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Vocation

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CHAMPAGNAT

AN INTERNATIONAL MARIST JOURNAL OF CHARISM IN EDUCATION

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Inside:

- The Leadership of Pope Francis
- The Treasures of Darkness

Champagnat: An International Marist Journal of Charism in Education
aims to assist its readers to integrate charism into education in a way that gives great life
and hope. Marists provide one example of this mission.

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Champagnat

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VIEWPOINT AND CONTRIBUTORS

Two prophets always emerge for me when I start planning and putting together the Marist publications: *Lavalla* and *The Champagnat Journal*. Over the past few weeks these two prophets have been Brothers Mark O'Connor and Brother Frank McGrath.

Mark has been instrumental for many years, in bringing speakers to Australia who can enliven our faith and help us to see a wider and at times exciting Christian Church beyond what we see at times in our own world. The guests and speakers that have come to Marist Youth Festivals and to give the Helder Camara lectures have been good for us and helped us to be creative in responding to the signs of the times.

Frank is an outstanding John Henry Newman scholar and his work is acknowledged both on the national and international scene. Pope Francis will canonize Newman this October. One of the treasures in the Province Archives is Frank's Doctor of Philosophy thesis that he completed in Oxford some years ago. It is a good connection for us: an Australian Marist who contributed to the process of Newman being considered and approved for canonization. There is further comment on Newman in these pages.

Thank you always to these Marists, and to all of the Marists, both men and women, who journey with us to make Jesus known and loved.

The following scholars presented the key papers for this edition of the Champagnat Journal:

1. Br Brendan Geary has just completed his nine-year mandate as Provincial of West-Central Europe, a ministry that was appreciated by all. He is now on sabbatical; and readers would remember that he has written for the Champagnat Journal on a number of occasions. His reflection on Fourvière is of interest to all Marists. It is central to our story and heritage particularly in Oceania as we approach our 150 years of service to this part of the world.

2. Cardinal John Dew is the sixth Archbishop of Wellington in New Zealand. He has been the Archbishop since 2005 and was created a cardinal by Pope Francis in 2015. Prior to his appointment to Wellington he was Director of Holy Cross Seminary, and after overseas studies, he was appointed Parish Priest in Newton. Cardinal Dew has been a popular appointment to the episcopate, and his work is appreciated not only in his own diocese but also throughout New Zealand. We print his lecture titled "The Leadership of Pope Francis" delivered recently in Australia as part of the Helder Camara series.

3. Dr Bonnie Thurston is a native of West Virginia. She is a New Testament scholar, author or editor of eighteen theological books and five collections of poetry. An ordained minister in the Protestant tradition, a spiritual director, and a foundation member of the Thomas Merton Society she has much to teach us. Her recent ministry in Australia included the famous reflection titled "Treasures of Darkness" with a focus on the Resurrection and the implications for us today of Jesus coming out of the dark tomb – simple, but a powerful point that enriches our spiritual lives.

4. Br Chris Wills is a member of the Australian Marist Province having recently returned from Rome where he spent a number of years working with the General Council on the Marist Solidarity agenda. This wonderful contribution continues back in Australia as he coordinates a number of projects supporting Marist collaboration and volunteering on both the national and international scene. His paper, "Bridge Builders" outlines recent developments in this area, and it is well worth reading, reflecting on, and if possible supporting such an important initiative.

Br Tony Paterson
Editor

THANK YOU

Our gratitude to those who have contributed papers to this edition, and to the proof-readers and to those who have assisted with the peer-review process. The Management Committee.

BR BRENDAN GEARY

Reflection

Fourvière: Icon and Triptych

On 23rd July, 1816 the newly ordained Marcellin Champagnat climbed the 800 steps to the Marial Shrine at Fourvière in Lyon, along with Jean – Claude Colin, Jean – Claude Courveille and nine other young men who were either seminarians or newly ordained priests. As we know, they made this pilgrimage in order to commit themselves to the foundation of a new religious order in the Church which they proposed to call, “Mary-ists.” They signed a pledge which outlined their plans. Fr. Donal Kerr, a Marist historian, commented on the Fourvière pledge as follows:

It is a generous and courageous statement by twelve young clerics. This pledge in its exalted piety, heroic commitment and romantic language bears the trace of the fervour of young neophytes emerging from the hothouse of the seminary which at that time St. Irénée certainly was.¹

I am not an artist, but I found myself wondering what I would expect to see if someone were to paint an icon of Fourvière. Would I look for a group of young men climbing a hill, or would I want to focus on the Mass in the newly restored church, which had been inaugurated by Pope Pius VII in 1805? Or would I want to put the emphasis on their expansive sense of mission, as they left the Church to go to their new parish appointments, with the pride and excitement of the newly ordained priests?

As I reflected on this question I realized that no one image could capture the essence of Fourvière for me. I wondered if a triptych might better express the meaning of Fourvière, and its significance for today.

CLIMBING THE HILL OF FOURVIÈRE.

The image of 12 young men climbing the steps to Fourvière works effectively as a metaphor for the individual stories and shared experience of the men who made their way to the top of the hill that morning. They had all been touched by the profound changes ushered in by the French Revolution, the rise of Napoleon, establishment of the Empire, and the consequences in every part of France of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. They also lived through unprecedented changes in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the French state.

They all had their own individual journeys. Marcellin Champagnat had to overcome a lack of formal education, limitations in his academic ability, and the death of his father in 1804 and his mother in 1810. Jean – Claude Colin lost both of his parents before he was five years old, and was brought up by his uncle, and a housekeeper who was pious but rather dominating. We know that our adult lives are marked – for good and ill – by experiences in childhood.

The young seminarians were inspired by the vision of Jean-Claude Courveille to found a Marist Society, and had many meetings to discuss and clarify their ideas prior to their ordination. We also know that the establishment of the Society of Mary, Fathers and Brothers, Sisters and Missionary Sisters, and the Marist Brothers, had many uphill moments in the years after the Pledge that was made at Fourvière. In that sense, the image of the young men climbing the hill in the early morning is a good image that captures part of the Fourvière experience.

1 Kerr, Donal. (2000). *Jean – Claude Colin, Marist. A founder in an age of revolution and restoration: the early years 1790– 1836.* Dublin: Columba Press, p. 141.

MASS AND PLACING THE PLEDGE ON THE ALTAR

The Mass which was celebrated by Courveille was a solemn moment. It was the culmination of their personal journeys and shared discussions in the seminary. Such moments are important in life. They help us to articulate what is important for us, and are part of the process of maturity as we make a public statement of our hopes and life plans, involving a commitment to others and to ourselves. We pledge to use our efforts and energies in pursuit of a dream and a common purpose. Like treasured wedding, profession, ordination or graduation photos, they capture a moment in time which contains a marvelous and inspiring human story.

ITE MISSA EST

After the Mass was over the twelve young men left to return to the seminary or to begin their new parish missions. The Mass was ended: the mission had begun. As we know, only four of the twelve signatories continued to be part of the Marist project. For the others this commitment was seen, perhaps, as part of their youthful enthusiasm. No doubt it remained as a cherished memory of idealism and brotherhood, as they went about their ministry as diocesan priests.

FOURVIÈRE TODAY: THE UNFOLDING STORY

My triptych begins with a group climbing a hill and ends with dispersal to the world. The Marist story involves all three movements: the personal

stories and shared moments that bring us to this point in time, key moments of celebration and commitment, and moving outward in mission.

We know that the early Marist founders had a vision of a tree with many branches. The branches that were obvious to them were branches of priests, coadjutor brothers, and sisters. We know that Fr. Champagnat wanted something different – brothers who would be professional teachers, who would also break new ground in their ministry by learning how to teach deaf children, for example. Fr. Colin, who never fully understood Champagnat's vision for his brothers, did have a sense of a lay branch, which was never developed in a satisfactory way in his life time.

If we return to my imaginary triptych, perhaps the unfolding Fourvière story is asking us to revisit the initial vision to find a way for the lay dimension of the Marist project to be more fully developed. One of the foundational insights of the Second Vatican Council was the universal call to holiness, reminding us that the Church is the whole People of God – and not only bishops, priests, and professed brothers and sisters. The decline in vocations to consecrated Marist life, and the expanding interest of teachers, administrators, fellow workers, carers, friends and others who have a relationship with us, who express a desire to participate more fully in the life, leadership and management of the Marist Institute, offer us a new hill to climb, leading us to a second Fourvière, where the original vision can be fulfilled in a way we could not have dreamt of, even fifty years ago.

BR CHRIS WILLS

Bridge Builders

Supporting Marist Collaboration & Volunteering

The Bridge Builders program has recently been launched on various Marist websites and introduced into the communications' stream by leaders of key ministries. The program is a service to those ministries and to all Marists.

Bridge Builders aims to cultivate the call of the XXII General Chapter which invites us all to be a Global Charismatic Family so that we are Beacons of Hope in a turbulent world.

Here are three stories that illustrate the possible. Bruno is a layman from Brazil who has volunteered in East Harlem and Lebanon with shorter experiences in Syracuse, Romania and Aleppo between 2016 and 2019. He is now back in his province working as a vocational animator. He has connections with Br João Batiste, another Brasileiro in Timor Leste. Beth is a teacher from Galen College in Wangaratta. She has become the mainstay of youth ministry and animator of the international Marcellin House young adult community in South Africa. She was introduced to this role by Bec Bromhead who in October took on the role of CEO of Australian Marist Solidarity. There is also an update on Tom Milliken who has recently completed six months in Sucombios, Ecuador and is moving to San José de Chiquitos, Bolivia. He travelled by bus – 4,654km!

Chris Wills fms

BRUNO'S LETTER:

"To discover the other, to live with the other, to understand the other, let yourself be shaped by the other, doesn't mean to lose your identity, to reject your values, it means to enjoy the difference" (Pierre Claverie, 1938-1996).

Dear friends, I am home. No, not just now, for some time, but I'm still trying to absorb all the learning of these almost three years in Marist Communities around the world. I'm sincere when I say that making a decision to go, with all the resignations that this brings, was hard, but even worse is to prepare the landing for another new



Nina and Diogo are members of the Lavalla200> community in Atlantis, South Africa

beginning on return. However, now I'm living in happiness and enjoying everything that has been lived in mission.

Life requires beginnings, ends and new beginnings. There is spring only if there is to be autumn and how beautiful autumn is, silence and waiting for another spring.

I left home at age 27 and returned at 30. I left with my interior backpack full of repeat things and made sure to empty it and, then, fill it up with a lot of plurality. I lived in Harlem in New York and Rmeileh in Lebanon, passed by Siracuse (Italy), Moinești (Romania) and Aleppo (Syria). In each corner, I met and lived with many 'good people', people I admire, even more now when I sit in silence and do a synthesis of my experience during this period. These people are strong men and women, of fiber, who daily give themselves for an ideal, that is dedicated in gratitude for the other's life. People who fight, cry, laugh and carry on with seriousness a wonderful work/mission. Good people, tireless people.

I left home to get answers. I think that I didn't find any (that's good), but I found many questions. And these questions, now, will be/are being replied to in my new way of life. Since in Lebanon I lived

close to evangelical routes, like the converted Paul, I recognize that my daily goal now is to take to myself the description that Paul says to Timothy (2 Timothy 4,7) and, without pretense to be holy, keep the verb of the passage in the infinitive and, thus, *try to fight the good fight, keep on the way and persevere in the faith.*

Just to let you know, I returned to work in the Marist Province of Brazil Centro-Sul on February 1st. Now, I'm working with vocational animation.

I'm happy, accomplished and living in fullness!

Thanks for your support, friendship and marvelous companionship in this period.

You can bank on me in the things with which I can help.

Fraternally,

Bruno Manoel Socher, Curitiba, Brazil



Marist Young Adult Community, Marcellin House, Johannesburg. Beth is 2nd from left

BETH'S LATEST REPORT:

Beth Code – Johannesburg

It is extremely exciting to be 6 months into my two-year commitment as Marist Youth Coordinator – South Africa. The Marist Youth Community is growing, and we have so many new initiatives and projects on the go which I am so blessed to be a part of. There is certainly a need for Marist Youth in SA, and is incredibly rewarding to be part of the foundation for that. We have implemented monthly Taizé Services, Marist SA Pub Talks (though its pubs are different here – we meet in restaurants and cafés), in partnership with Marist schools working on The Menstrual Project, 24 Hour Silent Retreats, and continuing with all the previous Youth initiatives; service projects, Formation Retreats, Monthly Suppers and Dinners.

In addition to my Marist Youth Coordinating role, I now also work for the Marist School

Council (MSC) and Custodians. The result is I am working very closely with Mike Greeff – MSC Director and I am finding working with him to be absolutely fabulous, I am very much looked after and supported as well as constantly learning about the other side of Marist.

As with any new country, I of course struggled with a change of culture, and trying to adapt to a very new way of life, but this is also an exciting change as you learn more about yourself in the process. There are many people I can turn to for assistance who offer spiritual guidance, a helping hand or even a chance to take a step back, relax and have a drink of the incredible gin SA has to offer.

South Africans are so open-hearted and kind, and I feel so very welcome. I have tea with the Brothers daily and am embracing being part of the Marist Lay community. Such a beautiful country, and it is a wonderful blessing to be able to be part of a Marist Community.

TOM MILLIKEN UPDATE:

It has been a wonderful, challenging, and adventurous Marist experience in Abya Yala, Sucumbios, in the Ecuadorian Amazon region.

Teaching physics to the high school students has been a joy. There has been lots of strong rapport and friendships grown with the students.

In the last few weeks of teaching we had our farewells and our school-leavers “schoolies” week which was a week full of adventures and sightseeing at one of the cuyabeno, amazon rainforest lodges.

It was hard to leave and say goodbye to the students as we were like a big family unit in the college.

I will surely cherish these wonderful Marist experiences in Ecuador. Next, in Bolivia, I'm looking forward to the mission work and diving head-first into whatever roles I can help in. I hope to keep a positive mindset, cheerful, and with Christ as the key.



Tom with young Ecuadoreans

CARDINAL JOHN DEW

Helder Camara Lecture 2019

THE LEADERSHIP OF POPE FRANCIS

It was just on 8am in New Zealand on 14th March 2013, 13th March in Rome, when it was announced that Jorge Bergoglio had been elected the Bishop of Rome. I had just begun the 8am Mass at the Cathedral when one of the priests came in and handed me a note with this news.

As soon as Mass was finished, I rushed back over to our house and watched some of the television coverage. As I watched my first thoughts were *“this is a man of incredible freedom, he is his own man, and he is going to do things his way.”* I was thinking that not too far away was his predecessor, Pope Benedict, but the new Bishop of Rome was clearly not wondering about that his predecessor might be thinking or have done as he began to do things differently.

His first words were simple: *“Brothers and sisters, good evening,”* he then asked the assembled people to pray for him.

He accepted the stole for the blessing, then took it off and handed it back.

He rode in the bus rather than a limousine. The next day he chose to wear a simple mitre and vestments.

A few weeks later the world saw a little boy come up onto the stage in the Paul VI Audience Hall, he stood next to Francis, others tried to get him away, some looked disapprovingly. Francis patted him on the head, and allowed him to stay and play. then spoke about how the boy was mute and *“was free to play in front of everyone.”* He used this as a teaching moment.

What is it about Francis that allows him to be so easy, open, clear and almost counter cultural to Church and society?

He leads out of his own inner authority, sure of who he is before God and content to be who he is. He is content to be a flawed human being, flawed but still chosen because of the goodness of God’s

mercy and grace. Remember the question of the reporter, *“Who are you”* and his response *“I am Jorge Bergoglio, a sinner.”* He was obviously very aware and very comfortable with his identity as a sinner. It was a real Jesuit response. One of the decrees to come out of the 1975 General Congregation of the Jesuits was called *“Jesuits Today.”* The opening sentence of that reads; *“What is it to be a Jesuit? It is to know that one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was.”* Francis has never been afraid to acknowledge that he is *“flawed, but called.”*

That’s a very different way to lead in today’s world which looks for extraverted power, efficiency, productivity and quick decisions. Where there is an attitude of get to the top, trample over anyone who gets in your way, don’t show any weakness or frailty, be right, be great, be important. Francis is happy to lead as a flawed human being, and shows us that it is really the only way to lead.

He is now 82 years of age. He seems to be in pain a times as he almost hobbles along, but he keeps going. In his travels to some countries he endures intense heat and hardly bats an eyelid. I look at this sometimes and wonder how day after day he can keep going, and some days he is meeting hundreds of people a day, with a word for each of them ,a smile- and often the chance to ask a question of someone or tell them something he wants them to know about or take action on. He sees, listens and hears. He has complete trust in God and keeps on going.

It is very clear in all the comments about the conclave that elected him that there were many calls, including his own, for the reform of the Roman Curia. He knew that it had to be done, and he is making great efforts to do so. In the recent document *Praedicate Evangelium [“Preach the Gospel”]*, he put the work of evangelization at the

centre of the Roman Dicasteries, even above the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The biggest novelty in the document is the establishment of the “super dicastery” for evangelization, which has the potential to be more important than the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), often called “The Supreme Congregation.”

That takes courage, I have been privileged to see him lead with courage, conviction and compassion. There is another lesson in leadership here.....How was he to go about this? He was now the Pope, he had the authority, he could have just gone ahead and made his own decisions. But no, he chose to gather a group of advisors around him, initially known as the C8, then the C9 when he added Cardinal Parolin, now I am not sure whether it is C5 or C6, but they continue to meet to advise him. Once again, this was coming out of his Jesuit background and straight from the Jesuit Constitutions where Ignatius had legislated that leaders “*should have persons designated to give counsel, with whom they should consult on the matters of importance which arise.*” (Constitutions 810). His leadership shows us that he is not afraid to consult and include others, he admits he does not have all the answers. Leaders who think they do have all the answers are often described as “arrogant,” that is not an adjective we could ever use for Pope Francis. In fact the word I hear most to describe him is “Authentic.” People follow a leader who is an authentic human being, one they know they can trust and who is in touch with life. He knows that authenticity, kindness, a smile are what speaks to the hearts of people today

He has shown us something else, awareness: he is aware of what is happening all around the world. Think of the way he has brought human trafficking to the world’s attention and has inspired others to tackle the problem which he refers to as “Modern day slavery.” Think of how within a few weeks he travelled to Lampedusa and put the plight of refugees on the world map. He highlighted the thousands who had lost their lives fleeing from Africa to look for a new and safe life. The first time he visited that island he challenged the world not to be complacent, he thanked the people of that tiny island for welcoming the migrants and for being an example of solidarity to a “*Selfish society which is sliding into the globalization of indifference.*” In commemorating the thousands who had lost their lives he emphasised his drive to put the poor

at the centre of his papacy.

Six days after his election – the Feast of St Joseph, Pope Francis declared unambiguously that “*Authentic power is service.*”

In 2015, at the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops he said in his speech “*Let us never forget this! For the disciples of Jesus, yesterday, today and always, the only authority is the authority of service, the only power is the power of the cross. As the Master tells us: “whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave” (Mt 20:25–27). In these words we touch the heart of the mystery of the Church, and we receive the enlightenment necessary to understand our hierarchical service.*”

For me that says so much about the type of leader he is.....he shows us that too, and hearing him say that day in 2015 “*the only authority is the authority of service*” reinforced for me what leadership is all about, those words are burnt into my mind and I repeat them often to our priests and lay pastoral leaders.

In that same speech he said..... “*From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I sought to enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council. For Blessed Paul VI, the Synod of Bishops was meant to reproduce the image of the Ecumenical Council and reflect its spirit and method. Pope Paul foresaw that the organization of the Synod could “be improved upon with the passing of time”. Twenty years later, Saint John Paul II echoed that thought when he stated that “this instrument might be further improved.We must continue along this path. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.*”

What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word “synod”. Journeying together — laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice.

In the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, I emphasized that “all the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients.” Francis is very clear that we are in this TOGETHER.

I sometimes think *Evangelii Gaudium* is his best document, then I think that it might be *Misericordiae*

Vultus, proclaiming the Year of Mercy. They are both documents which give us his vision for the Church. There are other important documents;

Laudato Si in which everyone is challenged to take care of our common home, to protect the word gifted to us by God;

Gaudete et Exsultate reminding us that holiness is for everyone, the saints are the ordinary everyday people who do their every-day tasks with joy and commitment; *Christus Vivit* emphasising the place of the Young in our Church today.

It's easy to quote from any of those documents and to use words that are powerful, eloquent and challenging. In February of last year the Pope spoke to Anti-Usury organizations, he said: "*Usury humiliates and kills. Usury is an ancient and unfortunately still concealed evil that, like a snake, it strangles its victims...*" That is very direct speaking, they are great words.

I come back to **MERCY**, very early the analysts started saying that **MERCY** was the word the Pope was using the most. It was a brilliant initiative to proclaim the Year of Mercy and to emphasise that we are a Church of mercy. Francis knew at a young age that he was "*chosen in mercy*." We probably all know the story of him going out one Saturday evening with his mates, he decided to go to Confession and while there his life was changed as he heard those words – "*chosen in mercy*." That's the motto he chose when he became bishop, it's the motto he still uses today.

In announcing the Year of Mercy he wrote. "*We recall the poignant words of Pope St John XXIII when opening the Second Vatican Council, he indicated the path to follow "Now the Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy, rather than taking up the arms of severity."* MV 4 I

In the same document he expressed confidence that the Church would open its doors to the full realization of the power of Mercy in our World... "*Mercy is the very foundation of the Churches life. All her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Churches very credibility is seen in how she always shows mercy and compassionate love*" MV 10

He has told us time and time again that the credibility of the church is seen when we walk with our people, when we journey with them at whatever stage of life's journey they are on, where we don't judge them, but encourage and enable

them to continue on their journey.....our presence, actions and companionship supports them as they try – as we all do – to Walk the Way of Jesus, Tell the Truth of Jesus and Live the Life of Jesus. He is very aware, and he reminds us of the first lines of *Gaudium et Spes*. "*The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.*" (GeS 1)

Pope Francis is showing in his leadership that ALL the baptised are engaged in the life of the Church, that ALL are to be "*journeying together*." What does that imply for us as leaders? Clearly that every effort needs to be made to draw more and more people into the life of the Church..... Ministry is not something we do to people, it is something we do together. The Church is not the domain of the ordained, it is the place of all the baptised. He clearly sees that his emphasis on SYNODALITY is the way to include people in decisions to do with their local Church.

He has emphasised the peripheries, the edges, the outskirts...he does not just talk about it, he goes there, either physically or symbolically...this year alone he has been to Panama, United Arab Emirates, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania; he is yet to visit Mozambique in September, Madagascar and Mauritius, and Japan in November.....he is about to hold a Synod for the Amazon ...he is concerned about the effects of climate change, deforestation, etc....

For his first formal visit to a Roman parish in May 2013 Francis chose not a Baroque masterpiece near the Vatican but travelled to the outskirts of the city because, as he told the parishioners "*We understand reality not from the centre, but from the outskirts*." Just before he visited that parish he said 'We should not lock ourselves up in our parish, among our friends ...with people who think as we do – but instead the Church must step outside herself. To go where? To the outskirts of existence, wherever they may be.' Address 18th May 2013

A few weeks later he told Jesuit journalists from La Civillita Cattolica "*Your proper place is on the frontier not to build walls but bridges.*" (14th June 2013)

I couldn't speak on the leadership of Pope Francis without saying something about the way he has tackled the crisis and scandal of sexual abuse within the Church. Very early he established the

Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. The commission received its statutes in 2015 as part of the Church's efforts to deal with the scandal of sex abuse. Its singular purpose was to propose initiatives that could protect children from paedophiles in the church. Following a slow start the Commission began meeting with bishops and sponsoring training for church staff worldwide. The most significant proposal of the commission, the creation of an in-house Vatican tribunal to judge cases of bishops who are accused of failing to protect victims, was approved by Francis but was not implemented. That of course has been rectified in recent months (May this year) with the publication of the *Motu Proprio Vos Est Lux Mundi* which has very stringent reporting expectations. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontifical_Commission_for_the_Protection_of_Minors - cite_note-4

August last year, at the World Meeting of Families, was a particularly difficult time for the Pope and for the Church. Many accusations were being made about the Church and about the Pope's Leadership. On the Sunday morning Archbishop Viganò's call came for him to resign, he remained silent. I was about three yards away from the Pope at the Mass in Phoenix Park that afternoon. He made the sign of the Cross, reached into his pocket and took out a handwritten note ...showing he could be adaptable and take into account the particular moment and make changes because of the seriousness of the situation. In a hand written note in Spanish – which became the penitential Rite- he was able to mention that he had met the day before with eight abuse victims, asked pardon for abuse in Ireland and particularly in Institutions run by the Church, forgiveness for children taken away from their mothers, he asked forgiveness for those children who went looking for their mothers and were told that they were committing a mortal sin. In this Penitential Rite he managed to mention so many things, showing he could be flexible and that it was important to acknowledge all those who had been hurt by the Church in the past.

His leadership meant that he called the Presidents of Bishops Conferences from all over the world to Rome in February of this year. It was made very clear that we always put victims first, that this is a problem we all must face together, the abuse of clerical power and clericalism is at the heart of this crisis. One of his priorities is to end

clericalism and empower the laity, and he has been clear *"To say NO to abuse is to say an empathic No to all forms of clericalism."* Broadly speaking, clericalism refers to the abuse of power by any person with authority in the Church. Behind it lies a false sense of *"entitlement,"* an attachment to power and privilege. It encourages an obsession with ladder climbing and obedience. Instead Francis asks as he asked the Bishop of Brazil in 2013 *"can the Church today still 'warm the hearts' of its faithful with priests who take the time to listen to their problems."* He went on to say, *"we must train ministers capable of warming people's hearts, of walking with them in the night, of dialoguing with their hopes and disappointments, of mending their brokenness."* That is very different to an attitude where bishops and priests think they are set apart and are unaccountable to anyone.

In a book written by Chris Lowney *"Pope Francis Why He Leads the Way he Leads"* he recalled an interview with a former student of Fr Bergoglio at a Jesuit secondary school in Argentina. The former student recounted the story in an interview with the author. *"It happened during some sports match. I slapped a younger kid, the kind of thing that happens in sports, nothing out of the ordinary, and a typical 'youth brawl' happened."* Fr. Bergoglio found out about it, *"he asked me to show up the next day in one of the classrooms at a certain time."*

"So, when I get there, I see ten of my best friends sitting in a circle, and Fr Bergoglio sitting off to the side. He told me I should tell my friends in detail what had happened, and it became something that stuck with me for life. They were understanding, they gave advice, and somehow I felt as if a load had been lifted off me – I felt no reproach or attacks from them." Fr Bergoglio never intervened but merely watched as the friends ran the meeting and eventually decided the appropriate punishment: he was suspended from sports for two weeks and had to call the younger kid out of class to apologize for what he had done.

Look at the great lesson in human development Fr Bergoglio managed to squeeze from one childhood fistfight on the playground. We would probably focus on misbehaviour; he focused on forming a young person to lead life well. He brought together this young man and his classmates, then trusted them to orchestrate their own mini seminar on human frailty, on dignity, on assuming leadership, and on accepting the call to be a better version of oneself. The young man concerned

summed up the episode: *“Jorge Mario Bergoglio was above all a person who helped to draw the best out of each one of us, who really raised our self-esteem.”*

In August 2016 when a Former Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark – a well-known agnostic, was campaigning for the position of Secretary General of the United Nations. She was asked about Leadership in the world today and who she saw as world leaders.

She replied – *“I look around the world at who is providing a sense of inspiration and hope at the moment. It’s the Pope. I am not a Catholic, but I recognise in this man tremendous goodness. A voice of sanity in a troubled world, often speaking what we all feel but could not express as eloquently. So, yes, leadership matters and he is giving that leadership.”*

The day Laudato Si was released to the world I had been invited to a Day of Prayer and Reflection with the women and men religious of the diocese. A Sister visiting from England was leading the day, she had spent most of the night analysing the Encyclical. Among the many passages she drew to our attention was Paragraph 148, where the Pope speaks of densely populated cities, where there is pollution, lack of water, facades of buildings are derelict, people live amid disorder and uncertainty. He says *“The feeling of asphyxiation brought on by densely populated residential areas is countered if close and warm relationships develop, if communities are created, if the limitations of the environment are compensated for in the interior of each person who feels held within a network of solidarity and belonging. In this way, any place can turn from being a hell on earth into the setting for a dignified life.”*

I don’t think he is just speaking of the vast polluted cities of the world, I think he is also speaking of our parish and religious communities, our Catholic schools and colleges, the various movements we have in the Church today.....

..... our task is to develop and create –

close and warm relationships ,

communities of care

look to the interior of each person

hold others within a network of solidarity and belonging.....

Thenwe can together turn what looks like hell on earth for some people into a setting for a dignified life.

Throughout his ministry Pope Francis has lived

servant leadership.

He is self and other aware, he listens, empathises, teaches, challenges thinking, is ceaselessly kind and acts to change people and the systems that oppress or disempower whether in the church or society.

My first-hand experience of Francis and my study of his documents and letters provide me with inspiration and courage. His example of servant leadership is in word and actions. He challenges us to follow Christ’s words and actions.

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for others”.

We are called to think, talk and act as servant leaders and to be open enough to the Spirit to respond with courage and humility in the face of opposition, destructive negativity or seemingly impossible situations.

In April of this year Francis hosted a healing and reconciliation retreat in Santa Marta. He pleaded with the three political faction leaders from the South Sudan.

“To the three of you who have signed the peace agreement, I ask you as a brother: stay in peace, I am asking you with my heart. Let us go forward. There will be many problems but they will not overcome us. Go ahead, go forward, and resolve the problems.

There will be struggles and disagreements amongst you, but let this be within the community – inside the office, as it were – but in front of the people, hold hands, united; so as simple citizens you will become fathers of the nation.”

Francis, aged 82, then knelt down and kissed the first leaders feet. He was helped up and he kissed the second leaders feet, was helped up and then kissed the third leaders feet.

The Pope knelt and kissed their feet!

This is the example of servant leadership that we are challenged to emulate. This is the Spirit of Servant leadership that Christ calls us to live in our different ministries.

“Let us never forget this! For the disciples of Jesus, yesterday, today and always, the only authority is the authority of service, the only power is the power of the cross”.

Today we are challenged to be servant leaders and disciples who through our obvious and daily words and actions are radical living witnesses of Jesus’ love, mercy, compassion and hope.

FROM THE PROVINCE ARCHIVES

One of the significant scholars in the Australian Marist Province is Brother Frank McGrath who has spent most of his life studying and writing on and about the life and legacy of John Henry Newman.

On October 13th of this year, Pope Francis will canonize this famous Englishman who was born in 1801 and died in 1890. Newman was a theologian and poet; he was an important and at times controversial figure in the religious history of 19th Century England. He was initially an Anglican priest, converted to Catholicism, and was ordained a Catholic priest. He was a member of the Oratory Community in Birmingham, and eventually Papa Nino made him a Cardinal.

When I was in the Scholasticate at Nicholson Street in Melbourne for one year, Frank McGrath was a member of the community (we were both doing the Clinical Pastoral Education course with a number of other Brothers) and it was a great privilege to live with Frank. He spoke about Newman all the time, and gave us some formal lectures on the saint. Frank eventually headed off to do his Doctor of Philosophy on Newman at Oxford University; and the rest is history by way of his contribution to the life and times of this man. I can remember Frank's stories: those centered on Newman's ideas around university education (his book "The Idea of a University" first published in 1852 is in our Archives); and for me a famous book titled "The Present Position of Catholics in England" published in 1851. I am sure that a reader may be interested in writing a similar book appropriately titled "The Present Position of Catholics in Australia in 2020"?

Newman was not afraid to say what he thought, and even though I am not a scholar of his, the sermons and letters bequeathed to us indicate a man of great faith in God and his neighbor. The fact that he advocated the Church hierarchy consulting the laity on theological matters, and that the Holy Spirit works through all of us is still somewhat revolutionary for some people.

Thank you to Br Frank McGrath for his great work in this field.



"Tracts for the times"

Image of Newman as it appeared in 'Vanity Fair' in January 1877.



Newman's Grave at Oratory House, Rednal.



Marist Community at Wolverhampton in England. Br Frank McGrath is standing third from left. Photograph taken on 6th June 1988 – Feast of St Marcellin Champagnat.

BONNIE THURSTON

“...the treasures of darkness...”¹

Poetic Musings toward a Spiritual Theology of Darkness

“...to remain in that place of light, I must know I
am a guest brought out of darkness.”²

Dom Eric Varden

INTRODUCTION (MILDLY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL)

My private life of prayer and public life as poet and biblical scholar has been obsessed with the reality and images of darkness. Only recently have they become sources of light, have I come to some glimmering insight about light shining *in* darkness. (John 1:5) This may be one of the considerable gifts of aging. Or perhaps the treasure of darkness has been given, as it usually is, by crossing its threshold, or by looking carefully at the biblical metaphors and how some of our best poets courageously inhabited darkness and articulated the experience. Paraphrasing 2 Peter, I suggest poetry can be “a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises...”. (2 Peter 1:19) Lots of us inhabit lots of dark places, but experience rather less dawning. Why is that?

My introduction to theology was English literature. The classic English poets provided glimpses of what Paul Tillich called “Ultimate Concern,” the Great Mystery of God. [Caedmon, Spencer, Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, Milton, Blake, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Eliot, Auden] They are

fundamentally theological not only thematically, but in use of language. Formative theologians of the Western Church, Sts. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, suggest God is known (if known at all) by comparison. In Book II of *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine wrote of “perceiving through similitude.” Similitude, or metaphor, is the language of poetry and of biblical theology. Biblical theologians and poets use metaphorical language to illustrate and suggest things otherwise inexpressible.³ As Dom Michael Casey explains, spiritual and theological language “is metaphorical because what is being described is meta-experiential.”⁴

The Psalter, the Prophetic writings, and numerous canticles in the New Testament preclude the need to apologize for poetry as a source of theology. We *al dhimi*, people of scriptural books, have always done so. In its multi-valiancy the Bible is more like poetry than prose precisely in its extensive use of allusive and metaphorical language to express its truths. The parables of Jesus indicate the poetic nature of Christ’s diamond-bright mind. Indeed, John’s Jesus says explicitly that metaphor is His method: “I have said these things to you in figures of speech.”⁵ (John 16:25) In his remarkable book, *The Shattering of Loneliness*, Abbot Erik Varden, OCSO writes, “a biblical mind is alert to a range of associations.”⁶

1 Isaiah 45:3

2 Erik Varden, *The Shattering of Loneliness* (London: Bloomsbury/Continuum, 2018) 45.

3 I have written about this in more detail in “Words and the Word: Reflections on Scripture, Prayer and Poetry,” *The Way*, April, 2005 (44/2) 7-20.

4 Michael Casey, *Strangers to the City* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2013/2018) 156.

5 This may be a dangerous method: “Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.” John 10:6

6 Erik Varden, *The Shattering of Loneliness* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018) 90.

In his book *The Luminous Dusk*, Professor Dale C. Allison, Jr. reminds us that “Throughout the world’s religions darkness is...the outstanding symbol of evil.” Although his argument concludes on a different note, Allison gives “indisputable reasons” for “the unpleasant associations of darkness so fixed in the human mind.”⁸ When we mention “darkness” common connotations are of evil, malevolence, the horrible, if not the disgusting. I hardly need give examples of contemporary darkness. If you think I do, I gently suggest you are not paying attention.

Wait. Please don’t race for the exits. This talk is not a “downer.” I hope by its (relatively speedy) conclusion we shall have glimpsed another side of darkness, what St. Gregory of Nyssa in the 4th century, St. Gregory Palamas (quoting Dionysius the Areopagite) in the 14th, Welsh metaphysical poet Henry Vaughn in the 17th, and Albert Einstein in the 20th called “dazzling darkness.” We begin where we shall end, with this image of “dazzling darkness” in the last stanza of Vaughn’s poem “The Night.”

There is in God (some say)

A deep, but dazzling darkness; As men here
Say it is late and dusky, because they

See not all clear

O for that night! Where I in him
Might live invisible and dim.⁹

After brief grounding in biblical theology, we proceed to three modern, English-language poets, 2 English men, 1 American woman, who entered the reality of darkness: Gerard Manley Hopkins, R.S. Thomas, and Jane Kenyon. They found therein “the treasures of darkness” and gave us “riches hidden in secret places.” (Isaiah 45:3) They awaken us to the “dazzle” in the darkness, which is good news since there is so much darkness.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY (LARGELY JOHANNINE)

John scholars note the poetic nature of that gospel’s prologue, frequently calling it the “Logos hymn.” [C.F. Burney argued that if John’s Greek

were translated back into Aramaic a hymn of eleven couplets emerges. Bultmann agreed, adding that the hymn was originally a Gnostic composition by followers of John the Baptist which John the Evangelist appropriated to praise Jesus Christ. More recently G.R. Beasley-Murray notes the “poetic quality of the prologue is observable, even in translation.”¹⁰] Raymond E. Brown terms 1:1-18 “The Introductory Hymn” structured around four strophes.¹¹ Scholars divide the poem differently, but most agree John 1: 1-18 is, or contains, a poem.

John’s poem makes a startling assertion about light and darkness: when the *Logos* entered the sphere of creation “...in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:4b-5) In Genesis, light was God’s first creation. (More on that later.) John suggests the Ur-light is *reintroduced* into creation through the Word Who has entered its darkness. In discussing Athanasius, Abbot Varden suggests “...God’s intervention in the incarnation of the Word...was not primarily a matter of sin or redemption.... What God had in mind was not so much redemption as recreation.”¹² St. John asserts this re-creation through reintroduction of Light. To clarify light’s source, he inserts a prose explanation introducing John the Baptist, not the light, but witness to it. “The true light, with enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” (1:9) John’s gospel declares that Jesus, light in darkness, is God’s act of re-creation.

This is important to us for at least two reasons. First is the equation that *Logos*, Jesus Christ, is light for everyone. Jesus tells Nicodemus “the light has come into the world” (3:19). Further on in the narrative (perhaps with growing self understanding) Jesus more explicitly, declares “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (9:5), and “I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness” (12:46). John’s Jesus is “the

7 Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Luminous Dusk* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006) 53.

8 Allison 54-58.

9 Helen Gardner (ed.), *The Metaphysical Poets* (Penguin, 1957/1975) 281.

10 George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Word Biblical Commentary) (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987) 3.

11 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (Anchor Bible) (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966) 3-37.

12 Varden 140.

light of all people” (1:5) and “enlightens everyone” (1:9). Second, the existence of darkness is a given, taken for granted. Near the end of His earthly life Jesus *doesn't* pray that the disciples be taken out of the world (17:15), nor does he ask that the darkness be removed. Mysteriously, something about darkness isn't optional: *to phos en te skotia phainei*. The light “shines” or “is revealed” in the darkness, not elsewhere.

The world of John and Jesus was every bit as dark as ours. Their land was occupied by the most powerful military force the world had ever known. Military occupiers are not known for kindness and consideration. Roman occupied Palestine was at the edge of Empire (which is why Imperial troops were there), economically both exploited and fragile. A few fortunate people got jobs in Roman building projects (like that at Sepphoris near Nazareth where St. Joseph and Jesus may have worked) or they were quislings, for example, serving as Roman tax collectors. Most folks fished or farmed, had subsistence, “pay check to pay check” lives. The Synoptic gospels highlight Jesus the healer, proof positive of wide-spread disease and deformity, just as the accounts of his trial and execution demonstrate judicial malfeasance and corruption of people in power. While the narrative occurred in the late 20's and early 30's A.D., the gospels were probably written *after* the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the disruption and suffering it caused.

It was not in an ideal world that St. John espoused a poetic Christology of light and the Johannine community proclaimed (almost unbelievably) “that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), that “the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” (1 John 2:8) Early Christianity espoused light *in* darkness. God is not a magician, does not cancel the effects of human crassness and cruelty, or a cosmic Scotty beaming up Christians into perfection and unremitting bliss. God comes as

light *in* darkness. This assertion of light *in* darkness is the biblical, theological lens through which we view poets of darkness closer to our day as we now make a huge historical leap to the 19th century.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS (1844-1889) -- - DARKNESS AS PROCESS

In *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth and Society* Northrop Frye introduces a structural principle of literature, the “principle of polarity,” the contrast of opposites.¹³ For Jesuit priest and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose experiments in rhythm and sound made him the first modern English poet, the root polarity was between what is outside and what is inside the human person. For Hopkins “world without” was a source of fascination, joy, and, importantly, connection with God. The great sonnets of 1877 were written the year he was ordained to the priesthood and lived at St. Beuno's in north Wales, a place of extraordinary beauty. That year he wrote “God's Grandeur” (“The world is charged with the grandeur of God” and the “Holy Ghost over the bent/World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings”¹⁴), “The Windhover,” “Pied Beauty” (in which God is glorified “for dappled things” “He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change” Hopkins 69, 70), and “Hurrahing in Harvest” (“I walk, I lift up, I lift up hear, eyes,/Down all that glory in the havens to glean our Saviour” Hopkins 70). They are poems of immense beauty and technical skill.

The other side of Hopkins' poetic polarity was “world within.” Edwin Muir wrote that “In nature Hopkins saw the glory of God, and in himself he felt the terror of God.”¹⁵ R.K.R. Thornton noted “There is a noticeable changing in the poetry from the earlier happier years in Wales to the sadder years when he felt weighted down by his experiences in Liverpool and his work in Ireland.”¹⁶ Biographer, Robert Martin noted after St. Beuno's, “we are seldom aware of his eyes constantly being lifted in unclouded praise.”¹⁷ Hopkins' “Terrible

13 TNorthrop Frye, *Spiritual Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth and Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976) 155.

14 *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* W.H. Gardner & N.H. MacKenzie (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967/1972) 66. Hereafter in the text as Hopkins.

15 Quoted in W.H. Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Vol. 2, 1844-1889) (London: Oxford University Press, 1949/1969) 356.

16 R.K.R. Thornton, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Poems* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973) 47.

17 Robert Bernard Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (London: Harper Collins, 1991) 264.

Sonnets, written in 1885, are almost unimaginably different from those of 1877. The poet's eye has rolled inward where it is much harder to find the fecundating natural/divine connection. These sonnets echo the classical language of those who have known God, then feel abandoned. They are *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani* cast in 19th C. mode. [Hopkins' experience is somehow more terrible than John Donne's in "Batter my Heart Three Personed God" (to which it is often compared).]

Hopkins chose a very disciplined poetic form to keep his "explosive emotions" in check.¹⁸ The six of these terrifying sonnets (numbered 64 to 69 in the Gardner-MacKenzie edition) taken together, trace a pattern of isolation, despair, and finally movement toward reconciliation. In 64, "Carrion Comfort," a re-writing of Jacob's wrestling with the angel which Hopkins described as "written in blood,"¹⁹ the author is talking himself out of suicide. "No worst, there is none" (#65 which reminds me of Lear on the heath) expresses absolute abandonment.

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,

More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.

Comforter, where, where is your comforting?

Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?

My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief-

woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing---

Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No long-

erring! Let me be fell: force I must be brief'.

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall Frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed. Hold them cheap

May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small

Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,

Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all Life death does end and each day dies with sleep. (Hopkins 100)

"To seem the stranger lies my lot" (#66) expresses Hopkins isolation as an Englishman in

Ireland, a Roman Catholic in an Anglican family. At his lowest point in #67 "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day," the poet admits there are others worse off than he. Recognizing and articulating the connection of his suffering to that of others is the turning point. "Patience, hard thing" (#68) affirms the will of God, and # 69, "My own heart let me more have pity on," ends with a turning outward and, unpredictably, with God's visitation "...as skies/Betweenpie mountains--lights a lovely mile." (Hopkins 103)

Terrible as they are (read together, they are very, very dark) Hopkins' 1885 sonnets provide an important example and give an important gift: that of speaking with complete honesty about life's darkest experiences, about questioning faith, about standing at the edge of the chasm of despair. Hopkins gives voice to his process of moving through darkness, thereby giving others permission to howl.

Current Christianity's sanitized public discourse is "happy clappy," "healthy and wealthy" cheerful. My suspicion is this attempts to keep the reality of darkness at bay, to cover the smell of the fetid breath of the "roaring lion seeking someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8) Martin's biography of Hopkins correctly says that in the Terrible Sonnets "...Hopkins is speaking for all of terrified humanity."²⁰ The speaking saves; the articulation keeps the lion at bay. Psalms of Lament in the Psalter function similarly. The largest single category of Psalms, 70 of 150, are *klagelieder* (complaint songs), making them the characteristic prayer of faith. Lament, the cry to God "out of the depths" (130:1), the speaking of unrelieved suffering and chaos of Psalm 88 (which closes "darkness is my only friend"), all express faith. Lament Psalms voice specific, individual situations and speak to the common, human experience Buddhists call *dukkha*, unsatisfactoriness, or suffering.

The theological message of Psalms of Lament and of Hopkins Terrible Sonnets assert it is appropriate to struggle with God. Lament invites openness to life's extremes and helps one to experience, to die to. And to grieve old situations that are passing away, thus making room for the

18 See, for example, Martin 383.

19 Quoted in Gardner, Vol. 2, 333.

20 Robert Bernard Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1991) 387.

God Who “makes all things new.” (2 Cor 5:17) Usually we don’t experience newness until the old dies. Lament in darkness which leads to recognition of a shared, human experience is the seed sown for death and new flowering. Hopkins articulated life’s dissonances through the poetic principle of polarity. He did not short-change the darkness; he entered it, recognized its ubiquity, survived it, and suggested darkness might not be an event, but a process, a movement toward new life.

R. S. THOMAS (1913-2000)
--- DARKNESS AS PRESENCE

Hopkins died in 1889. Not to be confused the other Welsh poet Thomases R.S. Thomas was born in Cardiff in 1913 and educated in Wales. He graduated in Classics from the University of Wales, Bangor, undertook theological studies at St. Michael’s College, Llandaff, was ordained to the priesthood in the Church of Wales (Anglican) in 1936, and mostly served remote, rural parishes. The Welsh landscape is the backdrop of his work. Literary critic, Barry Morgan, thinks “His poetry grew out of his ministry amongst people and his struggle to apprehend the living God.”²¹ Thomas wrote poetry in English, won numerous literary awards, and was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996. Themes of his poetry include God’s apparent absence but, paradoxically, givenness in a suffering world, self-questioning, the challenges of science and technology, and threats to the environment.²² Morgan observes Thomas writes of the hiddenness, elusiveness, mystery, silence, darkness, and absence of God.²³

Thomas’ language is less traditionally Christian than Hopkins’. He writes unfamiliar words to familiar biblical/theological melodies. In an essay on Thomas, William McGill distinguishes between doctrinal and religious poems. Religious poems “are attempts to describe metaphorically our experience with realities, including our spiritual experience.”²⁴ It is in this sense Thomas is a “religious” poet.

William Countryman observes he sees “... things as they are, which means seeing them in the lights of both God’s absence and God’s presence, not denying the evil and the ugliness, yet remaining open to the advent of the Holy in the most unexpected of contexts.”²⁵ Thomas’s work is not unremittingly dark; I find him a poet of light, though light refracted rather direct.

After reading Thomas’ poem on the Incarnation because it is just too good to omit, I will read without much commentary three poems in which darkness is both literal and a metaphor for the mysterious encounter with God.²⁶ Listen for the interplay of darkness and light. First, the Incarnation poem, “The Coming.”

And God held in his hand
A small globe. Look, he said.
The son looked. Far off,
As through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce
Colour. The light burned
There; crusted buildings
Cast their shadows: a bright
Serpent, a river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime.

On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. Many people
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs. The son watched
Them. Let me go there, he said. (82-83)

Is this a poem of light or of darkness? Perhaps, as does John the Evangelist, it depicts Light choosing darkness for the sake of us thin-armed people.

In “In Church,” the speaker is a priest lingering after a sparsely attended service, wondering if anything really happened. Note that when darkness

21 Barry Morgan, *Strangely Orthodox: R.S. Thomas and his Poetry of Faith* (Llandysul, Ceredigion: Gomer Press, 2006) 13.

22 Byron Rogers’ prize-winning, literary biography of Thomas, *The Man Who Went Into the West* (London: Aurum Press, Ltd., 2006) is highly recommended.

23 Morgan 18.

24 William J. McGill, “A Priest/Poet’s Christmas in Wales: R.S. Thomas and the Incarnation,” *Theology Today*, April, 2000 (57/1) 79.

25 William Countryman, *The Poetic Imagination* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000) 184.

26 All quoted poems are from *Poems of R.S. Thomas* (Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas Press, 1985).

begins to overtake light in the church, the images change.

Often I try
 To analyse the quality
 Of its silences. Is this where God hides
 From my searching? I have stopped to listen,
 After the few people have gone,
 To the air recomposing itself
 For vigil. It has waited like this
 Since the stones grouped themselves about it.
 They are the hard ribs
 Of a body that our prayers have failed
 To animate. Shadows advance
 From their corners to take possession
 Of places that light held
 For an hour. The bats resume
 Their business. The uneasiness of the pews
 Ceases. There is no other sound
 In the darkness but the sound of a man
 Breathing, testing his faith
 On emptiness, nailing his questions
 On by one to an untenanted cross. (54)

“Via Negativa” is a modern expression of *apophatic* theology which contends human attempts to describe God are inadequate. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* notes it is “a way of approaching God by denying that any of our concepts can properly be affirmed of [God].”²⁷ The term *apophatike theologia* was first used by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (5th C) and appears (among other places) in the Eastern Church in St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Symeon the Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas, and in the Western Church in John Scotus Eriugena, John of the Cross, Teresa of Jesus (Avila), and *The Cloud of Unknowing*. John Scotus (9th C.) wrote “Nothing can be said properly...of God, because he transcends all understanding...he is known better by not knowing; ignorance concerning him is true wisdom.”²⁸ St Gregory Palamas (14th C) explained that God’s essence is unknowable, but God is known through God’s energies (which may be why Hopkins, and so many others find God in nature).

Thomas’s poem “Via Negativa” opens by

addressing an assumed interlocutor. Someone (a parishioner?) has asked the speaker (the priest?) a question to which the poem is the answer. Behind that answer is apophatic theology and Augustine’s assertion that the heart is restless until it rests in God.

Why no! I never thought other than
 That God is that great absence
 In our lives, the empty silence
 Within, the place where we go
 Seeking, not in hope to
 Arrive or find. He keeps the interstices
 In our knowledge, the darkness
 Between the stars. His are the echoes
 We follow, the footprints he has just
 Left. We put our hands in
 His side hoping to find
 It warm. We look at people
 And places as though he had looked
 At them, too; but miss the reflection. (75)

God is to be found exactly where the divine is seldom sought: in “empty silence,” in “the darkness/ Between the stars,” in echoes, in woundedness. The poem illustrates Countryman’s suggestion that Thomas invites us to remain “open to the advent of the Holy in the most unexpected of contexts.”²⁹ Perhaps unintentionally, the poem is reminiscent of St. Mark’s gospel which depicts discipleship as following (Greek, *akoulotheo*).³⁰ God is ahead of us, leaving a trail (perhaps crumbs the Syro-Phoenician woman accepted from the Chosen’s Table?), giving hints to be followed, reminding us that God looks at things differently than we do (for which fact, I am profoundly grateful).

Lest Thomas’ work be considered an unremitting “bummer,” I include a poem depicting both God both known through creation, and unknowable, in which “The darkness/is the deepening shadow/of [God’s] presence...”. “Alive”

It is alive. It is you,
 God. Looking out I can see
 no death. The earth moves, the
 sea moves, the wind goes
 on its exuberant
 journeys. Many creatures

27 F.L. Cross (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 88.

28 Quoted in Cheslyn Jones, et al eds, *Adobe Caslon Pro Italic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 157.

29 Countryman 184.

30 In the Good Shepherd Discourse in John 10 Jesus says of the Shepherd “...he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him...”. 10:4

reflect you, the flowers
your color, the tides the precision
of your calculations. There
is nothing too ample
for you to overflow, nothing
so small that your workmanship
is not revealed. I listen
and it is you speaking.
I find the place where you lay
warm. At night, if I waken,
there are the sleepless conurbations
of the stars. The darkness
is the deepening shadow
of your presence; the silence a
process in the metabolism
of the being of love. (101-102)

Even in the most positive of these poems, God inhabits darkness and silence. The place the speaker finds “warm” is the one God has left. A contemporary Anglican priest-poet, Fr. David Scott, says of Thomas “The narrow way and the dark way is Thomas’s way, except occasionally when the light shines all the brighter for the surrounding dark.”³¹ Darkness and silence at the end of the poem are “a/process in the metabolism/of the being of love” suggesting, as did Hopkins, that darkness is a process. Thomas’s apophaticism maintains the mystery of God while suggesting that we have been looking in the wrong places to find God. We have misunderstood darkness as empty when it is the dwelling place of Presence. In Thomas’ collection *Counterpoint* these lines appear:

I have been student of your love
and have not graduated. Setting
my own questions, I bungled
the examination: Where? Why? How?³²

Perhaps the voice is Thomas’. Perhaps it suggests we are asking the wrong questions which leads us to look in the wrong places. Thomas spoke of “a kind of mutual watching...taking place in silence”³³ and of moving “from unfathomable/darkness to

unfathomable light.”³⁴ He suggests that empty, silent, dark places may harbor the Presence for which we long.

JANE KENYON (1947-1995)

--- DARKNESS AS PROMISE

When, at 48, Jane Kenyon died of leukemia we were deprived of an extraordinary poet. Compared by interviewer David Bradt to Emily Dickinson, Kenyon responded, “Dickinson thinks a lot about her soul, and I think a lot about mine. She thinks about her relation to God---a God who is distant, and rather cruelly arbitrary. In many of my poems I am searching, clumsily, for God. We are both full of terror, finally, and puzzlement at creation.”³⁵ With what elegant and exacting language both poets recorded their terror and puzzlement!

Jane Kenyon was born in Ann Arbor, MI in 1947, studied French and English at the U. of Michigan, met, and married the poet Donald Hall (some years her senior) in 1972. They lived at his family farm in Wilmot, NH. She loved the sense of community, and the parish church, she found there and noted, “It makes one less self-obsessed and more concerned about the needs of others. It gives you a feeling that you are part of a great stream.”³⁶ In 1980 Jane Kenyon had a prolonged mystical experience of which she wrote in a poem: “Once, in my early thirties, I saw/that I was a speck of light in the great/river of light that undulates through time.”³⁷ In her difficulties, she never completely lost sight of that vision.

In 1983 it was established that she had bipolar mood disorder with which she struggled for the rest of her life. Her poetry reflects the ups and downs of this illness. Diagnosed with leukemia in January, 1994, Kenyon died in April, 1995. In an essay entitled “Darkness and light,” Jeff Gundy wrote perceptively of the relationship between beauty and sadness in her poetry, “especially in her awareness of mutability.”³⁸ (What is more mutable

31 From a blurb at the end of R. S. Thomas, *Mass for Hard Times* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, Ltd., 1992) 91.

32 R.S. Thomas, *Counterpoint* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, Ltd., 1990) 34.

33 Quoted in Morgan 21.

34 Quoted in Morgan 41.

35 The interview appears in Jane Kenyon, *Let Evening Come: Selected Poems* (Highgreen, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, Ltd, 2005) 169)

36 Jeff Gundy “Darkness and Light: Jane Kenyon’s Spiritual Struggle,” *The Christian Century* Jan. 24, 2006 (123/2) 26.

37 Jane Kenyon, *Collected Poems* (St. Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2005) 232. Hereafter in text Kenyon.

38 Gundy 29.

than a river of light?) In her writing, suffering is not focused on the individuated ego, but on commonality. Like Hopkins' Sonnet #67, suffering connects the sufferer to the human condition.

As it was for Hopkins and Thomas, for Kenyon nature is a trysting place, the natural world an entre to what or Who was behind it. She explained "... my poems are full of the natural world. I use it again and again as a way of talking about something inward."³⁹ In the introduction to a collection of Kenyon's poems Joyce Peseroff noted they "are not didactic but they always show us where to look."⁴⁰ The "where" tends to be outward. Even though her "interior" subject matter may be her own suffering, depression, or approaching death, the poems are not dismal, but remarkably hopeful. As Gundy noted "...her best poems are treasured by so many readers because of the way they poise between sadness and joy."⁴¹ It her version of the polarity of which Northrup Frye wrote. The title poem from her 1990 collection, "Let Evening Come" exemplifies these assertions.

Let the light of late afternoon
shine through the chinks in the barn, moving
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing
as a woman takes up her needles
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned
in long grass. Let the stars appear
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.
Let the wind die down. Let the shed
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop
in the oats, to air in the lung
let evening come.

Let it come as it will, and don't
be afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come. (Kenyon 213)

Obviously, the coming of evening is the coming of darkness. But unlike darkness in either Hopkins' or Thomas' poems, here it is welcome, its coming a

gentle closing down, its promise the presence and comfort of God. The voice in Kenyon's poem "Notes from the Other Side" is dead and sending messages back to the living. In spite of its gentle humor and suggestion of whistling in the dark, the poem closes with promise and assurance.

I divested myself of despair
and fear when I came here.

Now there is no more catching
one's own eye in the mirror,
there are no bad books, no plastic,
no insurance premiums, and of course
no illness. Contrition
does not exist, nor gnashing
of teeth. No one howls as the first
clod of earth hits the casket.

The poor we no longer have with us.
Our calm hearts strike only the hour,
and God, as promised, proves
to be mercy clothed in light. (Kenyon 267)

Kenyon's adult life was stretched between the darknesses of mental illness and terminal disease. Poems we have not read reflect this, yet in the poem that closed her 1993, penultimate collection, darkness is the fulfillment of promise: "mercy clothed in light." Jeff Gundy shrewdly observed "... her poetry was not merely an expression of faith but a means toward faith."⁴²

SOME CONCLUDING MUSINGS

To some degree this is true of all three poets. Their poems are expressions of faith and signposts toward it even, or especially, for people who would never enter a church or open a "spiritual book." For these writers "faith" is bigger than "faith in" a particular set of beliefs or practices. Barry Morgan suggests that for Thomas faith is continuing to believe we can catch glimpses of God.⁴³ Maybe a glimpse is enough. Maybe to see face to face would be to be vaporized. God tells Moses "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." (Exodus 33:20) Perhaps darkness protects us from too much light.

39 Interview with David Bradt in *Let Evening Come* 170. Hereafter Bradt.

40 Joyce Peseroff in *Let Evening Come* 11. Hereafter Peseroff.

41 Grundy 29.

42 Gundy 28

43 Morgan 26.

These three poets are related to, but not exactly what Paul Claudel called “poets of night;” Abbot Varden described them as “troubled by the call of the *Logos*: blind seers who do not know the secret they intuit but can teach much to us who claim to know but often fail to see.”⁴⁴ It was, after all, the blind prophet Tiresius who “saw.” These are poets of “dazzling darkness,” of light *in* darkness, who can make us aware of, introduce us to the search for, not only God, but what God wants to give us, indeed, for which God made us.

I don’t think I shall rehabilitate the archetypically and almost universally negative associations with darkness. I do suggest that darkness has other possibilities. Fundamental biblical texts hint at this. We could, for example, interpret the creation story differently. In Genesis 1, God created either from within or from “formless void and darkness.” (1:1) *From* the “darkness [that] covered the face of the deep,” God drew “the light [that] was good,” thereby retaining *both* light and darkness. Was the light drawn from the darkness as, Eve was drawn from Adam? I wonder. “God called the light Day, and the darkness he call Night.” (Genesis 1:1-5) Later in the week, God made “lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night” and “saw that it was good.” (1:14, 18) Presumably, God *could* have obliterated darkness and night, left only day, but day and night seemed to be a necessary polarity. In a reflection, “The Call of St. Matthew,” Benedictine sister Genevieve Glen suggests that “...the primal chaos was not nothingness. It was possibility. God looked upon it with love.... The formless void, the dark waters, proved to be in fact a seething cauldron of prospects awaiting only God’s creative word to leap into actuality as sun, moon, stars, and all the rest of creation.”⁴⁵

Similarly, Dale Allison’s *The Luminous Dark* reminds us that the Bible “speaks of *God dwelling*

in thick darkness.”⁴⁶ Preparing to receive the Tables of the Law, Moses “drew near to the thick darkness *where God was.*” (Exodus 20:21 Italics mine.) The paradigm of wisdom, King Solomon, declared “The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness.” (1 Kings 8:12) One could multiply references to darkness as God’s dwelling place. As Allison says with such clarity, “God is a mystery.”⁴⁷ “This is reason to love the dark.”⁴⁸ If God retained darkness at creation and dwells therein, darkness cannot be unremittingly negative. Again Allison, “God hides in the darkness, so to the darkness we must go.”⁴⁹

The ancient tradition of apophatic theology avows that darkness images the mystery of God. But mystery isn’t *evil*; it’s just *unknown*, an enigma. We would inhabit a very different world if the mysterious or unknown were viewed as simply that, not as threat or danger. The Greek word *musterion*, of which St. Paul was so fond, has as its lectionary definition “secret,” but connotes for Paul “something formerly unknown but now revealed.”⁵⁰ For Paul it described religious truth known by revelation. The biblical witness, and our poets, suggest the source of revelation (“unveiling” if you will) is resident in darkness, waiting.

Apparently darkness isn’t optional. Like death, it is part of a plan. In *Autobiographies* R.S. Thomas wrote, “One of the unfailing rules of the world is that life has to die in the cause of life. If there is any other way on this earth, God has not seen fit to follow it.”⁵¹ The obvious Christian example of the “requirement” of darkness and death is Jesus’ passion. Think of how darkness functions in that narrative. Matthew’s gospel reports “From noon on, darkness came over the whole land.” (27:45). From 3:00 Good Friday until Easter morning there was an utter cosmic darkness, beginning with the emotional darkness of Jesus’ friends. But something remarkable was gestating in the dark womb of

44 Varden 155. Claudel’s discussion of “poets of night” occurs in his essay on Mallarme in *Oeuvres en prose* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965, 508-513. Full reference from Varden 172.

45 Genevieve Glenn, OSB, *Sauntering Through Scripture* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018) 58.

46 Allison 62. Italics mine.

47 Ibid.

48 Allison 63.

49 Allison 65.

50 Barclay M. Newman, Jr. *Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971) 119.

51 R.S. Thomas, *Autobiographies* (Jason Walford Davies, transl.) (London: Phoenix, 1997) 95.

Holy Saturday only to be revealed, according to St. John, “Early on the first day of the week, *while it was still dark*.” (John 20:1 Italics mine.) “And when it was *evening* on that day...Jesus came and stood among [the disciples]” (20:19). Other gospel witnesses to the resurrection speak of Jesus’ appearance in early dawning or dawn, not full light.⁵² The greatest mystery of all, the resurrection of Jesus, took place in darkness.

What would change if we shifted our expectations about darkness? What if we allowed the possibility that it contained revelation, gift, God, new life, resurrection? Suppose instead of unremitting suffering and evil, a source of radiance or healing was resident therein? Suppose darkness were a process, contained a Presence, offered a promise? Certainly that would comfort the desperately ill, sufferers from emotional darkness and depression, and those who carry in their hearts humanity’s hurts, those vicarious sufferers who become our saints.

In human life and community, darkness seems not optional, but required. “Things” are resident therein that can be found only there. Through the prophet Isaiah God announces, “I will give you the

treasures of darkness/and riches hidden in secret places.” (45:3) The exact nature of the “treasure” will be different for every person who enters private and/or communal darkness. I believe there is a redemptive process, presence, and promise in darkness, that may only be evident in hindsight, and no one can define what it might be for someone else. As the African American spiritual puts it: “You got to walk that lonesome valley/You got to walk it for yourself/Ain’t nobody else can walk it for you/You got to walk it by yourself.”

Another African American, James Baldwin, in his 1957 novel *Sonny’s Blues*, writes, “For while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn’t any other tale to tell, it’s the only light we’ve got in all this darkness.” Our most enlightening poets, teachers, preachers, and wisdom figures tell variations of the tale of finding light in darkness. Waiting for, articulating light in darkness may be the light in darkness, and the darkness itself the secret of radiance. I give the last word to Meister Eckhart, “...where understanding and desire end, there is darkness and there God’s radiance begins...”⁵³

52 In John’s gospel Jesus also appears by the Sea of Tiberias “just after daybreak.” (21:4)

53 Quoted in Morgan 22.

BOOK REVIEWS

Bernardo Olivera, *The Sun at Midnight: Monastic Experience of the Christian Mystery*, Liturgical Press, 2010.

The sub-title of this book can be misleading. Monastic experience – the experience of monks and nuns teaches us many things; it helps us on our own journey to God; a journey that has many detours, yet we never lose the desire to find Christ, who always waits for us, who is there before we get there. The monastics never seem to waver from this principle.

This book is a gem. Dom Bernardo Olivera was for many years the Abbot General of the Cistercians. He now lives in the monastery in Azul in Argentina. Many would see him as a living saint when it comes to his own journey. The book owes its paradoxical title, *The Sun at Midnight*, to the

nature of mystical language. The title brings to mind the spectacular sight of the winter sky in the Far North of Europe, but ‘midnight’ points, above all, to our human experience of searching amid shadows and darkness. ‘Sun’ obviously refers to our longing for light. In the present case, it is a question of the supreme Sun, “the dawn from on high” (Luke 1:78), the *Kyrios*, the Risen Lord. Thanks to him, our human darkness and death have been mortally wounded by life. In other words, this book is based on our reality; the reality of every Christian, monastic, or teacher in a school, or carpenter or whoever.

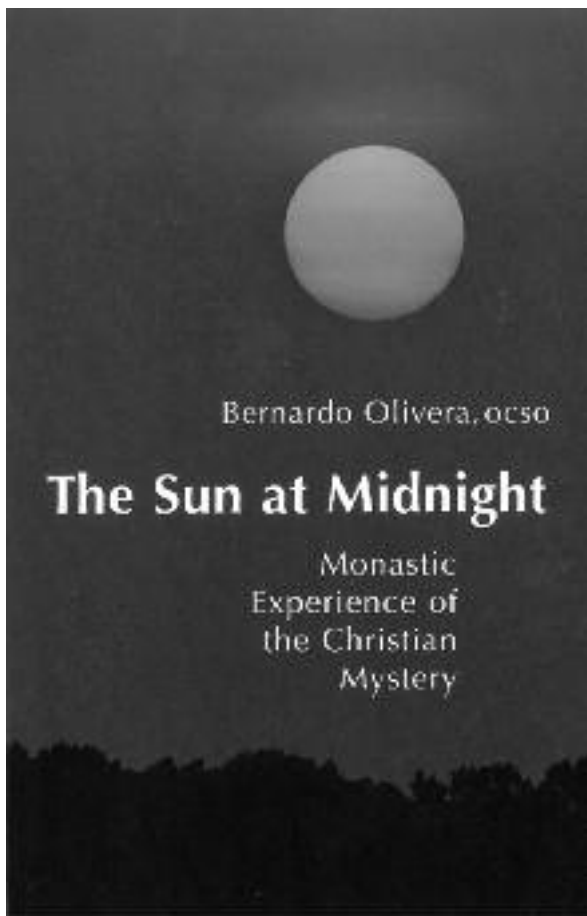
Olivera is convinced that there is a mystical experience, an experience of the presence of God in each of us. This makes the book worth reading. We discover in the book, Olivera’s fundamental thesis: personal mystical experience (of God) is not only the key to the renewal of monastic or religious life, but in today’s climate, it is central, it is a foundation, an originating point, for anyone who seeks meaning and understanding of themselves and others in this troubled world.

All educators should read this book. There is a holiness about it, it is uplifting, and it has the potential to nourish the soul. It is not expensive. I purchased my copy from Pauline Books in Sydney. It is something I will keep forever.

Janette Gray, M-D Chenu’s *Christian Anthropology: Nature and Grace in Society and Church*, ATF Press, 2019.

All Church leaders – Bishops, Principals and Teachers should read this book, reflect on it, and live it. Jan Gray, Sister of Mercy and theologian, died in 2016. The book is based on her thesis for a Doctor of Philosophy degree and it has the potential to help us move from our current reality in the Church. Anyone going to the Plenary Council in 2020 should take notes as they read this book.

Marie-Dominique Chenu’s (1895-1990) work as both theologian and historian is the focus of Gray’s research. Chenu’s work demonstrates that a theology of humanity is the basis for writing in the



context of historical, ecclesiological and socio-political theological writing. In other words writing in the reality of the present moment and not ignoring key issues that influence us daily. As one teacher told me a long time ago, if you are unhappy about something, do something about it. This, in my opinion is what many see as wrong with the Church today. We do have agenda with regard to change given the events in the Church and in the world around us, but how constructive are we when it comes to promoting a New Church? Alternatively, do we just walk away from it or touch up the edges? One of the best chapters in the book is the fourth titled: "Anthropological Shift of Vatican II Ecclesiology". Chenu was a participant in the Council, and he helped to put in place a strong foundation for the Church of today. Unfortunately, the vision of the Council has at times been 'blurred' by those who want to turn the clock back. While Gray locates her discussion in what Chenu saw as the struggles of the twentieth century, she points out that he was sensible enough to mostly avoid being relativized by modernity's agenda. What he was interested in was a range of contemporary theological topics, and hence explored a Christian anthropology that articulated the experiential and concrete 'history' of human life in relation to faith. This is something we should be doing today.

Br Tony Paterson
Reviewer

**M-D Chenu's Christian Anthropology:
Nature and Grace in Society and
Church**



Janette Gray RSM

Invitation:

All readers are invited to contribute to the Book Reviews. Two hundred words and copy of the cover all in Word Document would be appreciated. The draft needs to relate to spirituality, Marist life and spirituality, Marist education, Prayer and similar topics.

