Yet, as Lienhardt had earlier remarked, this stereotype of ‘primitive peoples’ was contrary to reality; for ‘scepticism and an ironical recognition of the ambiguities of human experience and knowledge are undoubtedly found among them’. Even pagan religious experts, who were thought to be the fount of religious knowledge, could display (contrary to earlier expectations of ‘primitive religion’) a blend of faith and scepticism. Religious beliefs were the product not simply of traditional teaching, but of the will, and the reason, being brought to bear upon that teaching in the context of experience.

In focusing on religious experience and practice and in recognizing that scepticism is an inevitable companion to reasoning about faith, Lienhardt was able to suggest that the behaviour of people has often more in common than is apparent from their conceptions of gods. This humane understanding informed his own major field monograph, Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka (published by the Clarendon Press in 1951), which has become, over the last quarter of a century, a modern classic in the social anthropological study of religion. In it, he demonstrated in an African religion the sort of complexity and depth which he had already evoked in general terms. Divinity and Experience (now reissued in paperback) has had a marked impact on the study of African religion, and it is beginning to influence the study of religious practice and experience elsewhere, including regions of the Christian heartland. Godfrey Lienhardt has recently turned his own attention to the way in which missionaries operated among, and were received by, the Dinka, and it is from his study of ‘The Dinka and Catholicism’ (published in 1952) that several of the essays in this volume take their particular lead. In that paper Lienhardt asks, ‘What kind of translation, as it were, of experience was required for a Dinka to become a nominal or believing Christian?’ He proceeds to answer that question by examining the Dinka experience of a world in which Christianity had increasingly become established and suggests that the acceptance of the Church came through foreign secular ideas of progress and development, for the most part material, which had little to do with the main evangelical purposes or teaching of the missions’. Such ideas in the context of translation, along with new theological doctrine and notions of the human personality and soul, came to be ambivalently a part of the Dinka world through ‘a kind of linguistic parallax’ (the apparent displacement, or change, of objects in space as they are seen from different points of observation). Mutual re-definitions of Dinka words and meanings could in this way lead to

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2. Ibid., p. 325.
5. Ibid., p. 326.
new doctrinal orthodoxy where the authority of selected persons to define and
maintain it was acknowledged.

The gulf between the study of 'universal' and 'primitive' religions is not
what it was thirty years ago. Not only have anthropologists increasingly
applied their methods of enquiry to communities living within the compass of
the 'revealed' religions, but theologians and biblical scholars have taken a
greater interest in anthropological literature and lay perspectives upon the
sociology of religious questions and sacred texts. As examples representing the
wide range of rethinking in this field, we might mention the collection of essays
edited by Bernhard Lang, Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament
(Philadelphia and London 1986), and the special 1987 issue of American
Ethnologist on 'Frontiers of Christian Evangelism'. Comparative religion is
beginning to take account of the experiences and practices of Johnson's 'gross
men', within as well as outside the domain of 'Church history'.

Godfrey Lienhardt has played a quiet but sustained part in the achievement
of this change, not only through the example of his writings, but through his
personal encouragement of younger scholars in social anthropology and a
variety of related fields. In particular, in recent years he has organized a series
of colloquia in collaboration with colleagues in theology and European social
history, which have helped extend anthropological thinking about the older, as
well as the newer, province of Christendom. It is for these reasons that we
dedicate the present volume on the theme of vernacular Christianity to him as
a gift on the occasion of his retirement from formal duties as Reader in
Social Anthropology at the University of Oxford. We have brought together a
number of essays from former students and others who have found inspiration
in his work and whose own research has been sufficiently close to the general
theme for the making of a coherent study. Our fellow contributors join us in
offering this token collection in acknowledgement of an indebtedness and as
representative of an affection felt by a much wider range of persons than could
actually be included here.

W.J.
D.H.J.

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Vice-Principal in 1939-45. The cover illustrations of elders from the
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suitable representations for the theme of this book. They are from a series of
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Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art; subsequently some of his work was
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