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NILE HARVEST: FOREWORD

There have in the past been several notable works of scholarship treating the history of the Church in Africa on a comprehensive scale. But recent opinion has favoured the more local approach, treating one region or state in greater detail, and recognizing the different factors that have shaped the stories of different parts of that vast continent. The advantage of such a regional treatment is nowhere more apparent than in the case of the Nile Valley which throughout its history has both affected and been affected by the Mesopotamian and Arabian civilisations.

Great rivers can be lines of communication that unite the territories through which they flow. But they can also be misleading symbols, tempting people to impose artificial unification that conflicts with other physical and historical factors. The Nile has exercised this fatal fascination upon the many would-be conquerors from the days of Pharaoh's double-crown to the protracted struggle that has bedevilled the Republic of the Sudan since its independence. How this has affected the fortunes of the Church in these lands, from the Mediterranean to the borders of Uganda, is unfolded in these chapters. It is a story of advance, decline and extraordinary tenacity, with many lessons for the Christian enterprise elsewhere, and it has for a long time needed a good interpreter.

Brian de Saram is wonderfully qualified to relate this history with understanding and balance. He and his wife worked in the south of the Sudan for twenty years. Then followed a period of eleven years on the head quarters staff of the Church Missionary Society, which gave him the opportunity of regular visits to many other parts of Africa. From 1972-77 he was Provost of the Cathedral in Cairo. It was a difficult period of change and considerable insecurity for the Christian community in Egypt, and he served the small Anglican Diocese of Egypt, the expatriate community and, indirectly, the important Coptic Church, with consummate skill, as an interpreter, enabler and spokesman. As a colleague and personal friend over

many years I have valued his insight, humour and
endurance, and I am grateful for this book.

Bishop John V Taylor
formerly Bishop of Winchester
and General Secretary of the
Church Missionary Society