at least in those areas. The north-east as a whole cannot have been Gaelic-speaking for much more than 250 years. Away from the towns and ports, however, Gaelic must have been the language of the people all through the Middle Ages—perhaps as late as 1700. Gaelic remained the dominant language in upper Banffshire, in and around Tomintoul, until the middle of the nineteenth century, though most of the inhabitants were bilingual by then. The last Gaelic-speaking families in Aberdeenshire died out in the 1920s. But it is the Buchan dialect that has been the language of the people of the north-east for many generations now.

The north-east tongue derives from the Northumbrian dialect of English spoken by Caedmon and Bede—the language that Richard Rolle of Hampole was writing near Doncaster about 1340 and that John Barbour was writing in Aberdeen in 1375. Barbour himself called it ‘Ynglis’. This is the speech-basis of the poetry of Henryson, Dunbar, Gavin Douglas, and the other medieval Scottish writers. It was not until the sixteenth century that this form of English had grown so different in pronunciation and vocabulary from English as spoken in the English royal court that it began to count as a separate language—as different from English as Portuguese is from Spanish say. A good deal of literature, prose as well as poetry, survives; but the language ceased to be a literary medium when wealthy and educated Scots took to writing for political reasons in as English an English as they could manage (John Knox was among the first to do so though it was not a common practice until the eighteenth century). Since then the language has gradually declined into a handful of regional dialects, among the most traditional and vigorous of which is the Buchan dialect, the mother tongue of the majority of the people born in the north-east to this day. It is generally referred to as Scots or sometimes as Lallans (the language of the Lowlands).

As I have just noted, educated Scots have been writing in English since the eighteenth century and also trying to speak it (the first Scottish M.P.s at Westminster in 1707 were much mortified by the laughter with which their speeches were greeted, so amusingly foreign did their English colleagues find their language). But the common folk, especially in the country, have kept the old tongue alive, as I can testify since the Buchan dialect is, or was, my own mother tongue. I spoke nothing else out of school until I went to university (in 1949). My father and grandparents never spoke English with facility. I can still understand the broadest north-east dialect without the least difficulty and follow conversations that no Englishman could understand (for that matter, the Gaelic-speaking fishermen of the Hebrides who have learned their English at school find the ‘English’ of the Buchan seamen they meet so often in each other’s ports all but incomprehensible), but my ease in speaking it has gone. That is due to more than twenty years of living outside the north-east.

The assertion is often made that the resources of a dialect cannot cope with the full range of experience and the needs of modern life. It is certainly possible to practise as a doctor in the north-east or a lawyer or an engineer or a priest, and seldom speak the Queen’s English or anything like it. The individual will, of course, write letters in English and modify his speech into the normal form of Scottish-accented English when necessity requires. But the vast majority of ordinary folk in the north-east, in the city of Aberdeen as well as in the landward districts, have little cause ever to speak

anything but their own dialect. They read and write one language and listen to it on the radio, but they habitually speak a significantly different one.

Such bilingualism becomes problem-ridden, however, whenever one's intellectual consciousness has been developed—developed, necessarily, in English. There is a deep psychic disharmony in having one's primary relationships to reality formed in as vigorous a tongue as the Buchan dialect, and one's intellect extended in Standard English. This is surely the main reason for the distinctive flawedness in every major Scottish writer from Walter Scott and Thomas Carlyle to Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon. In one case after another the psychic disharmony reappears. This is what produces the cardboard prosing in Scott and the gnarled rant in Carlyle as well as the turgid strain in MacDiarmid and the terrible plangency in Grassie Gibbon. Every major Scottish writer learned his primary-emotional responses to reality in a vigorous regional tongue and had Standard English taught him at school. Of all the great Irish writers who have written so copiously and so self-possessedly in the English language none (I think) was brought up speaking a vigorous dialect—Shaw, Yeats, Joyce, Beckett . . . though at least two of those, if not all four, had a strangely external and superior attitude to language. O'Casey shows signs of something like the typical Scottish predicament. (I leave aside the question of Irish-speaking writers; one of the odd things there is that the finest Gaelic poet for centuries is a Scot: Sorley MacLean.)

If you don't stay on at school and go to university, however, another perspective may open up if you are lucky enough. If you don't need English much to extend you intellectually and emotionally, then you can stick to the dialect and join one of the many flourishing folksong clubs. There is no use pretending that many north-easters understand and appreciate what is possible in the folk tradition, any more than native Gaelic speakers in Scotland or Ireland always value their inheritance (this summer I was asking a middle-aged woman, Gaelic-speaking all her life, about a recent concert on her island and she told me that what she had really appreciated was a rendering of *Swanee River* by a visiting priest from the mainland: her mother contributed numerous traditional songs to the archives of the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh). But it is equally plain that the folksong revival over the past fifteen years, in which Aberdeen has proved a seedbed, has brought a substantial number of people to see that access to the traditional world of deep feeling and wisdom need not necessarily be through *literature*. A literary grammar-school education may in fact inhibit one from discovering this world.

### *The folksong tradition*

I say folksong *revival* but in fact it is more a *discovery*. I was familiar

with the bothy ballads from my childhood: the songs composed in late-Victorian days by the unmarried farm labourers in the dormitories known as 'bothies'. My maternal grandfather, a millwright, who died in 1949, was a fiddler in the old style and I remember the 'musical evenings' we used to have during the war when we would gather in a neighbouring farmer's house to sing. The less bawdy of the bothy ballads would always be sung then—I remember such songs as *Bogie's Bonnie Belle* and *The Muckin' o' Geordie's Byre* (the latter of which actually goes back to 1750 or so). But I was entirely unaware of how rich the north-east ballad tradition was and did not discover this until recently. At school we used to ridicule a certain local family who were notoriously illiterate, licentious, squalid and drunken (by our standards of rectitude). It was years later that I found out that two of the most despised and disreputable members of that family were traditional singers of real distinction (dead now but taped for eternity in the Edinburgh archives). The whole bias of grammar-school education was—probably still is—against the likelihood of one's ever coming to discover and value the folk tradition. The old songs were associated with people discounted as either old or ignorant, and with a dialect which the teachers gradually shamed us out of. I still squirm when I remember the tone of disbelief in a teacher's voice when I was asked about the age of twelve if my family spoke dialect at home—her assumption being that they wouldn't. One has very little to complain of when one thinks of the brutal efforts to stamp out the Celtic languages in favour of English or French as the case may be, but the tensions generated by the bilingual situation can be painful and have enduring effects. I could never sing the songs my grandfather sang in the presence of even my closest English friends.

The idea that the great classical ballads were still being sung would have astonished me twenty years ago. We studied them at school, of course, without being told that they make little sense unless they are sung, and we were led to think of them as 'Border ballads' though in fact most of them come from the north-east. It was in 1953 that Hamish Henderson, himself a poet and on the staff of the School of Scottish Studies, was put on to a 45-year-old working-class housewife in Aberdeen. He took his tape-recorder round with him one afternoon to see her, found her tired and unwilling to sing for him or even to admit that she could, played with one of her small children for a while until she suddenly stirred, and found himself staying until two o'clock next morning as she sang one after another of the classical ballads. He had discovered Jeannie Robertson, generally regarded now as one of the greatest singers of classical folksong in western Europe. One would have to go to the Connemara *sean-nós* singer, Máire Aine Ní Dhonnchadha, to find her like.

The social circumstances of the traditional singers in Scotland and Ireland are often very similar. Seosamh O hEanaigh, also of the

Connemara tradition, probably the richest of all in these islands now, was at home this summer, singing at concerts in Dublin, but after years working on building sites in England he is now caretaker of a block of luxury flats in New York. . . . He apparently finds the work congenial, but when will Ireland ever take care of her own? Jeannie Robertson, touchingly and incongruously, was awarded the M.B.E. in 1968 for services to folk music; she will no doubt get an LL.D. from one of the Scottish universities in due course. What can a university *do*, when confronted with the bearer of a tradition that goes back unbroken to . . . well, no one knows how far back the north-east ballad tradition goes. Anna Gordon, who died in 1810 at the age of sixty-three, dictated the repertoire of ballads she could sing, most of which she had learnt by 1759 from her mother, an aunt, and an old maidservant—which takes us back as far as 1700, and nobody in the early eighteenth century was regarding the songs as *new*.

In an important recent book, *The Ballad and the Folk*, an Aberdeen University doctorate thesis, David Buchan shows that the north-east classical ballad tradition goes back at least to 1350. Following the example of Milman Parry and Albert Lord whose interest in the oral-auditory character of Homeric poetry led them to study the continuing oral tradition of Yugoslavia, Dr Buchan brings out the mnemonic structures and formulae that allow the singer to re-create the ballad. He also points out—as Willa Muir has already done in her *Living with Ballads*—that the world of the ballads is never the ordinary circumstances of the folk but a heightened and intensified world of heroic figures, though for all that the emotional subject matter is in effect nearly always the range of tensions and relationships possible within the family. The basic situation is nearly always triangular: the relationship between two persons, a man and a woman usually, is complicated by the intrusion of some third person. It is rare that the third person is a rival lover (as it almost always is in modern novels and films); it is much more likely to be an irate father, ambitious mother, sympathetic servant or whatever. It is very likely to be death or the supernatural. In one sense, then, the range of the ballads is very restricted: betrothal, betrayal, bereavement, revenge, and so on. And yet is this so very different from the subject matter of Jane Austen, George Eliot or Henry James—or Blake or Shakespeare? It is surely the simplicity and the intensity of the emotional response to these primary personal traumas and crises that the ballad singer can attain that characterizes the ballad over against the extended analysis in the novel or the altogether richer and more comprehensive experience of tragic drama. But the classical ballad repertoire as interpreted and re-created by such authoritative singers as Jeannie Robertson and her daughter Lizzie Higgins (a fish filleter for twenty-three years until her health forced her to give up some four or five years ago) and her 'pupil', Isla St Clair, of Buckie



(who will ensure the continuance of the tradition for another generation), surely offers a hope of both 'memory and mature purpose': they are the precipitate—the flower, rather—of 600 years of the suffering and endurance and pleasure of ordinary folk in a hard land.

Jeannie Robertson is also a story-teller, a *seanchaidh* of a kind: her singing is of course unaccompanied but it would ideally take place at a *céilidh*, a 'musical evening', when some would tell stories and others would pipe and fiddle. Jeannie's mother was a Stewart and she therefore belongs to the great travelling clan of the Stewarts. They have been on the road, latterly in fine caravans, ever since they can remember—at least since the middle of the eighteenth century because they attribute their homelessness to supporting Prince Charlie in 1745. Whatever their origins, their mode of life guaranteed that they would have to make their own entertainment and the late-Victorian education laws did not catch them very successfully with the result that such families of itinerant tinkers, hawkers and general handymen, have become the principal bearers of the medieval ballads and the piping, fiddling and story-telling that has always accompanied them.

Not enough study has yet been made of the music of the classical ballads but there is no doubt that, as the great nineteenth-century collector Gavin Grieg pointed out, north-east folk-music owes a good deal to Gaelic folk-music. The language is Northern English but the melody is usually Celtic. This in itself would suggest that the tradition goes back to the fourteenth century. According to David Buchan, who has gone into the matter carefully, a high proportion of north-east tunes are constructed on the basis of a Celtic form of the melodic quatrain and the cadences are frequently modelled on Gaelic prototypes. It is particularly instructive to hear Jeannie Robertson's interpretation of *MacCrimmon's Lament*, a Gaelic song composed in 1745 which she sings in a nineteenth-century translation into English (which of course she gives a Buchan turn to). Some of her relatives are in fact Gaelic-speaking: Alec Stewart, of Lairg, for example, the blind *seanchaidh*. In this respect, however, the most interesting case is that of Norman Kennedy, another singer of the younger generation (born in Aberdeen in 1934). He left school at sixteen but had already built himself a small hand loom and started to learn Gaelic and to spend his holidays on the Isle of Barra. In 1951 he attended a Folklore Convention in Stornaway and met the late Annie Johnstone, of Castlebay, one of the greatest tradition-bearers in Barra in a generation very richly endowed with them. From her he learned the Gaelic tales and songs and only then did he begin to visit some of his mother's kinsfolk in rural Aberdeenshire and master the basic north-east repertoire. The ease with which he can sing in the two cultures, allegedly so different from one another, suggests that they may have more in common than is often

thought. An ear sensitive to Gaelic music is certainly a help in first listening to Jeannie Robertson: her singing can sound very strange to those trained on light-classical orchestras.

What conclusions are there to draw from all this? How much does the folk-ballad tradition have to give people now? Is it really likely that the stark tales and the strange music of a medieval world can mean much to us these days? I think there is a case for saying that the folk festival is more likely than the university to initiate people into a tradition giving us 'memory and mature purpose'.

Whenever the chance occurs, Hamish Henderson and others have been playing tapes of traditional music in schools since 1955 or so, and he reports that the effect is 'electric'. Even in areas where the regional dialect is neither pure nor strong—where an urban patois prevails ('slovenly speech' as the school inspectors used to call it)—it must certainly be liberating and exhilarating for youngsters to hear the vernacular tongue so honoured; but I suspect the satisfaction would spring less from the emotional resonances of the ballads themselves than from suppressed Anglophobia. On the other hand, no innkeeper in Scotland can afford not to have some kind of entertainment on Friday and Saturday nights and, though most of this would be late-Victorian music-hall in style or current 'popular songs', it is not difficult to find places in which traditional folk-music alone is played. And the main cities all have folk-music societies and centres equipped with libraries and archives easily accessible to everybody who is interested. So many fine musicians have been discovered in the last twenty years—men and women who have been performing among their friends for years without always understanding the antiquity or grandeur of the tradition they bear—that it becomes hard to credit how deaf and blind the educated have been to the living folk-art all around them. And such events as the Blairgowrie festival, bringing together folk-musicians from the Scottish *Gaidhealtachd* as well as from the Lowland tradition, and open of course to all other traditions, annual since 1966, creates a focus and a forum and must help to renew the tradition.

A certain eclecticism is inevitable. The Scottish ballads, particularly if the words are too regional for the English ear to follow, sound quite at home interspersed with Indian sitar music, just as Hebridean waulking songs could almost pass as African tribal music. And even that need not be superficial: the work and sorrow and joy of the common people in every society has been so much alike that their music and song really does have an essential unity. But the late Sean O Riada was able, before his sadly premature death, to bring out the potentialities of *seah-nós* music in the Irish folk-tradition—to demonstrate something of its richness and distinctiveness and to hint at how much it has to give the modern composer. Aberdeenshire has not yet produced such a talent. But the tradition is *there*, flourishing—certainly requiring much less reform and revitalization

than the average English Faculty. Is it so absurd to think that ordinary folk might be the soundest bearers of 'memory and mature purpose'? Haven't they always been so?

## Missionaries Go Home—? by Marcel Boivin, W.F.

Some time ago I met here in England a missionary priest with whom I had worked while in Tanzania. I knew him for an excellent missionary, a man who had adapted himself well to Africa and had put himself entirely at the service of his people. Yet, when I met him, he stated his firm intention of never returning to Tanzania.

Why had he so radically altered the course of his life? Was it for personal reasons—failing health—or a compelling desire to marry? No. He had come back because he could not see why he should stay in Tanzania any longer. For one thing, the 'new theology' had considerably weakened the motives for which he had gone to the missions in the first place: if pagans already know God, why bother to cross sea and land in order to announce God? If men can be saved without being baptized into the Church, why go on instructing catechumens and making converts? Besides, after twenty years of experience, he had reached the conclusion that conversion to the Church did not appreciably affect people's lives—Christians seemed no better than pagans. Then, thirdly, there are enough Tanzanian priests to cater for the flock, and in the sectors of education and health, the country is sufficiently developed to look after its own people. Better leave now than wait to be expelled in five years' time . . . our time is limited, anyway.

Obviously, the majority of missionaries working in Africa or elsewhere are remaining at their posts, and of those who come home, not all come for the reasons given by the missionary I have quoted. I have, nevertheless, chosen to begin with this example because it so well illustrates the kind of questions missionaries are asking, questions as to whether or not they still have a role to play in the Church, and if they have, how they should be playing it.

Some conclude, as did the missionary quoted, that missionary work has become an anachronism. Others decide to stay on and to do their best in the circumstances in which they find themselves. For nearly all, the issue is not just a theological problem, it is a personal drama.

### *The background to the drama*

In the last century, entire continents which until then had been closed to the West and therefore to Christianity, were opened to the activity of the Church. This undoubtedly favoured the view of the