

Angola

Angola was born beautiful
Its mighty rivers,
Grand panoramas,
Spectacular scenery
Conspire to offer habitat
To animals and birds of a bewildering variety.
Truly the Lord is in this swathe of Africa.

Angola has torn itself to shreds.
Destruction and decay,
Broken bridges,
Land mined roads,
Fallen trees
Combine to perpetuate the memory
Of internecine strife and fratricidal war.
Truly the Lord has been abandoned
In this lovely part of Africa.

Only bicycles can pass along the road
Between Cazombo and Luwawo.
Swampy paths
And daunting hills
Make even that so difficult,
Guerrilla base for many years.
The fighters still are there,
Retired now,
Living with their families,
In post-war anonymity.

A priest arrived one day,
The first for over thirty years.
The people of Mazoze had not received communion
Since before the Second Council.
Hoc est corpus meum was all the old remembered;
The language of an era dead and buried.
The Mass is now re-done in Portuguese and tribal tongues,
But though the words are comprehensible
The act itself is strange.

When symbols lose their meaning,
And bread and wine their sense,
What can ravaged communities do to lift up their hearts,
To lift them to the Lord?
With what remembered wisdom do they give their thanks and praise
To the Lord their God?
Or bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord,
The Lamb of God
Who takes away the sin of the world
And grants it peace?

It was God who brought the beauty of Angola into being
And loves it still.
Pray that the Angolan people may rediscover
Sacramental hope in the symbolism of sacrifice
And pure, unadulterated love.

The civil war in Angola and Mozambique had just finished. I wrote this reflection on my journey home.