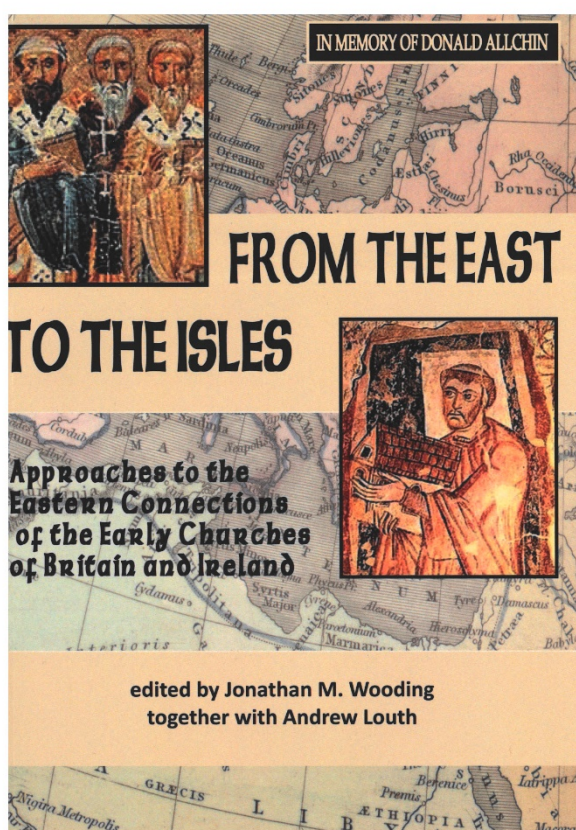


Jonathan Wooding, with Andrew Louth, eds. *From the East to the Isles: Approaches to the Eastern Connections of the Early Churches of Britain and Ireland*. Oxford: Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, 2019. 193 pp. ISBN 978-0-903190-32-9.

Reviewed by:

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This book published by the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius as a volume in the series *Studies Supplementary to Sobornost*, contains the papers given in 2008 in Lampeter, Wales, at a seminar jointly sponsored by the Celtic and Orthodox Study Centres. The volume includes nine essays, an appendix, and an appreciation of the life and work of the Rev Canon Donald Allchin to whose memory the publication is dedicated. The book has been ably edited by Dr Jonathan M Wooding, the Sir Warwick Fairfax

Professor of Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney, together with Father Andrew Louth, Professor Emeritus, Durham University, and General Editor of *Sobornost*. The papers have evolved since they were first given and contain the latest scholarship on their various subjects.

The person whose memory this volume is dedicated, the Rev Canon Donald Allchin, was a priest of the Church of England. Fr Louth describes him as one of “the core of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius for several decades” (p5). Metropolitan Kallistos Ware contributes a moving appreciation

of Fr Allchin's life and ministry (pp 15-23). The two of them met at Westminster School in the 1940s and remained good friends afterwards. The Metropolitan describes Allchin's education, ordination, ministry, interest in Orthodoxy and scholarly attainments. He says that Allchin was able to learn Welsh, a difficult language to learn and a beautiful language for singing. Metropolitan Kalistos speaks of discovering 'unexpected joy' in his friend, and of his appreciation of his friend's work and holiness.

There is a lecture given by Fr Allchin in the volume: "Celtic Christianity: Fact or Fiction" (pp 163-185), delivered on March 16 1993 following Fr Allchin's appointment to an Honorary Professorship at the University College of North Wales, Bangor. In this reviewer's opinion, this paper should be read first and then the rest of the papers. In this paper, Allchin describes what Celtic Christianity is and what it is not. He states very firmly that there was not a Celtic Church, "if by that is meant a unified, organised body in the Celtic lands independent of Rome, separate from the rest of the western Christian world" (p 166). He does; however, admit that "just as we may speak of the Christianity of the Syrian-speaking world, or the Coptic-speaking world, so we may speak of the Christianity of the Celtic-speaking world" (p 168). This is important, as when we understand the status of Celtic Christianity and the world in which it existed that we can begin to explore fruitfully the contacts between the Celtic west and the Eastern Mediterranean described in many of the other chapters in this volume.

Dr Jonathan J Wooding of the University of Sydney contributes a useful chapter, "'Feet in Ancient Times'? Myth and Reality in the Eastern Connection of the Early British and Irish Churches" (pp 24-53). He gives us a comprehensive and competent survey of the available evidence for contacts between the Eastern Mediterranean and Britain and Ireland. He begins one section of his paper with admission that "theories concerning direct eastern connections of the early British church have long pedigree" (p 26). This reviewer, for example, remembers being told of a story connection Joseph of Arimathea with Glastonbury. In a significant part of the paper, Wooding examines the archaeological evidence, especially the ceramics from the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa which have been found in Cornwall, Wales, and Ireland. This evidence demonstrates that seaborne links between these

areas did exist in early post-Roman times. If trade goods could travel by this route, then perhaps other things could also travel by the same route. Wooding says “religious influences might have travelled in more than one way” (p 45), and refers us to Bishop Arculf (p 46). However, demonstrating that something could have happened is not the same as demonstrating that it did happen. In his conclusion Wooding observes that “it cannot be too strongly said that a few eastern connections do not make Insular churches ‘eastern’ in affiliation...” (p 52). This is a very useful paper because it surveys a large amount of information.

Fr James Siemens gives us a highly competent paper, “Theodore of Tarsus and the Syrian Bequest” (pp76-88). Fr Siemens’ doctoral dissertation on Theodore of Tarsus was published as *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus: The Laterculus Malalianus and the Person and Work of Christ* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), and his work on Theodore has significantly advanced our knowledge of the archbishop. In this paper, Fr Siemens describes the theological knowledge which Theodore acquired in Syria, Constantinople, and Rome, and which he brought with him when he came to England to be Archbishop of Canterbury. Fr Siemens sees this as an example of the “palpable connections between Insular and eastern Mediterranean though in the early middle ages” (p 76). Fr Siemens considers that “he [Theodore] was a man of extensive and wide-ranging education who brought his considerable intelligence to bear on the great Christological questions of his time, to the care of the people of the church in Britain, and to the communication of an intellectual tradition inherited from antiquity and interpreted afresh for a post-Roman age” (p 84). This paper was a pleasure to read, it is erudite, well written, and admirably researched.

Another enjoyable paper, by John Morgan-Guy, titled “The Visit of the Eastern Metropolitans and Patriarchs to St David’s Cathedral in 1925” (pp 112-129) addresses the event that took place on July 14 1925. The visit commemorated the anniversary of the Council of Nicea and the Nicene Creed. The patriarchs were Photios of Alexandria and Damianos of Jerusalem, and the metropolitans included Antony of Kiev and Eulogius. Morgan-Guy describes the perils of Orthodox life in Russia under Lenin’s communist dictatorship and the difficult relationship of the two Russian metropolitans. We remember that

Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow died on April 7 1925 as a martyr. Morgan-Guy also describes the situation in the Near East, where Jerusalem was part of the British mandate of Palestine, and Alexandria in Egypt was just emerging into independence after a time as a British protectorate. Both patriarchs had good cause to be grateful for British political support. Wales in 1925 was not without its own ecclesiastical politics. The Church in Wales was appearing in its new disestablished status, trying to assert itself by stressing its links with the Celtic past and its connections with the Eastern Church. Further complicating the situation was the vexed condition of relations among the Archbishop of Wales, the Bishop of St David's and the Dean of St David's. The result is a fascinating story which Dr Morgan-Guy tells very ably.

It is difficult to do equal justice to the other chapters of this book. They are all written by competent scholars who are experts in their fields. These chapters are: "Papyrus in the Early Insular World" by Gifford Charles-Edwards and Helen McKee (pp 54-75); "Eriugena the Translator: An Insular Window on to the Byzantine World" by Andrew Louth (pp 89-99); "Eastern Influence on the Insular World: The Evidence of Early Irish Martyrologies" by Patricia Rumsey (pp 100-111); "Idealizing the 'Celtic Church' in Modern Orthodoxy" by Augustine Casiday (pp 130-146); and "Bypassing the Church: Some Reflections on Celtic Christianity and Orthodox Ecclesiology" by Valerie Morgan-Guy (pp 147- 162). This book was a pleasure to read and is an important contribution to the various fields of scholarship represented in its chapters. Equally importantly this reviewer learned from reading the book and recommends it highly to others. It may be useful for the readers of this review to know that Dr Wooding was the reviewer's supervisor for his PhD thesis, and that Fr Siemens is a good friend of long standing.

*About the reviewer:* Father Stephen Sharman is a priest at St. Nicholas parish in Narol, Manitoba. He received his PhD from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in 2013. The title of his dissertation was *Visions of Light in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*.