

*John Mansford Prior SVD\**

### 1968: THE YEAR OF MOUNTING LUCIDITY

*The author evokes several incidents and events of the year 1968 and scrutinizes the inspirations then and their lasting effects until this day. The poor, justice, violence and non-violent resistance as well as the Word of God are the basic attitudes in relating to the different contexts of his missionary engagement.*

By mid-1968 I had completed the initial phase of formation with the SVD at Donamon Castle in the west of Ireland, and moved to north London to commence theological studies at the recently-founded Missionary Institute (MIL). Thus, for me “The Year of Mounting Lucidity” was split between two countries and two formation experiences.

#### *Donamon Castle: January–June 1968*

The two-year novitiate in Ireland, running into two years of philosophy, sociology and scripture (three years in all), was a time of creative exploration, of willing surrender to the natural unevenness and unpredictability of life. The novitiate schedule provided us with a visible, outer consistency, while our inner selves were relentlessly nomadic, on a constant pilgrimage of discovery. Readily bound to a daily routine, our minds were inexorable explorers. All doors were open, all barriers down. As three rectors in a row left the Society,<sup>1</sup> we learnt to live with a certain precarious uncertainty, but more crucially understood that we have to be personally responsible for our SVD vocation, and become freer and less dependent on the affirmation or negativity of others. Allow me then, in this brief essay, to limit my Irish reminiscences to just one SVD staff member, one visiting lecturer, and a single student conference, that to some degree unpack the impact of 1968.

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\* Born in England (1946). Doctorate in Intercultural Theology from Birmingham University, UK. Lecturer in inter-contextual theologies at STFK Ledale-ro, Indonesia.

<sup>1</sup> The three rectors during those years were Patrick McHale (1965–1966), Michael O’Neil (1966–1968), and Michael Phelan (1968–1971).

*Culture-Based Faith Consumed by Science*

**Séamus Langan** (born 1931) was a sensitive and understanding confrere, both as formator and lecturer, who readily accompanied us inquisitive youngsters as we commenced our mission journey. He accepted us as we were and encouraged us to embrace our individual gifts and so become the people we were meant to be. We were set free to discover. Séamus himself later worked in the Caribbean. On returning to Ireland, and after a heart-rending struggle, he came to terms with himself, departing from the SVD and religious belief. In the autumn of his life he has taken to writing thoughtful novels, of which I have read just two. His first is autobiographical, *Four Last Songs* (2005)<sup>2</sup> relating how he came to question his culture-based faith and accept his sexuality. The other book, *The Melody Behind the Words: Where Personal Values and Ancient Myths Collide* (2015) I enjoyed as a more mature work. Here Séamus debunks the culturally-based religious roots on which he was raised. His books show how he is genuinely intrigued, even bewildered, by the seemingly serene faith confreres possess when all he can see are the multiple contradictions between faith and reason. His—and hopefully our—journeys continue. Faith-trekking recognises no frontier as too far, no depth as too deep.<sup>3</sup> In 1968 I was wont to state it more bluntly: Faith is to question, to answer is heresy. Today I put it more prosaically: We come to know through exploration, not through predetermined concepts or ideas.

Moving from the Ireland and England of the secularising '60s to the world of culture-based religion in eastern Indonesia, I have felt the need to unfasten my faith through both mysticism and the latest insights of science as data pours forth from the Hubble Satellite. With the “geologian” (Earth scientist) **Thomas Berry** (1914–2009) I accept that “Everything in the universe is genetically cousin to everything else. There is literally one family, one bonding in the universe, because everything is descended from the same source.”<sup>4</sup> We are intimately and intricately interconnected. We have cosmic connectivity:

<sup>2</sup> The title and organisation of the novel were inspired by Richard Strauss' *Vier letzte Lieder*.

<sup>3</sup> Séamus' more recent book, *Heredity* (2017) is an imaginative generation-hopping historical novel celebrating the endurance of love in its various manifestations through conflict and war: tribal, national and international.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Berry with Thomas Clarke, *Befriending the Earth: Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth*, Mystic, CT 1991, 14.

“Not only are we in the universe, but the universe is in us.”<sup>5</sup> Hence, “every existence is a mode of divine presence,”<sup>6</sup> being aware that “the human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will both perish in the desert.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the natural world is our primary revelation of the Creator and therefore, “To preserve the natural world as the primary revelation of the divine must be the basic concern of religion.”<sup>8</sup> Which leads me to **John O’Donohue** (1956–2008): “We are but temporary sojourners on the surface of an unknown planet spinning slowly in the infinite night of the cosmos... The sacred duty of being an individual is to gradually learn how to live so as to awaken the eternal within.”<sup>9</sup> Science rooted in the soil of contemplative life. Séamus and I must continue our intermittent conversation.

*Context Is Not Only Context*

While Donamon was not accredited to a university, we did have some fine guest lecturers from Dublin and Galway, of whom the most memorable was surely **Michael Higgins** (born 1941). Duly christened the *Leprechaun* owing to his diminutive height (1,63 m), Higgins was driven to Donamon each week by Séamus for our lectures in sociology. The one lecture I vividly recall is when he appeared in clothes he had clearly slept in. He confessed: “I don’t remember where I partied last night nor who took me home.” Then, standing behind the lecturer’s chair twiddling its wooden nobs, in his beguiling County Clare accent he gave us a spontaneous oration on the sociological context of Church Councils and dogmatic statements, commencing with Chalcedon. While we had regularly—and readily—dismantled the Word of God through biblical exegeses, we had not yet got around to placing the conciliar word of mere bishops within their original and subsequent social contexts. It was a game changer.

Over the past 16 years, while probing inter-contextual theologies with post-graduate students in Indonesia, I have often recalled Higgins’ vibrant post-party outpouring on that memorable day. Profound

<sup>5</sup> Neil deGrasse Tyson, *Death by Black Hole—and Other Cosmic Quandaries*, New York 2007, 345.

<sup>6</sup> Berry, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Berry with Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*, London 1994, 243.

<sup>9</sup> John O’Donohue, *Eternal Echoes: Exploring Our Hunger to Belong*, London 1998, 2, 5.

thoughts are not simply assembled by the mind, they occur. An acknowledged poet<sup>10</sup> and captivating orator, Higgins later gave up his academic career for politics. First elected to Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament) in 1981, he was voted President of the Labour Party in 2003, resigning eight years later when elected the ninth President of the Republic of Ireland (2011). Not a bad career: From a diminutive teacher in an SVD novitiate to President of the Republic!

### *A Storm in a Dublin Teacup*

1968 was a year of rising clarity, mounting lucidity, and widening engagement with progressive thinking and exposure to the marginalised. Slowly our horizons expanded.<sup>11</sup> We were being encouraged to become compassionate and fearless. When an invitation came from students at UCD (University College Dublin) for a joint conference between secular and clerical students, the Donamon rector, Michael O’Neil, gave permission for me to attend.<sup>12</sup> Believe it or not, this was the first time seminarians would officially join with secular students at a university gathering! This put me into contact with the Student Christian Movement (SCM), where I was later active throughout my four years in London, and with Pax Romana, with whom I have been networking since living in Southeast Asia.<sup>13</sup>

The Dublin conference was organised by **John Feeney** (1948–1984),<sup>14</sup> chair of the Catholic Student Association at UCD. I chaired

<sup>10</sup> I have just one volume of Higgins’ poetry, *An Arid Season*, Dublin 2004, a gift from Séamus Langan. The other Higgins’ collections to date are *The Betrayal*, Galway 1990, *The Season of Fire*, Dingle, Co Kerry 1993, and *New and Selected Poems*, Dublin 2011.

<sup>11</sup> “An horizon is something towards which we move, but also something that moves with us... always in motion.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., New York 2004, 303.

<sup>12</sup> An SVD student from Maynooth was asked to attend to keep an eye on me and report afterwards. At each session he sat right at the front, and tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to keep us in order.

<sup>13</sup> Through Pax Romana Asia I was put in contact with CATS (Centre for Asian Theology Solidarity), a network of social activists doing practical theology throughout the continent. CATS, founded in 2004 under WTI (Woori Theological Institute, Seoul, established in 1994), is under the direction of **Paul Hwang Kyung-hoon**, a married layman. CATS holds annual continent-wide forums/symposia bringing together social activists and inter-contextual theologians. Each forum produces a book such as *The Eucharist and Community: Beyond All Borders* (2009), and *Asian Theology for the Future* (2012).

<sup>14</sup> Two years younger than me, John Feeney was an extremely intelligent student, the son of a medical doctor (one of the Archbishop’s consultants!).

the session where **Herbert McCabe, OP** (1926–2001) gave a talk on the term “world” in John’s Gospel. Herbert’s biblical theology is the gem I took back to Donamon. **Michael Joyce** (born 1933), SVD lecturer and assistant novice director at Donamon, remarked the following day, “John, you’ll go far—if you don’t go too far....” And he hadn’t yet seen the headlines of Dublin newspapers!

Dublin Archdiocese had long been run by the autocrat **John Charles McQuaid** (1940–1971), who (in)famously, on returning from the final session of the Vatican Council in December 1965, announced: “The Council says ‘No Change!’” His imperious policies induced institutional sclerosis which metastasized unrest among diocesan students who utilised the freedom of the conference to have a resolution passed requesting that parish priests be appointed on merit and for a fixed term. In those days only elderly clerics managed to make it as parish priests—many remained curates well into their 60s as “promotion” was based on seniority. Once installed in a parish you were ensconced for life. Indeed, most curates and parish priests lived in separate houses.

To me it was a minor, yet practical issue. However, it made newspaper headlines. The clerical monarch of an Archbishop was furious. The chaplain to the conference was Pax Romana activist, **Brian Power**. As Brian recalled some years later, he was berated by John Charles McQuaid who was ostentatiously mounted on his throne in his Episcopal Palace. Berated for what? For saying Mass in Newman House, UCD, without permission and without an altar stone, and for inviting the English Dominican Herbert McCabe whom he regarded as a subversive.<sup>15</sup> Brian had just returned from Rome where the Mass was

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After finishing university John went into journalism. After McQuaid’s resignation (1971) and death (1973), John published a remarkably complimentary essay presenting McQuaid as living outside his time but as a “first class bishop of the old school” who, had he lived fifty years earlier, “would have had no critics worth speaking of and would hardly be remembered today except by those who benefited from his quiet, personal charity” (*John Charles McQuaid—The Man and the Mask*, Dublin 1974, 78-9). John published other books such as *Worm Friday* (1974) and *Mau Dies and Other Stories* (1977). He died in an Aer Lingus crash at the age of 36.

<sup>15</sup> Herbert McCabe was a deeply intelligent Thomist, who reinterpreted Aquinas in the light of linguistic philosophies. Known as a “Catholic Marxist,” of his numerous publications I was most impressed by *Law, Love and Language* (London 1968). For McCabe, ethics is about human action and interaction, for we are intrinsically in conversation, all our action is response to others, and this economy of response determines our environment. For McCabe there is no split between nature and culture, between “is” and “ought.” We are not disembodied beings isolated from one another in an inert or neutral or hostile world. Editor of the Dominican journal *New Blackfriars*

already being celebrated in Italian. In Ireland, in 1968, Mass was still officially in Latin. So Brian gallantly celebrated the Mass in English with a Eucharistic Prayer I had helpfully brought along from my personal collection in Donamon.<sup>16</sup>

When Brian tried to explain the circumstances in which Mass was not said on a consecrated altar, McQuaid leapt off his throne and left the room. Brian delayed for a while before it dawned on him that McQuaid was standing at the front door, waiting for him to leave. McQuaid held his arms stiffly by his sides, signalling the ultimate insult that he was not allowed to kiss the Episcopal ring. As he left with as much dignity as he could muster, Brian sensed that McQuaid must have been unbalanced emotionally by the sheer depth of his outrage.

The sequel to this bizarre encounter came in a summary notice from the Episcopal Palace informing Brian of his imminent transfer to the working-class parish of Inchicore, an unexpected move for an intellectual and literary priest who was highly popular with students.<sup>17</sup>

The Archbishop's secretary also wrote to **John Lynch** (1925–1975), SVD Regional of Ireland, demanding that I—as co-chair of the conference—be hauled over the coals. John remained loyal and did his best to mollify the Archbishop while supporting me with all my impulsive and independent ways. McQuaid's anger came at a sensitive time for the SVD; the Regional needed the Archbishop as he was negotiating the establishment of an SVD house for students now attending the national seminary in Maynooth. The SVD student house at Maynooth was duly opened the following year.

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(1965–1967; 1970–1979), McCabe was dismissed in 1967 for stating that the Church was “quite plainly corrupt.” Restored to the editorship in 1970, he memorably began his opening editorial: “As I was saying before I was so oddly interrupted, the Church is quite plainly corrupt...”

<sup>16</sup> A chalice was brought from Donamon and we had communion under both kinds, another first for university students. The first reading was taken from Albert Camus' *The Plague* (London 1948), a novel listed on the Vatican's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* until its abolition by Paul VI in 1966.

<sup>17</sup> John Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid: Ruler of Catholic Ireland*, Dublin 1999. At the end of Part IV, “Change and Downfall of John Charles McQuaid 1962–1973,” comes Chapter 23 “Crisis of Obedience” (372–391) which includes Brian Power's account. Immediately prior to being dismissed from the chaplaincy, Brian had conducted a survey on the beliefs and cultic practices of students (published 6<sup>th</sup> October 1968). The following day the *Irish Independent* expressed shock at the results. See, *Politico: Social and Political Issues*, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1969. <http://politico.ie/archive/religion-ucd> [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018].

The contrast between the intellectual questioning going on in seminaries and universities with the inane attitude of the sovereign hierarchy in Dublin could not be more stark. Mercifully, in June I slipped across the Irish Sea to London to continue studies for the missionary priesthood.<sup>18</sup>

### *Holiday Interlude: June–August 1968*

#### *A Touch of Reality*

While at Donamon some of us used to cycle to wherever the Travelling People (“gypsies”) had camped locally to help teach the children to read and write. One day **Hugo McClure** (1935–2009), our SVD vocation director, remarked that, when he passed us in his car, he could not make out who were the “gypsies” and who were confreres. Naturally, we took it as a compliment rather than the reprimand intended. During summer holidays we would work with the homeless, or with a housing association, or with drug dependents, or alcoholics, and once I laboured on the floor of a steel factory in Salford. The summer of 1968 was spent in Manchester at a shelter for the homeless run by the Legion of Mary.

This rhythm persists. In the two Indonesian parishes I have served—in the coastal town of Maumere (1974–1981) and the mountainous interior of Wolofeo (1981–1987)—it was not so difficult, as in parishes we can largely determine our own lifestyle. But after being appointed to the main Ledalero community in 1987, I found it necessary to insert myself in one or other marginal group outside the seminary’s monastic walls: with local migrants in Patisomba for instance, with prisoners in Maumere jail, and for the past decade accompanying HIV carriers.

Since 2002, as part of the Ledalero programme in inter-contextual theologies, post-graduate students are asked to divide into small groups to accompany a particular fringe category of their choosing: muck in with prisoners for instance, or identify with HIV carriers, or accompany young scavengers in town, or join garbage collectors on their rounds; and those sufficiently muscular can opt for unloading goods from ships at the docks. As John J. Hugo often reminded the

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<sup>18</sup> Another minor bizarre incident occurred later in the year, when an article of mine on liberation theology was published in *Confrontation*, a short-lived journal (1968–1969) edited by John Feeney. This time it was the Donamon novice director who proposed my dismissal, however **John Fincutter** (born 1923), the USA-born British Regional, decided to give me one more try.

New York Catholic Worker community: “You love God as much as the one you love the least.”<sup>19</sup> 1968 gave form to a lifelong pattern.

### *London: September–December 1968*

#### *World Hunger and Racial Discrimination*

After three years in “the bogs of Ireland”<sup>20</sup> **Vincent Fox** (born 1947) and I moved to Totteridge, North London, where for four years we lived with the White Fathers (Missionaries for Africa, M.Afr). In Ireland we kept up with news on the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa, as the momentum for economic sanctions had gained ground rapidly after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960.<sup>21</sup> We also closely followed the struggle of **Martin Luther King Jr** for Black rights in the USA. To be honest, we were not that surprised with his assassination on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1968. I think it was after his murder that Michael Higgins (or was it Séamus?), looking at the 40 of us in class, proclaimed solemnly: “At least two of you will be killed if you live the Gospel.” We made out to be shocked: “What! Only *two* of us?”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in chapter “December 1948,” *On Pilgrimage*, New York 1948.

<sup>20</sup> This flippant designation I received in a letter from **John Robinson** (1919–1983), Bishop of Woolwich, author of the all-time best seller, *Honest to God*, London 1963. But, yes, Donamon is not that far from the Burren of County Clare and the peat bogs of the West of Ireland.

<sup>21</sup> In 1968 SCM transferred their account from Barclays Bank which had heavy investments in South Africa. Two years later, as student representative on the Board of Directors of SCM Press, I made a similar proposal which was successfully voted through. A minority of directors were dismayed, but quietened down later that year when the British Council of Churches transferred its accounts from Barclays causing Barclays finally to divest their sizeable investments in Apartheid South Africa.

<sup>22</sup> None of us has been murdered as yet. To sum up a Herbert McCabe Good Friday sermon: “If you don’t love you’re dead, if you do love you’ll be killed” (*God Matters: Contemporary Christian Insights*, London 1987, Chapter 8, 90–100). **Pat Rice** (1945–2010), one year ahead in novitiate, was a true martyr. Not long after arriving in Argentina Pat left the well-established SVD and joined the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld, becoming a human rights campaigner on behalf of the “disappeared.” In 1976 Pat himself was kidnapped and tortured by the military regime, but was released after a campaign by the Irish government. In 1984 Pat returned to Argentina and continued with his human rights advocacy. To quote Óscar Romero, “A church that does not provoke any crisis, preach a gospel that does not unsettle, proclaim a word of God that does not get under anyone’s skin or a word of God that does not touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed: what kind of gospel is that?” (*The Violence of Love: The Pastoral Wisdom of Archbishop Óscar Romero*, San Francisco 1988, 57).



If in Ireland we kept ourselves informed, in London we threw our energy and determination into movements for justice and peace, taking part in planning meetings, seminars, conferences, demonstrations, and fasts, which quickly formed a wellspring of our SVD life that our vocation both engendered and required. There was no internet, but there were a number of independent specialist cinemas to nourish our voracious appetite for information and analysis. I wallowed in the overflowing menu.

We held a mass three-day fast to highlight world hunger in Trafalgar Square (central London); to prepare ourselves most of us felt the need to eat progressively less on previous days. We broke fast by sipping a mini-tumbler of rice soup while listening to speeches, regularly interrupted by shouts and slogans; a somewhat banal way, perhaps, of reinforcing communal commitment. There were also frequent mass demonstrations against Apartheid and the nuclear arms race; once I had to scramble up a lamppost to avoid a charging police horse.

Back home, we not only went to chat with the homeless seeking food at the back door of the kitchen, we invited these “gentlemen of the road” to a meal in the dining room; and in they came complete with fleas and horrendous appetites! From the hungry homeless in London I learnt that voluntary poverty is to do without as much as one can in order to be free to live a full human life. Vowed poverty signifies completeness without superfluity, wholeness without luxury, in solidarity with those laid destitute by enforced poverty.

Hence, during this United Nations Development Decade, key issues of race, ethnic minorities, social injustice, a lopsided economy, and exposure to the discarded poor fed into our study of doctrine and ethics, which commenced appropriately enough in 1968, giving an underlying shape to our SVD vocation.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Student Christian Movement*

It was in London in 1968 that I was introduced to terms such as “liberation theology,” “ecology,” “feminism,” and “gay rights.” Through involvement in the Student Christian Movement (SCM) I learnt to practise “people’s exegesis” with the Marxist Dominican **Laurence Bright** (1920–1979).<sup>24</sup> This brought to life what we had

<sup>23</sup> I have yet to find a way to stimulate meaningful class discussions at Ledalero Seminary after showing what I consider to be a suitable film. However, retreatants come up with remarkable insights after watching films. Clearly, silence stimulates, stillness listens within!

<sup>24</sup> An agnostic nuclear physicist in Oxford, the relentlessly clear-sighted Laurence Bright was converted to Catholicism by the devastating impact of

studied about Bible Sharing in Brazil's Base Ecclesial Communities, and set me on a "career" in the Biblical apostolate—locally with prisoners and HIV carriers, globally with the BISAM Study Group,<sup>25</sup> and with the Intercultural Bible Commune.<sup>26</sup> These days I smile when SVD students come to Maumere jail to listen to Bible Sharing by the prisoners, and hear them declare: "In seminary we learn *about* Scripture, in prison we experience how the Scriptures imbue renewed hope and possibility." Yes, we read the Bible until it reads us.<sup>27</sup>

As a response to the crises of 1968, in April the following year the British SCM held a congress in Manchester with some 1500 participants.<sup>28</sup> There I heard **Visser 't Hooft** (1900–1985), the first general secretary of the World Council of Churches, and was introduced to the person and thinking of **Dom Helder Camara** (1909–1999), then Archbishop of Recife in northeast Brazil.<sup>29</sup>

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the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. He became a Dominican friar and Marxist intellectual. Laurence Bright was the thinker who steered SCM to the left in the 1960s. He was also mentor to the Catholic Cambridge undergraduates who founded the radical left-wing journal *Slant* (1964–1970, 30 issues). When one of them, the later literary critic Terry Eagleton (a cousin of Cardinal Heenan of Westminster!), asked Bright how far to the left a Catholic could go without falling off the edge. Bright responded, "Oh, as left as you like." Eagleton adds, "It seemed there was no edge after all" (*The Gatekeeper: A Memoir*, London 2001, 28–29). While at SCM Laurence Bright authored (with Simon Clements) *The Committed Church* (London 1966). He later edited a series of biblical commentaries when editor at Sheed & Ward Publishers.

<sup>25</sup> BISAM (Biblical Studies and Mission) is a study group of the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS). For a history of its first 35 years see my Addendum in Gerald H. Anderson's *Witness to World Christianity*, New Haven 2012, 157–178.

<sup>26</sup> **Hans de Wit**, initiator of intercultural Bible exegesis, describes the process in *Empirical Hermeneutics, Interculturality, and Holy Scripture* (Intercultural Biblical Hermeneutics Series No. 1, 2012). Minor contributions by myself are found in *New Perspectives on Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (ed. Daniel Schipani, Martien Brinkman & Hans Snoek, Amsterdam 2015, 137–157), and in *Bible and Transformation: The Promise of Intercultural Bible Reading* (ed. Hans de Wit & Janet Dyk, Atlanta, GA 2015, 75–97).

<sup>27</sup> Years later Wes Howard-Brook wrote a superb Bible commentary focusing on the choice between creation and Empire. See, "*Come Out, My People!*" *God's Call out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond*, New York 2010.

<sup>28</sup> See Robin Boy, *The Witness of the Student Christian Movement*, Hindmarsh 2007, 113–115.

<sup>29</sup> Camara's SCM talk can be found in *Spiral of Violence: Prayer and Practice*, London 1971. The scope of his involvement is clear in *Dom Helder Camara: Essential Writings*, New York 2009.

As I was preparing to leave for Indonesia in 1973 the SCM held a four-day conference in Huddersfield on “Seeds of Liberation: Spiritual Dimensions to Political Struggle.” For SCM in those days, radical politics was about maintaining a pact with the defeated. The speaker who most stimulated me was **Daniel Berrigan** (1921–2016), the Jesuit poet and peace activist, and recurrent prison inmate. His biblical retreats have been an inspiration ever since.<sup>30</sup> For nigh on 90 years he walked the talk, placing his body where his soul was, in his non-violent struggle against the militarisation of the USA and its economy. Later, in the early 1980s, Berrigan was one of the first to accompany HIV sufferers in New York when AIDS still heralded stigmatisation and death.

As **John Wesley** would no doubt have put it: In 1968 the world had become our parish.<sup>31</sup>

### *1968: Fifty Years Later*

Having undertaken cross-cultural studies in London comparing Islam in Morocco with Islam in Java,<sup>32</sup> for my first assignment I opted for Indonesia, home to the largest Muslim ‘*umma*’ in the world. And so, in veritable SVD tradition, I was appointed to the Catholic isle of Flores where I have been ever since.<sup>33</sup> Living for the past 45 years as an ordained minister in a local Church marred by rampant clerical-

<sup>30</sup> In particular, *Whereon to Stand: The Acts of the Apostles and Ourselves* (1991); *Isaiah: Sprit of Courage, Gift of Tears* (1996); *Ezekiel: Vision in the Dust* (1997); *Daniel: Under the Siege of the Divine* (1998); *Job: And Death No Dominion* (2001); *Wisdom: The Feminine Face of God* (2001); *The Kings and Their Gods: The Pathology of Power* (2008); *No Gods but One* (2009). – See also Jim Forest, *At Play in the Lion’s Den. A Biography and Memoir of Daniel Berrigan*, Maryknoll, NY 2017.

<sup>31</sup> “I look upon all the world as my parish,” *The Journal of John Wesley*, (recorded on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1739).

<sup>32</sup> With **Adrian Edwards CSSp** (1933–2017), an outstanding lecturer in social anthropology, who also possessed a lovingly eccentric personality. The classic text in those days was Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago 1971), which followed on from *The Religion of Java* (Chicago 1960).

<sup>33</sup> John Musinsky’s letter of 31<sup>st</sup> August 1971 reads in part, “On the basis of Frater Prior’s letter (10<sup>th</sup> April ‘71), we are inclined to assign him to the Ende Region in Flores. He has volunteered for pastoral work in Indonesia, to get at least several years of grass-roots missionary experience with non-Christians: we feel he will get this in the Flores mission.” Well, in the 1970s during Ramadan I taught members of the local Muslim ‘*umma*’ inside the Al Taqwah Mosque in Maumere! In those days, religious boundaries were thankfully porous.

ism with its concomitant sexual and financial scandals, has, I trust, turned me neither overtly cynical nor obnoxiously arrogant. It has, however, led to my thanking God that I could enjoy my basic formation in Ireland and England during those delightfully creative and value-inducing years of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Glancing back through this rather random reconnaissance of 1968, one person who has not been granted a mention, and yet has had a major impact on my life, is **Thomas Merton** who died on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1968. I had been devouring his numerous writings since high school in the 1950s, and his insights have nourished my spiritual life ever since.<sup>34</sup> A name that produced a mere echo earlier, despite his restless presence, is that of John O'Donohue.<sup>35</sup> But then 1968 was too early for any meaningful immersion into Celtic spirituality which was awakened only after 1990 with regular exposure to the primal cultures of the Asmat people of West Papua. Who, then, stands for 1968? Put another way: "Since the past speaks of difference, and thus of the future,"<sup>36</sup> what nutritious dregs from 1968 remain to sustain me?

Each two months with the arrival of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper (still a nominal one cent a copy), I am reminded of the ideals I sought to embrace as a naïve youngster back in '68. I read of **Peter Maurin** (1877–1949) and **Dorothy Day** (1897–1980)<sup>37</sup> and the anarchist movement they started, now in its 85<sup>th</sup> year with a loose confederation of 240 communities committed to nonviolence, voluntary pov-

<sup>34</sup> I read Merton's autobiography in high school (UK edition entitled *Elected Silence*), and have literally dozens of his works (well-marked!) as well as Michael Mott's magisterial biography (*The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, Boston 1984), and Ron Seitz' poetic appreciation 25 years after Merton's tragic accident in Bangkok (*Song for Nobody: A Memory Vision of Thomas Merton*, Liguori 1993).

<sup>35</sup> Apart from ancient Celtic spirituality, I have found John O'Donohue's contemporary Celtic imagination merging with my appreciation of Asmat religious culture, in particular, O'Donohue's two classics, *Anam Cara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World* (London 1997), and *Eternal Echoes: Exploring Our Hunger to Belong*.

<sup>36</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Gatekeeper*, 101.

<sup>37</sup> At my bedside I have Peter Maurin's *Easy Essays* (Chicago 1977), *The Dorothy Day Book* (ed. Margaret Quigley & Michael Garvey, East Adams 1982), *Dorothy Day: Selected Writings* (ed. Robert Ellsberg, New York 1993), and the fascinating biography by Dorothy's granddaughter, *Dorothy Day: The World Will Be Saved by Beauty* (by Kate Hennessy, New York 2017). I follow Jerome's advice: "Let sleep creep over you holding a book, and let the page receive your drooping face... Reading is the oil that keeps the lamp burning." From Letter XXII to Eustochim. Quoted in Dorothy Day's column "On Pilgrimage", *Catholic Worker* (November 1961, 1).

erty and prayer. They grant hospitality for the homeless, the exiled, the hungry and the forsaken. I read of Catholic Workers who continue to protest injustice, war, racism and violence. I peruse tales by those who run organic farms in the countryside.<sup>38</sup> Reading and reflecting, I recall the ideals I vowed to live back in 1968.

Confreres who know me recognise how much I rationalise and compromise and betray my principles. Yet the ideal of living close to those discarded at the periphery, studying through the eyes and hearts of the victims at the fringe of society, is what placed me here in Maumere. And if all those national and international meetings and workshops in which I participate year by year are to mean anything,<sup>39</sup> let alone the retreats with confreres, diocesan clergy, catechists and myriad congregations of Sisters—not excluding my primary task of teaching at Ledalero, then these endeavours need to widen my horizon and deepen my heart as each time I return home to embed myself once more in marginal communities.<sup>40</sup>

As Dorothy Day puts it: *“The biggest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution that has to start with each one of us.”* Hence, together with houses of hospitality and organic farms, Peter Maurin highlights his uncomplicated commitment to roundtable discussions for the clarification of thought, where we inquire as to *“... why the things are what they are, how the things would be if they were as they should be, and how a path can be made from the things as they are to the things as they should be.”*<sup>41</sup> To me, fifty years later, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin stand for 1968.

In summary: That year of turbulent politics and student protest was, for me, a year of mounting lucidity, a peeling back of given answers as we allowed ourselves to be seduced towards new horizons of possibility. The one enduring need throughout the subsequent 50 years has been for *the love of Christ to overwhelm me* (cf. 2 Cor 5:14).

<sup>38</sup> See [www.catholicworker.org](http://www.catholicworker.org) [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018].

<sup>39</sup> For a positive appraisal (written 21 years ago!) of international meetings and conferences (“affirmations of solidarity and symbolic spaces for those who speak a common language”), see Prior, *Transforming Mission: The Impact of Zonal Meetings: Verbum SVD* 38:4 (1997) 363–381. I am also aware that conferences can degenerate into “anthropological rituals” at which the like-minded gather for mutual recognition and consolation. Enough said!

<sup>40</sup> Since the year 2000 I have been living in a small SVD community in town.

<sup>41</sup> [www.catholicworker.org](http://www.catholicworker.org) [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018].

**ABSTRACTS**

Der Autor ruft verschiedene Ereignisse und Situationen des Jahres 1968 auf und analysiert die Inspirationen damals und ihre Folgen bis heute. Die Armen, Gerechtigkeit, Gewalt und gewaltloser Widerstand sowie das Wort Gottes sind die Grundhaltungen, um sich mit den verschiedenen Kontexten seines missionarischen Engagements in Beziehung zu setzen.

El autor se remete a varios acontecimientos y eventos del año 1968 y analiza las inspiraciones de aquel entonces y sus efectos de largo alcance, hasta ahora. Los pobres, la justicia, la violencia y la resistencia no violenta al igual que la Palabra de Dios constituyen las actitudes básicas para relacionarse con los diferentes contextos de su compromiso misionero.

L'auteur évoque plusieurs incidents et événements de l'année 1968 et examine l'inspiration apportée et ses conséquences jusqu'aujourd'hui. Les pauvres, la justice, la violence et la résistance non-violente tout comme la Parole de Dieu sont les attitudes de base qui le relie aux différents contextes de son engagement missionnaire.