

Reflections on Banyo Seminary

7 February 2017

Monsignor John Grace

Thank you most sincerely for your kind invitation to reflect a little on Holy Spirit Seminary at Banyo. Your thoughtfulness honours the Seminary more than it stretches my mind. Presently, I am its thirteenth Rector – and, at my age, could well be the first to die in office, possibly even in the Office. One hopes, however, as my term progresses I may contribute something, however little, to its continuing life.

My priesthood was formed at Banyo in the years 1964 to 1970. They were exciting years in the Church as the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was in full swing and great hopes for the future of the Church were unfolding. A spirit of optimism captured seminarians and we were on the crest of a wave in numbers and enthusiasm. Expansion in student numbers and facilities characterised the period with which I am most familiar – new buildings, a lift and even a swimming pool were the features of that phase of the Banyo story. Whilst the chapel lay at the heart of the spiritual journey, a very fine extensive library was developed to assist in the education sought for in the priesthood. Despite the pressures which impact upon us as true Christian believers we cannot

surrender a spirit of hope and enthusiasm for the ministry of the Gospel.

My return to Banyo at the beginning of 2016 surprised no one more than myself. I had been on the priestly journey for over 45 years when the invitation to return was issued by the Queensland Bishops. It took me five days to recover from the shock! Retirement, or more exactly resignation from appointed office, was on the agenda and this 'call' seemed to involve a strange detour. It was, therefore, with reluctance and anxiety that my 'yes' was given and with great hesitancy I began my ministry in the Seminary. Looking back, returning has been a rewarding opportunity, too good to have passed over, to refresh myself in appreciation of the sacred gift entrusted to me at Ordination on 6 August 1970.

I arrived at Banyo in early January 2016 to discover that 75 years had passed since the first students (some 56) arrived in 1941. For three-quarters of a century Banyo has been a sacred site in Queensland. I consider myself blessed to have been aligned, in some degree, for over fifty years of the Seminary's completed seventy-five i.e. for two-thirds of its existence. The Seminary has provided education and formation to young men, from within Queensland and beyond the borders of Australia, aspiring to become priests. Over the years approximately 1000 students have enrolled and slightly over 400 ordained. Indeed, the Seminary has been fertile soil for the Church in Queensland in providing pastors for the People of God. The Church had come of age in this State by the mid 1930's when the Bishops had both the courage and the

foresight to establish a seminary to form, basically, a home-grown clergy.

The first Ordinations occurred in 1948. Age has crept upon the students of the founding years. Early last year the last surviving priests from the first and second years of Ordinations (Father Ed O'Dwyer and Bishop Ray Benjamin) died. Bishop John Gerry who began his studies in Banyo, and was later ordained in Rome, is the 'Senior Surviving Statesman'. You know what an honour he is and how deservingly he wears the title*. We congratulated him accordingly at the 75th Celebration.

The 75th celebration was simple and uncomplicated - Mass in the Holy Spirit Chapel followed by lunch for 135, bishops, priests, a deacon, students, staff both past and present in the Seminary's Xavier Hall. Archbishop Mark Coleridge presided at the Eucharist celebration. Father John Chalmers proposed the toast to the seminary on the occasion. The photographic display and the PowerPoint presentation captured the spirit of the changing times.

The 75th served as a good 'gathering time' for memories and progress of the Seminary story. Banyo has had mobile existence through stable service throughout the years. There were surely misgivings by the Bishops when the decision to begin Banyo was taken during the years of World War II, as there were with the relocations of their latter years. Three sites claim Banyo: On Beehive Hill where it began in 1941 and thrived until the end of 2001; then a phase with fewer members at a former Presentation Sisters Convent in Wavell Heights until the end of 2007;

* Bishop Gerry died on 13 December 2017. (Ed.)

returning to the first of three stages of a newly constructed Seminary at Banyo on a section of the original property for the start of 2008. The name Pius XII Provincial Seminary changed to Holy Spirit Seminary, Queensland, with the move to Wavell Heights. Its motto *Convestitum Spiritu Sancto* – clothed with the Holy Spirit – fits beautifully the formation of students which occurs under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The principal Formators are the Holy Spirit and the students willing selves.

For myself the 75th was a truly joyous event. Some priests of earlier years had never returned; others made their first visit to Holy Spirit Seminary. The priests expressed gratitude to me for the welcome and the hospitality of the seminarians. Each table had the pleasure of one student attendant. Moreover, it began a respectful recall of the peak moments of the years. Some readily come to mind. Firstly are the Bishops who claim Banyo on their priestly journey: Archbishop John Bathersby, Bishops Ray Benjamin, John Gerry, Brian Heenan, James Foley, Bill Morris, Michael Putney, Anthony Randazzo and Tim Harris, all former students. Two former rectors, not trained at Banyo also became Bishops: John Torpie and Michael McCarthy. The Rectors deserve mention: Monsignors Vince Cleary, Con Roberts, John Torpie, Fathers Bill Smith, Bill O'Shea, Tom Boland, Alan Sheldrick, Maurice Duffy, Frank Lourigan, John Chalmers, Michael McCarthy and Msgr Tony Randazzo. They brought academic, spiritual and pastoral gifts to leadership. Of the thirteen rectors seven have been former students, namely Rectors O'Shea, Boland, Sheldrick, Lourigan, Chalmers, Randazzo and Grace. Six have died: Cleary, Roberts, Torpie, Smith, Boland, and Duffy. Staffs

over the years have included both clergy and religious. Father Bernard Wallace, long term lecturer across a wide range of subjects, became Bishop of Rockhampton. The Christian Brothers taught initially those who had not reached senior standard of education. Gradually lay staff became involved in secretarial service and housekeeping. The Franciscan Sisters of Mary served Banyo humbly quietly and efficiently in the kitchen and the laundry keeping students healthy and presentable. The present Staff is a combination of clergy, religious and laity.

If all seemed so good, why the change of place and style? Style is quickly caught from the Ordination class photos – the swing away from intensely clerical appearance to hardly discernible clerics in lay attire is currently readjusting itself. A pendulum serves more than a clock! Two obvious reasons are easily discernible: the decline in the numbers of seminarians and the growth of lay people being trained as Catholic teachers for schools and colleges of Queensland. In my years as a student, numbers rose to the mid-140s. This year we are proud of 20 young men. McAuley College, which trained teachers, was glad to find an expanded home with Australian Catholic University who now use the site with additional buildings and ever-growing numbers. Over 7000 are enrolled in one of the three faculties on the Banyo site: Health, Education, Philosophy and Theology. The University employs 1000 Staff. Banyo is no longer a suburb in the Brisbane bush but very much part of suburbia. Woolworths raised its head last year. The medical centre in the village nearby has twenty doctors on their list.

I can single out a variety of faces for the change:

Students truly reflect the Church of today: smaller in number, older in age and a cultural mix. Whilst this presents its own challenge, it is nevertheless a good entrée into the nature of the Catholic Church. A casual glance over the student body reflects the remarkable change of the past fifty years. Numbers have declined from 140 plus to 20 – a seven-fold drop. The average age has lifted from around 20 years to 30 – up by half. Students mainly Australian born then were of European stock – Irish, English, Italian and Maltese. Now they are of mixed race, nationality and culture. We trace origins in Australia, New Zealand, Poland, Samoa, India, China, Philippines, Korea, South Africa and North America. Lurking in the wings are possible students from Vietnam following more recently students from Nigeria. Four continents (North America, Africa, Asia and Australia) are part of the present blend. Family history, personal interests, life experiences, devotional practices, attitude towards authority, class distinction, hierarchical order are all interwoven. Beyond a common humanity, a Christian faith and a Catholic Religion, the meeting point for a comfortable unity seems to be at Yum Cha! It animates like nothing else. The young men (not all so young) are of mature years. They have to be regarded and treated as such. The boyish spirit has faded. This quip of ‘a kid becoming an institutionalised kid’ no longer applies. Starting off as priests they also do so with more maturity and better self-confidence. Formation for older students is possibly a little more difficult as one’s ways tend to solidify with the years. Only anyone who is formable, however, rightly, has place in a Seminary.

The Staff, mostly part-time, are a mix of clerical, religious and lay. All are highly qualified in their respective disciplines. I am deeply impressed by the quality of the Formation Team and the academic competence which underlines the generosity and concern that they hold for the students. I remain intrigued at just how much energy is drawn from so many in the service of so few! The Students receive very personal attention.

Therein lies another change: the personal care of each student. Each is required to visit the Spiritual Director at least monthly, the Formator twice in the semester, the Vice-Rector every two months, the Rector once per semester, the Academic Dean at the start of each semester, and the Personal Trainer twice per semester. Students write, according to a prescribed form, a self-evaluation at the end of every semester. They are then interviewed by a staff panel for its endorsement. It seems like 'overkill' but it is not oppressive or daunting at least from my perspective. Accompaniment may be the best word to describe the journey. It is also a fine step into collaborative ministry.

The form of education, too, has stretched beyond the Seminary to include the Australian Catholic University Faculty of Philosophy and Theology. The students study Philosophy, Theology, Scripture and Church History at the University. I am especially grateful for the involvement of the Faculty members as well as the Associate Vice-Chancellor with the support of the Vice-Chancellor. Pastoral life, the practicalities of priesthood, liturgy, canon law, the spiritual life, and mission outreach flow from internal courses as well as attention to proper

self-care in hygiene, health and physical fitness. The Seminary is equipped with a very fine gymnasium and employs the service of a Personal Trainer. Every second year the students participate in an Australian Inter-Seminary Soccer Tournament. The Foundational Documents which shape daily life are: The Vatican II Decree on Priestly Formation, Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* which mentions 4 pillars of formation: Spiritual, Pastoral, Intellectual and Human; and directions from both Rome and the Conference of Australian Bishops. The Vatican Congregation for Clergy has recently issued a new Ratio entitled "The Gift of the Priestly Vocation" (8/12/2016) which we are studying and awaiting direction from the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Residential living is peculiar to Banyo. The students live in houses of 4 or 8 where they care for themselves by meals, laundry, shopping and house care. This may be less economical but it is part of the future style of living not far ahead of them. The days of housekeepers have passed. A little bit of work in the gardens serves them well.

The course of studies beyond academic includes:

*Annual Retreat and visits to Catholic Colleges and Schools in a different Diocese each year.

*Class Formation weekends, twice a year.

*A Pastoral year in a Parish of the Diocese to which the student belongs, in the fifth year of formation.

*Advent Placement in a home Diocese Parish.

*An immersion experience including a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Sunday Parish placements.

*Other Spiritual/Pastoral directions like ‘Men Alive’ weekend, the ‘Ignite Conference’, ‘Ignite Live’ and Emmanuel Worship.

Discipline is essential in every person’s life. It is part of our training. The rigorous standards of earlier years have been replaced by a greater emphasis on self-discipline. I believe that a measure of freedom is essential if students are to be true to themselves. They are clever enough to conceal behaviour so as to satisfy the system – leaving it so easy for ‘breaking out’ later on. I wish to see them in a more open and honest cast so that we are more confident when it comes to recommendation for Holy Orders.

Indeed, it is not my wish to cast any aspersion on the Seminary of foregone years. I would be cutting my own throat to start with. Seminary life was cast at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and had 400 years’ experience and proven worth. The Church got its act together then, and this has served the times magnificently. The monastic approach of Banyo’s founding years with students withdrawn or isolated from the community fostered a true clericalism in prayer, life style and ministry. Since Vatican II we have heard the directive to become involved in the community and to integrate the priestly life into the general life of the People of God. Both the Church and the world have changed. Ongoing education is on the rise as a necessity for future clergy. I hope that we can be part of its provision. Especially in the country dioceses where clergy numbers are sparse and distance between them vast we must address the serious issues of isolation and

loneliness with both modern technology and personal engagement. The immediate support of closeness to confreres no longer exists. That was once an almost everyday support structure.

Our focus is largely on the local Church. However that is a small part of a much bigger story. The Queensland Church (of 5 Dioceses) is testimony to a great story. Clergy from elsewhere have dominated. Priests who were Italian (like Fr Canali); Irish (like so many); French and Polish established the local Churches. The names at Nudgee Cemetery are bold reminders. This country is no longer of European stock alone. Our congregations reflect it. Again, priests again from overseas staff parishes. Banyo has done its share in shaping cultural programmes for clergy and students who minister daily in both city and country. Faces of priests from Africa, India, Philippines, Korea and Vietnam etc. are common place. We do pay a price for this – but this is our precious pearl: the Church. Handling new arrivals with language differences, clerical attitude to laity, especially women, and different pastoral styles are daily challenges in clergy formation. I become more aware ‘day by day’ that perfection comes in the next life! For one generation only has the predominant parish leadership in the Province been provided by locally born and trained clergy.

In mid-year we will host the Oceania Rectors’ Conference. It will draw Rectors of 16 Seminaries – 8 in Australia, 1 in New Zealand, 4 in Papua New Guinea, 1 in Guam, 1 in Solomon Islands and 1 in Fiji. We have set the theme: ‘Formation for Ordained Ministry from Generation Y to the Plenary Council’. The inputs will be

important and they are being professionally developed. Maybe of greater value will be the experience shared in conversations over dinner. It is a promising adventure which hopefully succeeds. We cannot presume to journey alone in the complexities of the present age. Sexual abuse to children has dogged the Church these last 15 years. The damage has not limited itself to young people. Future priests must be better prepared in the field of Professional Standards. We have detailed our approach in a report to the Royal Commission.

For the first time this year Banyo is presenting to the students, and open to others in the Province, a School of Evangelisation. It will run for a week in February followed up by a week in February of next year. Diocesan Education Offices, other Agencies and Parishes are indicating interest in the project which will refine itself slowly over the next two years. Mission and Pastoral Ministry have a sharpened focus in seminary formation. We do have to take careful steps to eliminate clumsiness, to increase accountability and to restore lost ground in so many ways. Our steps maybe faltering but they are sincere. Nothing can replace a sound and solid human formation. All else is built on this basis. Each grade remains: Human, Christian and Priest

Well: What of the experience of the last year? It has been a sharp learning curve for myself. I am impressed by the quality of the young men whom we have the privilege of being involved in formation. The cultural experience is enriching. The integrity of young men offering themselves to the service of the Church in a less than conducive society is impressive. Of course, God has

never closed the door to the call for vocations. The path is less clear and the general regard less supportive. In fact the way is counter cultural. We do not boast of a neat, tidy operation. Nor is it careless. The prayerful and financial support of the people of Queensland is heartening. In that we find endorsement and a genuine encouragement for our humble efforts.

Thank you for your attention to my ramblings.