**WHEN THE SAINTS …**

14TH OF FEBRUARY VALENTINE

14TH OF FEBRUARY CYRIL & METHODIUS

15TH OF FEBRUARY SIGFRID

15TH OF FEBRUARY THOMAS BRAY

17TH OF FEBRUARY ARCHBISHOP JANANI LUWUM

VALENTINE – There are two separate records of a Valentine who was martyred in mid-3rd century in the vicinity of Rome, but that is all we know.

There have been suggestions as to why this day has become a traditional focus for ‘The lord of misrule’ to encourage the expression of erotic or romantic love. It has been suggested that it is at this time that birds choose their mates, and there was a pagan festival of ‘Lupercalia’ associated with the somewhat more circumspect process among humans, or maybe the pre-Lenten carnival had something to do with it, when people almost literally took their courage in both hands!

Be this as it may, there seems to be no valid historical or theological reason why people should find it necessary to pay a king’s ransom for flowers, or fatten up somebody you claim to love by giving them the chance to bring on ‘headaches’ through hyperglycaemia with half a kilo of over-priced chocolate, or exorbitantly priced variations of sparkling wine that disinhibit those who imbibe it to extravagant words and actions that have to be lived up to for the rest of the year, [assuming they are remembered afterwards at all!] not to mention the time-honoured place of headaches to inhibit the very purpose of all this trouble and expense!!!

Nowadays, of course, it has become necessary even when asking one’s partner to put out the bins or go for a takeaway, to chorus: ‘I love you,’ and not to do so will very soon attract police action and legal penalties for emotional abuse, so why set aside one day for the expression of largely meaningless cathexis? There needs to be instigated a Valentine’s equivalent of good old Scrooge’s ‘HUMBUG PAH!!!’ All entries strictly anonymous please!

The serious side of all this, if, indeed, there is one, resides in the real emotional and spiritual affinity between love of God and erotic love, as long as we do not rationalise and conflate the two at a conscious level. Erotic love finds its place in most sane world religions for a reason: readers of ‘the Song of Songs’ are able to incorporate the beautiful expressions of erotic love for what they are, whilst simultaneously understanding its symbolism for the deepest and most intimate expressions of the love between God and humanity.

Deeply felt and deeply expressed married love perhaps comes nearest to the fullest expression of the kind of intimate whole-hearted love attested to by mystics of most religions, and people sensitive to such feelings can often bask, as it were, in the rays that seem to emanate from this kind of vintage love – though surely not because he was a martyr?

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CYRIL [827-69] & METHODIUS [815-84] apostles to the Slavs – Eastern Orthodox Christians would be right to point out that Paul’s mission and consequent letters were directed mainly around the eastern Mediterranean, the sole exception being Rome. Had Paul made it to Spain, as he seems to have intended, westerners might have at least one leg to stand on in their assumptions about where the roots of Christianity grew. Orthodox Christians take Andrew, the brother of Peter, as the founder of their church: remember the five original archbishoprics were Constantinople, as the undoubted primus inter pares, Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria and Rome. After the schism with Rome and the fall of Constantinople, Moscow came to consider itself to have inherited the mantle of leadership of the Orthodox faith, since Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria had also fallen to Islam. Moscow claimed that it was never assigned the place of priority by Constantinople that it had earned, though whatever the justification for such a position, Slavic Christianity came to the fore rather later in the day than Greece or Cappadocia but by no means as late as Scandinavia. Relations have ever after been cool between the two patriarchies.

It is also the case that the main thrust of theological endeavour was centred in the east. Seminal figures in the west – Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, all drew their inspiration from the east, including monastic spirituality and practice.

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 had entrusted the missionary and pastoral care of all known lands – the Barbarians – to Constantinople.

The great Scholar, Photius [c810-93] was one of the most important theologians and canonists of the ninth century, and is not a celebrity favoured in the western church because of his anathema of the pope over the ’Filioque’ dispute, but he is considered a great saint in the east. Photius encouraged many Christian missions from Byzantium, including one to the Slavic tribes in 867 when he sent them a resident bishop.

In 860, however, Photius had sent two aristocratically born brothers, the Deacon Constantine and his brother Michael, better known respectively as Monk Methodius and Cyril after his consecration as Bishop in Rome, to try to convert the Khagan of the Kazars, without success. The Khagan chose Judaism as his court religion, but many people had been attracted by the brothers and their message, and as a result Prince Vratislav of Moravia invited them to preach in his lands in 862. The mission had a great success, although, in the long term their work was undermined by later Latin-speaking evangelists from Bavaria.

Nevertheless Cyril and Methodius inaugurated some ground-breaking policies for all future missions from Byzantium. They determined that all Slavic peoples should be evangelised and be able to worship in their own languages, a policy of respect for culture on the ground that has been adhered to ever since in the east. Practically speaking they invented the Slavic alphabet by adapting Greek letters and adding some to stand for sounds that were absent in Greek. In this respect the brothers initiated a connectivity between Greek and Slavic peoples who came to feel a wider affinity with one another, through shared worship and traditions, although in time the Russian Orthodox tended to be orientated more towards the monastery than the byzantine.

The brothers were born in Thessalonika; Methodius was 12 years older than Cyril, but they are placed in reverse order because Cyril died first. Cyril was a respected philosopher and theologian who studied under Leo the Grammarian and Photius himself, and led a mission to the Ukraine. Methodius, known as Monk Methodius, spent some time as governor of a Slavic province within the Byzantine Empire. Cyril was the putative inventor of the Slavic alphabet, and began a translation of the bible, which Methodius did his best to continue.

On their way back from Moravia the brothers were in Venice when the Photian schism emerged in 867. Pope Adrian II sent for them to Rome, and treated them with great honour, organising their Slavic services in Rome. In 870 Hadrian consecrated Methodius as Archbishop of Moravia, at least partly to affirm Moravia’s position within the Roman fold; nevertheless he still had the Bavarians to deal with and at one point he was arrested and brought before a synod at Regensburg, from which captivity Hadrian’s successor, Pope John VIII got him released. Besides his work on bible translation Methodius produced a work on Slavic ecclesiastical and canon law. In 882 Methodius travelled to Constantinople to meet the patriarch and the emperor to explain the brothers’ work, which was approved. He died two years later in what is now the Czech Republic.

Cyril is buried in that wonderful old church San Clemente in Rome, where there is a fresco commemorating the brothers. In the Eastern Church both are ranked alongside the apostles and throughout the church as a whole they are held to be Patron Saints of Ecumenism.

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SIGFRID [?-d 1045] Apostle to Scandinavia – By Sigfrid’s time all of Anskar’s work had been destroyed in Denmark and Sweden.

The Norwegian King Olaf Tryggvason had been baptised in England in 995 and on his return he asked King Aethelred for missionaries. The anonymous author of Sigfrid’s life states that Aethelred called a conference of monks and clergy to try to find a volunteer to take up the mission, but not a soul moved in three days because they all knew what the danger was and how ferocious the people were. Eventually Sigfrid, who was already a well-reputed monk of Glastonbury, although he may have been Bishop of York by this time – got up and volunteered.

Olaf Tryggvason was killed in battle after a reign of only five years, so that Sigfrid was unable to make very much headway in Norway, but moved onto Sweden with a great deal more success. He settled in Vaxjo, where he built a church, and a church is still there in his honour.

He had his two companions John and Grimkell consecrated Bishops of East and West Gothland respectively, leaving his three nephews in charge, who were taken prisoner by pagan tribes and beheaded. Sigfrid begged for the lives of the killers to be spared, but declined to accept a huge sum in blood money because he felt his forgiveness should be complete.

Sigfrid also managed to establish the church in Denmark, and his ministry in Scandinavia lasted all of forty years. He is venerated there to this day, and is portrayed either with the heads of his three nephews or with loaves of bread in their place.

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THOMAS BRAY [1658-1730] – Thomas Bray was a very important figure in the Anglican Church; founder of SPCK, SPG and revivor of the rural deanery system.

He was born in Morton Shropshire, near the welsh border, the son of a yeoman, and from a very early age was allowed to read the chained books in the library of the Vicar of Montgomery. He was educated at Oswestry Grammar School and went off as a poor scholar and servitor to All Souls Oxford where he may have waited at table and run errands. He took his degree in 1678, but it was a while before he could afford the fee for his MA. He was made deacon in 1681 and priested the following year. He was soon taken up by Sir Thomas Price, of Park Hall near Castle Bromwich, and brought into his home as Chaplain, and in 1690 he was presented to the living in the country Parish of Sheldon.

In 1691 the first volume of Bray’s Catechetical Lectures – there were 4 eventually – attracted the attention of Henry Compton, Bishop of London, and also earned him £700 in royalties, having sold 3,000 copies. Compton was responsible for the oversight of Ecclesiastical Policy and Affairs in the colony of Maryland, which had originally been allocated to a Roman Catholic Lord Baltimore, from whom it was later withdrawn. Compton wished to bring it back into the Anglican fold, which needed an act of parliament to set up 25 parishes, and providing for their maintenance with a tithe on the tobacco crop, which the Quakers, who were very strong out there, opposed bitterly; so he was glad to appoint Bray to get the tricky job done.

In 1696 Bray went back to Oxford to get a BD and DD in order to lend him the necessary authority. He insisted to Compton that he must have books so that catechetical libraries could be set up in Maryland, and public subscriptions raised to pay for them. Four other diocesans joined with London for this promotion, and a joint statement read: ‘We look upon this design as one which will tend very much to propagate Christian knowledge.’ hence: SPCK. Proposals were printed and generous subscriptions received, including 100 guineas from Princess [later Queen] Anne.

Bray began to recruit and train missionaries sending them off with their ‘parish libraries,’ 21 of these, together with 16 clergy were sent out in the first two years of the scheme, but in England there was grumbling that America was to be better taught and supplied than home clergy who lacked both books and learning. To remedy this situation Bray revived the [by now] almost obsolete institution of the rural deaneries, proposing that each should have its own library.

Bray wanted SPCK to become established by Royal Charter, but without success, so he set up a small society consisting of four Anglican Philanthropists, to ‘propagate the Gospel.’ He wanted to start up free catechetical schools for the poor; for Indians and ‘Negroes,’ and to create a fund to support married clergy. Bray gave his all for the SPG, including selling off some of his rectory furniture.

In 1699 he finally got to Maryland, bringing yet more books: he summoned the clergy for a visitation, giving them charge for preaching and pastoral care. He made extensive registers of local information and asked his clergy to do the same, and returned to England after three months, expecting to visit Maryland again, but realising in time that there was more than enough work left for him to do in London including the three years it took him to finally get the Act of Parliament through to establish the Anglican Church in Maryland.

SPG got its Royal Charter in 1700 and became a major missionary society, and Bray went back to his rectory at Sheldon, but in 1708 he became Rector of St Botolph’s in Aldgate, and from here in London he was better able to continue training missionaries and making lists of books that he felt all clergy should read. He died in 1730.

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ARCHBISHOP JANANI LUWUM [1922-77] – Christians in Uganda seem to have had the worst luck in the world. On 29th October the church commemorates Bishop James Hannington and his companions who were tortured and executed by the Kabaka of Buganda in 1885; on 3rd of June ‘the martyrs of Uganda’ commemorates another atrocity in which Christian boys were burned alive for refusing to become ‘the Kabaka’s bedfellows. Now [17th of February] we turn to Archbishop Luwum, whose murder by Idi Amin shocked the whole world, as did his expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Asian business people and his defiance of Queen Elizabeth.

What went unnoticed by comparison was Amin’s murder of the former nationalist leader, the Catholic Benedicto Kiwanuka; thousands of other Christians, and his attempts to ethically cleanse entire peoples whom he considered as enemies: his overthrow of Milton Obote was initially welcomed by Britain and the rest of the world.

Amin was only in power for seven years, between 1971-8 before an ill-advised invasion of neighbouring Tanzania resulted in his fleeing the country for good. Neither, it appears, was there any significant minority of white settlers in the country, as there had been in neighbouring Kenya or Zimbabwe at independence in 1962. Time for some background.

The present nation of Uganda was carved out during the infamous ‘Scramble for Africa’ in the latter half of C19, occupying territory from the north shores of Lake Victoria bordered by Tanzania to the south; Kenya to the east, Sudan – now the Republic of South Sudan, to the north; Congo [formerly Zaire] Rwanda to the southwest. There are significant differences between the Nilotic-speaking cattle herders of the north of the country, and the Bantu-speaking agriculturalists in the south, but the principal established polity has been the kingdom of Buganda with roots in the trade with the Swahili culture along the east coast of the continent.

Buganda, together with Bunyoro, became the interior hub for delivering ivory, gold and slaves from the weaker tribes to serve coastal plantations, and those established on Zanzibar for clove cultivation, and for the Gulf States and Iran. This long-standing slave trade had nothing whatever to do with the Atlantic trade fostered by Europeans. The Arabic word ‘Abd [as in ‘Abdullah = slave of God] black African.

There had been a fragile regional balance of power among the courts of Bunyoro, Buganda and other smaller chiefdoms until Egyptian interests in the headwaters of the Nile made it necessary for the kings to admit Christian missionaries to their partially Islamized courts, creating a threat both politically and spiritually, not to mention that the kings were not best pleased to have Christians calling them to account for their morals. The Fact that Hannington entered the territory from the east gave rise to additional suspicion, and this forms the background to the atrocities of the 1880’s.

In 1922 a relatively enlightened colonial administrator named Lugard published a book in which he proposed that it was no longer feasible to retain colonies simply for the enrichment of the metropolitan, but that there is a responsibility to assist colonial possessions with their own development and progress towards eventual independence. This policy worked better where there was stable government already set up, so that the kingdom of Buganda benefitted most.

After World War 2 educated elites in most colonies were already pressing for independence, and certainly among French and British administrations questions were being asked about both the ethics and the practicality of keeping them on. Recent research, however, has shown that, in fact, civil servants who foresaw the inevitability of independence came to realise that this would come for the new nations with equally inevitable disappointments, so that, very cynically, governments wishing to keep their fledgeling independent nations onside were content to release them in the hidden knowledge that in many cases they would be likely to fail in the medium- or long-term. And that it would be expedient that this prospect should redound on the native governments rather than their own.

Although Uganda, with its predominantly agrarian economy, was relatively advanced, what was holding up independence was dissension among its political leaders. Buganda was unwilling to let go of the privileged position it had held under colonial rule, and it was only when Milton Obote formed a Uganda peoples’ Party in coalition with Kabaka Yekka, known affectionately later in England as ‘King Freddie,] that any chance of a stable government seemed likely.

At independence in 1962 the Kabaka was President of the Republic, but when Obote was universally condemned for gold smuggling, troops occupied the palace and ‘King Freddie’ was exiled: Obote took over the government, creating a one-party state, an efficient security system, and taking over 60% of banks, businesses and plantations; but he favoured his own people from the north, and in October 1971 to a chorus of general relief from all, Major-general Idi Amin engineered a coup.

There have been 150 such coups, and still counting, since Nkrumah’s bloodless removal from Ghana; the issue being whether the military would ever be able to set a government in order and retire back to barracks, or whether the example of one coup and disillusionment with its future doings would encourage more of the same.

If you have been reading these articles regularly you will have encountered two truths; firstly that many present European nations have taken centuries to evolve, if they ever have evolved completely in some cases: think of the convulsions Spain had to go through after the Arab conquest; Italy after having been ruled by Spain and France in the south and Austria in the north; Germany, a nation only since 1870, to say nothing of the Balkans, only released since 1918 from Ottoman and Hapsburg suzerainty.

Compare this history with the arbitrary meddling with borders by colonial powers in Africa and the Middle East and it should be clear that even with a fair wind it is likely to take centuries to stabilise, if they ever can with present borders. In 1978 there was a service of thanksgiving for Ghanaian independence at which the preacher reminded his congregation that whatever the expectations of a 21-year-old, one is not really entitled to make competent or accurate judgements about the life of an individual.

Secondly, the cruelty and ethnic cleansing that we hear about in the news so often from Africa is in no way different or worse than during, for example, the thirty-years’ war, the French wars of religion and their subsequent revolution, or the Viking raids; and certainly some of the stuff the Spanish conquistadors perpetrated in Latin America qualifies as ethnic cleansing. …

Janani Luwum’s father converted to Christianity and managed to send his son to school; education being entirely run by missionaries. He did well, went to Cambridge for two years and became a lay preacher. In time he was released to study for the priesthood and was ordained in 1956, and rapidly given 22 parishes to look after. Soon he was consecrated Bishop of Northern Uganda and in 1976, after another two years of advanced training in London, made Bishop of Equatorial east Africa. He was very conscientious both as parish priest and bishop, and much loved and admired.

Janani worked as best he could with Amin, whose erratic ways and instability made life extremely difficult: he would be called for a consultation or advice at little or no notice; and he spoke out so fearlessly against Amin’s cruelty and abuses that his peers at international conferences were afraid for him. With consummate courage and equanimity Janani carried on, bringing together a very large constituency of important people to sign a petition condemning Amin’s conduct, and when, at last, a car arrived to bring him to the dictator, he had no doubt whatever that he was going to his death, and stated that he was not afraid. He was never seen again.

Tanzanian sources claim that Amin shot him personally, but a story appeared in the news that the Archbishop had been killed in a car crash, but photos released to the press were found to be of wrecked cars that had been in garages for weeks previously; nobody ever believed that Archbishop Janani Luwum had not been murdered by Amin.