

## A Toast to Banyo at 75

3 Nov 2016

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[This is the text of the Toast given by Fr Chalmers at a dinner to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Banyo Seminary. Although it was not given at a BCHS meeting, it is included here to complement the previous article by Very Rev John Grace, who mentions the speech in his paper. Ed]

### Introduction

In ten minutes time, I'll be asking you to raise a glass to Banyo at 75. But first, **who** or **what** is this Banyo we toast? For some of us it will always be *Pius XII Provincial Seminary*, the ever-expanding and eventually too-expansive set of Hennessy-designed buildings that arose on Beehive Hill in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Thousands of years earlier, indigenous Australians came to the Nudgee Bora Ring, just over the back fence. There they corroborated their sacred stories, as we seek to do at Banyo, to this day.

For today's seminarians, Banyo is *Holy Spirit Seminary*. Designed by three architectural firms Conrad and Gargett, Hargreaves, Briggs and Jacuzzi, and Ainsley, Bell and Murchison, this complex graciously hosts our gathering

today. There was a time, in the closing years of the twentieth century when Banyo Seminary wasn't at Banyo. It was 'on pilgrimage' at Wavell Heights, between the Banyo we knew yesterday and the Banyo we know today. In each of its three iterations Banyo students were being subtly shaped for pastoral ministry, and at times not so subtly shaped; sometimes with and often without those they would eventually work alongside. Winston Churchill bears quoting and considering: we give shape to our buildings and from that moment onwards, our buildings shape us.

### **Buildings that have shaped us**

Originally built far out of the city, the world, these days, comes to Banyo. It is more than appropriate that a Seminary should sit within clear view of passers-by in the busy streets approaching Earnshaw Road, rather than hidden behind a semi- forest, far from the Madding Crowd. Not that it was always clear who comprised the Madding Crowd, those walking past and peering in, or those walking around within, pining to be let out! Pope Francis would no doubt wryly observe: 'If Jesus is knocking on the door of our hearts, it's not only to be let in. It's likely that he wants to be let out, into the world, where *he and we* can warm the hearts of people, *where he and we* can walk through the dark night with them, *where he and we* can dialog and descend ourselves into their night, into their darkness, but without getting lost'<sup>1</sup>. Alfred Lord Tennyson's epic poem *Ulysses* sounds the urgency of the task: 'Come my friends, tis not too late to seek a newer world.' Pope Francis's papacy is a masterclass in creating a culture of encounter, both within

and beyond the church. It's one thing to talk about constructing Banyo. But we're also influenced by the people who have made Banyo Banyo.

### **People Who Have Shaped Us**

First, the generous people across the Dioceses of Queensland who continue to pay for these buildings and their upkeep, and who pray for seminarians and staff. Then the staff who came here searching for a good self to be, and for satisfying work to do, whether in the grounds, in administration, in the laundry or in the kitchen. The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary came to Banyo after being expelled from China in 1941. They spent the next 35 years feeding ravenous seminarians, praying daily for each of us. Their presence hinted at a larger church. They would no doubt be chuffed, and Sister Doreen would chuckle to know that decades later, many young Chinese students have followed the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary to Banyo as international students of ACU. Exceptionally gifted academic staff set themselves on fire with enthusiasm for learning and invited us to warm to their wares. I think of people like Bill O'Shea, Tom Boland, Dave Hawe, Peter McEniery, Ray Kearney, Elaine Wainwright, Bernie Wallace, James Foley, Wrex Woolnough, Michael Putney, Orm Rush, Dave Pascoe and many others. Banyo's thirteen Rectors, including today's host, John Grace, did the best we knew and the best they were capable of. Some of us struggled with the role. Yet, surely every one of us came to make St Augustine's words our own: *Entrusting the past to God's Mercy, the Present to God's Love and the Future to God's Providence.*

## Across the Years

Queensland's Bishops, from James Duhig to Mark Coleridge dared to dream big. They transformed a pineapple farm on Beehive Hill into a gracious resource for the Church in Queensland. They dreamed that one day this small portion of what's called "the Quinn Estate" might host **both** the Seminary and a Catholic University. The Bishops pursued this vision through a series of stepping stones, across many decades. In the 1970s and 80s, Banyo lecturers began teaching at the University of Queensland and at what became Australian Catholic University. Many seminarians took classes at St Lucia, trekking across the city in the Seminary's trusty Torana. Then, for twenty-six years, Trinity College and St Francis College joined Banyo in an enormously fruitful ecumenical collaboration called the Brisbane College of Theology. Its demise brought regret, just as its existence brought grace beyond imagining.

Through the Brisbane College of Theology, women and men enriched Banyo's classes through their commitment to learning and living the faith. From the late 1980s, Australian Defence Force deacons and their wives participated energetically in Banyo's story. In the 1990s, Vietnamese seminarians came to Banyo with stories of faith honed by dramatic escapes from their beloved homeland. They spent months, even years in refugee camps, along the way. More recently Banyo has been enlarged by seminarians from Nigeria intent on serving God's mission of mending a broken world, far from home.

Over the years, seminarians came in their hundreds to Banyo to test a vocation. Some who came, found

themselves, and left. Some perhaps didn't find themselves and stayed. Others found themselves, after ordination, undertaking a different cruise from the one they thought they had signed up for. Some left, married and had a family and live out the lay vocation with great credibility. Others stayed; exhilarated and challenged to live the three key vocational questions: *who* am I, *whose* am I, and how will I *respond* to God's call to mercy among and beyond us?

### **Singing the Song of the Crucified One**

I've heard it said that to love someone is to learn the song they are singing and to sing it to them when they forget it. What an inspiring image for ordained ministry: to learn the song of the-crucified-and-raised one and to keep humming it *lest we forget* God's call to tame the savageness we're capable of, and to make gentle the life of this world.<sup>2</sup> In the light of the Royal Commission, Banyo is redoubling its efforts to produce priests who, in John Paul's words, are "credible heralds of the gospel, experts in humanity, who have a profound knowledge of the heart of present-day men and women, participating in their joys and hopes, anguish and sadness, and who are at the same time contemplatives, in love with God."<sup>3</sup>

### **Banyo's Vocation**

How sobering that we should toast Banyo a few days before the 2016 US Presidential election, and forty-one years since the Dismissal. Well might we say: God save the seminary; or better still, God savour the seminary. For God is the beating heart, the subversive presence and absence that underpins its every day. Forty years ago,

Henri Nouwen wrote: “Our society seems to be increasingly full of fearful, defensive, aggressive people, anxiously clinging to their property and inclined to look at their surrounding world with suspicion, always expecting an enemy to suddenly appear, intrude and do harm.” In the face of ugly divisiveness, where others are automatically labelled aliens or enemies, could Banyo’s vocation be: “to form priests adept at converting the *hostis*, the enemy, into *hospes* honoured guests?” This would see Banyo seminarians adept at creating that “safe and fearless space where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become fellow human beings.”<sup>4</sup>

May Banyo teach Seminarians how to build bridges rather than walls. Besides learning to keep respectful boundaries, may Banyo’s students learn how to hold others in difficult conversations; how to hold oneself and others to account; when to quieten our tongue and when to speak. As Pope Francis said recently: “We need to form future priests not to general and abstract ideas, but to the keen discernment of spirits, so they can help people in their concrete life. We need to truly understand this: in life, not all is black and white. No, the shades of grey prevail in life. We must teach them to discern in this grey area.”<sup>5</sup>

Not all who came to Banyo over the years found Nouwen’s free and fearless space where strangers could become brothers. Perhaps some still carry heavy memories that remain raw and unresolved. Indeed, as Desmond Tutu has observed: “We grieve as much for what might have been as well as for what was.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, today we not only count our blessings, voicing *gratitude*

for those many people through whom God has been at work among us. We also voice *regret*, personal and communal regret for times when we have forgotten Vatican Two's *Gaudium et Spes*; that it is the church's task to uncover, to cherish and to ennoble all that is true, good and beautiful in the human community.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in our hearts.<sup>8</sup> Clasp a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other helps us keep our eyes peeled for glimpses for what the saints are blinded by. For the lively Word of God has always lurked around Banyo, corroborating stories of faith and stories of life. It is the Word who is born in silence, the Word who is heard in whispers, and the Word who today and tomorrow, no less than yesterday we proclaim from the rooftop.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

One last story of a young boy watching Michelangelo sculpt a block of Carrara marble. He watches closely, fascinated. Then he calls out to Michelangelo: "Hey Mister! How did you know that there was a lion hiding in that block of marble?" "Because it whispered to me: let me out!"

Banyo, at its best, listens to the Lord whisper: Let me out! Though we may bungle through life, sniffing like bloodhounds through the forest of our lives we catch a scent of where meaning paused. The search is what we know so well. The rest is heaven. In words taken from John Kennedy's Inaugural Address, my prayer and my toast today is this: *With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to serve the land we love, asking God's blessing and*

*God's help, but knowing that here on earth, God's work must truly be our own.*<sup>10</sup>

Raise a glass and toast Banyo Seminary at 75!

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- <sup>1</sup> Pope Francis (2013) *A Big Heart Open to God* New York: Harper p31
- <sup>2</sup> Aeschylus, quoted by Robert Kennedy on hearing of the April 14, 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King.
- <sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul 2 address 11 October 1985 #13
- <sup>4</sup> Henri Nouwen (1967) *Reaching Out* London: Collins p 65
- <sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, meeting with Jesuits in Poland, 30 July 2016
- <sup>6</sup> Desmond and Mphor Tutu (2014) *The Book of Forgiving* London: William Collins p102
- <sup>7</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* #76
- <sup>8</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* #1
- <sup>9</sup> Fred Craddock frames his theology of preaching around these three phrases. See Fred Craddock (1985) *Preaching* Knoxville: Abingdon Press
- <sup>10</sup> John F Kennedy's Inaugural Address, printed in Thurston Clarke's *Ask Not*, New York: Henry Holt, xvi