

So it is not a criticism of this book to say that it will not be well understood by people who merely read it. The purpose of the book is to awaken the sense of ‘linguistic community’, his phrase, and to encourage us to talk to each other. To pray together. So I end with another quotation. ‘Community and individuality are not rivals. The individual who can stand over against the community, who can make a critical contribution to the tradition of the community, who can make a genuine contribution to revolution, is the product of that community and tradition.’ Herbert McCabe was not always an easy member of that community or as he would put it, a ‘good’ member of the particular community he belonged to, but I think those words apply to him.

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DIALOGUE AS MISSION: REMEMBERING CHRYS McVEY edited by Prakash Anthony Lohale OP and Kevin Toomey OP, *New Priory Press, Chicago*, pp. xviii + 171, \$10.00, pbk

This is a collection of talks and essays by Chrys McVey, an American Dominican theologian who lived in Pakistan for forty years before moving to Rome to assist the Master in the planning of the Order’s mission. He died suddenly in New York in 2009. It is edited by two brethren who worked with him on the Order’s General Council.

The first essay is a study of the Acts of General Chapters over the last forty years. It is a wonderful surprise to discover that anyone has given so much attention to these official documents which are largely ignored, alas, but it gives little impression of McVey’s lively mind and delight in language and poetry which makes most of his essays so engaging. He confesses, ‘I am a magpie and when I see something shiny I pick it up and bring it to the nest’. His favourite quotations reoccur frequently.

The transformative experience for this American who grew up in the intimate Catholic world of a New Jersey home and parish, was immersion in a Muslim country. He lived through the difficult years in which President Zia-ul-Haq launched the Islamisation of Pakistan: separate electorates for religious minorities, the blasphemy laws which exposed Christians to instant denunciation for even invented offences, physical attacks on Christians and other minorities, including the Ahmadiyya Muslims. A less courageous person might have retreated within the Catholic ghetto or returned home. Chrys, however, embarked on the risky adventure which eventually defined his theological approach, engagement with ‘the other’ (it sounds better in French: *l’autre*). The influence of Levinas is pervasive), above all with Islam.

He argues persuasively that this openness to others is the core of St Dominic's spirituality. Dominic was touched by the suffering of others, the poor and those trapped in heresy. 'He wept and the Order was born'. His spirituality was, in the wonderful phrase of the Spanish Dominican, Felicísimo Martínez, 'open-eyed'. His commitment to *Veritas*, one of the Order's mottos, implies the endless pursuit of truth rather than just the defence of the truth already attained.

So McVey's theology is profoundly dialogical: dialogue with people of other faiths or none but also the dialogue that should be heartbeat of the Dominican Family: brethren, nuns, active sisters and laity. This demands the ability to imagine other ways of being human and of seeking God and meaning. The deepest asceticism is an escape from the narrowness of one's own point of view. 'How do I get to the other side of the river', a man shouts to someone on the other bank. 'You are already on the other side', is the reply.

This openness is founded on a humility before the mystery of God. It was said by his successor that St Dominic understood everything in 'the humility of his intelligence'. Our dialogue with Islam would progress better 'if each remembered the God neither knows'. McVey quotes R.S. Thomas: 'Such a fast God, . . . leaving as we arrive'.

These essays are deeply refreshing and urgently needed in a world riven by arrogant religious fundamentalism. But we are left with questions which the length and occasions of these talks did not allow Chrys explore in any depth. How are the truth claims of Christianity engaged in our free dialogue with people who have other beliefs? He quotes with approval Reinhold Bernhardt's view: 'There can no longer be any question of absolute truth in the sense of something that transcends time and culture, independent of world view and set apart from history'. This is a claim that needs to be unwrapped at length before one could be sure of in what sense one might or might not hold it to be true.

Chrys quotes with approval the Acts of the General Chapter of Krakov, 2004: 'To enter this world [of the other] is to discover ourselves as one small part of a world where the liberating word comes from elsewhere. . . To enter this world . . . is to learn humility, to be docile before the wisdom and language of the others' experience'. He drafted the text himself! He was alarmed at the uneasy reaction of some brethren who understood preaching rather as the bold proclamation of the truths of our faith. Many of these had suffered persecution for their faith in the Soviet Union. Chrys's profoundly dialogical faith looked to them like religious relativism. I do not for a moment believe this to be true, but it shows that the toughest and most patient conversations are sometimes those one must have with one's closest companions.

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