



AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER FROM THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS' COMMUNITY,
8 CROFTWOOD GROVE, CHERRY ORCHARD, DUBLIN 10.

Scribbles from the Margins 13

December 2017

IN THIS ISSUE

Hard Questions

Paul Hendrick

Most cell doors in our prisons have a little slot on them which holds a piece of soft card with the prisoner's name and release date typed neatly on it. The slot on Morgan's door is empty, at his own request. It is better that his release date is not widely known; if it were, there might be an unwelcome reception committee awaiting him on his first few days of freedom.

What Morgan does know is that when that day comes he will have served his sentence of thirteen years less remission – 3,575 days.

Calculating this figure, including three extra days for leap years and two weeks lost remission for assaulting a prison officer, would have taxed Morgan's mathematics to its very limits but he has had

plenty of time to check calculations.

On his release, Morgan will be a few weeks short of his 33rd birthday, one of his sons will have completed his Junior Certificate and the other, whom he hardly knows, will be in fourth class.

When in a pensive mood, Morgan often thinks of the missed milestones. The list is almost endless – his younger son's birth, first smile, first tooth, first steps, first

words, first 'Dada', visits to and from Santa, first day at school, first Holy Communion his older son's Confirmation, moving to second level school, winning the



Hard Questions

Paul Hendrick

Memories of Marie

Outreach Fund

Retreat

There's no Cheap Grace at the Margins.

Martin Byrne

Slivers of Identification

Martin Byrne

Stream of Consciousness

Seán Beckett

Suggested Reading

'Man of the Match' award, sitting the Junior Certificate State Examination It goes on and on, lost memories that can never be restored.

Over the years, Sister Mary and myself have probably visited Morgan in prison forty or fifty times.

Normally, visits are easy.

Morgan is animated as he talks about his latest interests:

- Going to the gym, the MMA (mixed martial arts) craze and Conor McGregor's exploits;
- The books he reads and TV programmes he watches;
- Taking part in Christmas Pantomimes;
- Art and craft classes including gifts which he made for his family and a dream catcher for Mary;
- The creative writing classes and the poetry which he has written;
- Most of all, he talks about his pride in his two sons.

There's never any shortage of topics for conversation.

On two separate occasions when we visited, Morgan was seething with anger. The first was when word reached him that someone had demolished the headstone on his father's grave with a sledgehammer; the second, when his mother was hospitalised as a result of a physical assault with an iron bar.

I first got to know Morgan just over twenty years ago when he came to the Life Centre as an early school leaver. His father had died and the family was struggling to cope. His many cries for help had been ignored and finally he was excluded from the Primary school he was attending. At the Life Centre, he enjoyed practical subjects like art & craft, cooking,

woodwork and P.E. but made very slow progress at academic subjects.

The best efforts of the staff at the Life Centre failed to get Morgan the help he so desperately needed from the statutory agencies.

Inevitably, he came to the attention of the Gardaí, the courts, the juvenile detention services and then the adult prison system. Finally, his involvement in serious, gang-related crime resulted in the thirteen year sentence which he has just completed.

In early November, Mary and myself went to Portlaoise to visit Morgan only to discover that he had been released unexpectedly the previous day. I was sorry not to have the opportunity to say good-bye to Morgan.

In a strange way I'll miss my visits to the High Security Prison. I'll probably never see Morgan again – unless in the unlikely event that we meet up on the Costa del Sol or some other such refuge.



I'm often asked why do I visit the Morgans of this world in prison, people who have destroyed lives with their drug dealing, people who have shot others and been shot at, people

who will stop at nothing to collect a debt.

The harder question might be: Why not?

Memories of Marie

Marie Maher

Marie passed away in the last week of September after a short stay in hospital.

Marie was a loyal member of the Thursday Women's Group which meets weekly in The Cherry Orchard Life Centre.

The Group is slowly coming to terms with the huge gap left by Marie's untimely death.

By way of remembrance, we reproduce here some of the pieces written by Marie as part of the Creative Writing class.

May her generous soul rest in peace.

The Dancehall

I used to go to Barry's with my friends. It was a dancehall. There were a lot of old people there and you would get some laughs out of them, the way they would dance.

One Saturday night about seven of us went and we were all out on the floor. It was a band that was playing. My friend said to me, "Ask that little fellow over there up." I said to her, "You do it!" She would. So, I did and I took him by the hands and swung him all around the floor. I let his hand go and he went all over the floor.

Jail

I am looking after my niece's baby. His father is locked up and one day my niece asked me would I meet her over at the jail to bring the baby to see his dad. So I told her I would meet her over there. It was a Sunday because we were getting a box visit (a private visit with no screen between visitors and prisoner).

I met her and we went in. We had to wait for a while. At about two-thirty we were called. We had to go through this machine to see if we had any drugs on us. I was alright but when it came to my niece the alarm went off. All of the guards came running. They said that she had something on her. So, we did not get a box visit that day. I never went over again.

The Shop

I remember I worked in a shop in Parnell Street. I started at ten in the morning. That day went great. The owner of the shop said he had to go out for a while. He asked me and his daughter would it be alright, and we said, "Yes." At about nine thirty this lad came in and asked for smokes. I gave them to him. When I opened the till he tried to rob the money out of it. So, I caught his hand in the till drawer. He got no money.

About a week later his mother came in to the shop and started to give out to me. I said to her it would have been worse if I gave his name to the Garda. So, I told her to get out of the shop and I told the owner when he came back.

**Football**

My sister's three boys play for Sheriff. The oldest boy got the golden boot four or five times. The others are only with Sheriff a few months but I'd say they will go a long way. They all love playing football. I think the oldest one is getting too old as he is thirty-five now. I hope he goes on to help others. He was picked to go away and train in Spain. There were twenty picked, all from different clubs. On the seventeenth of May he is playing for the cup in the Aviva and all the family are going to see him playing.

Outreach Fund

**Contributions
to the
Outreach Fund
are always
welcome**

Our Outreach Fund, which is now in its fourth year, is geared towards our outreach in Cherry Orchard and The North Wall.

We started off our current financial year in September 2017 with a balance of €4,250 in the Outreach Fund.

Since then we have received contributions totaling almost €3,746 for which we are extremely grateful.

The following is a summary of the expenses to date for the current financial year (1st Sept 2017 to 31st October 2017):

<i>Assessment for addiction treatment</i>	<i>€100</i>
<i>Prison Visits</i>	<i>€110</i>
<i>Help with Groceries & Household</i>	<i>€240</i>
<i>Assistance with Funeral Expenses</i>	<i>€200</i>
<i>Others</i>	<i>€200</i>
<i>Bank charges</i>	<i>€ 41</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>€891</i>
<i>Balance</i>	<i>€7,105</i>

Retreats with a difference

Searching for Mystery in Marginal Communities was the theme of an on-site retreat/workshop hosted by the Christian Brothers' Community in Cherry Orchard in May 2017.

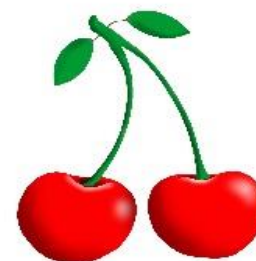
The participants enjoyed what was a very rich and enriching experience.

We plan to offer a similar retreat from Monday, 28th May to Friday, 1st June 2018 if there is a minimum of five participants.

A second retreat will take place from Monday, 23rd to Thursday 26th July 2018 and will be targeted at those who have already participated in one of our other retreats/workshops. The theme of this retreat will be 'Mystery Searching for us in Marginal Communities'. There are still some places available on this retreat.

Both retreats are non-residential and will involve encountering people living on the margins of society.

For further information about either retreat and for bookings, please contact either Seán, Martin or Paul.



The reality of gangland violence has claimed three lives around the North Wall in the past two months. Where is the mystery we call God in the bloody backdrop to the shootings of Eddie Hutch, Martin O'Rourke and Michael Barr? To opt to live, to work and to be really present in violent, unattractive hotspots is integral to the call of the prophet. Humanity and the Church and religious life could do with a lot more insurgents and awkward squads reminding us of why exactly Jesus was born among us and died.



Street memorial on Sheriff Street where Martin O'Rourke was murdered

There's No Cheap Grace at the Margins

Befriend struggling humans and stick-by together in kinship
Allowing the violence of poverty to invade our marrow
Marinating ourselves in any ghetto long term, hanging-in through good times and bad
Will surely rob the pure, joyous Alleluia from our lips.

Three soft targets executed in the inner city in the past month
Gangs of teenagers with guns squaring-up to each other in Cloverhill fields
Just another suicide of a depressed addict in the Lawns,
And a drink-fuelled Croftwood stabbing in our neighbour's house.

Stay away, if laden with theories and expectations, you're a user,
If you're an immersion tourist or a do-gooder on some pilgrimage, steer clear.
If your God is one of providential happy endings and 'all will be wellness'
Then distance yourself far away from the gas chamber's entrance.

The North Wall is not a place of cheap grace or of unearned hope
It's a land of chronic disappointment, of historic desperation and of human courage.
Our choice is to wallow in rage and self-pity, masking our pains in addictions
Or to grasp the stained life on offer, to mourn and to find mystery below our stories.

Sigh and cry in a world of flesh that weeps and bleeds and feels
While staying loyal to the pains and suffering of the people of the North Wall
Long after the mood has left, awakening us to the experience of weak resurrection
With margins erased, in simple friendships that count.

The silent scream sirens through whole neighbourhoods
Where it is both hard and easy to be human.
Surrendering a 'yes' to the degradation of poverty
Is not the prayer of Jesus hanging in the city's smelly dump.

Martin Byrne

Slivers of Identification

Noise at night with rallying joy-riders crashing through railings
 Our home quietly robbed by a Trojan Cherry Orchard horse
 Reverse karma!
 Cycling during bus strikes, waiting in line with a medical card at James'
 A & E
 Choosing to live on the margins within my comfortable means
 Such minimal, symbolic, much-needed slivers of identification
 Still leave me worlds apart.

A student has a knife put to her throat coming to school
 And now the protective blade in her pocket is as essential as her mobile
 The windows and doors of her house have been thrashed
 With her family's car defaced
 Where is resurrection in not sleeping and still not wanting to wake up?
 God wouldn't it be a relief to have a safe bolt-hole in the country to
 escape to
 Identifying in such evil madness is the awkward claim of kinship

These margins are not a violent, problematic landscape to be put right
 And my narrative, my destiny and my name as Brother is not to be a fixer
 The youngsters in the North Wall desire me to be alive and human
 Thus, mutually gift-sparking kinship between us
 A mystery not learnt or taught but caught, reminding us both of what is
 best inside
 Allowing our humanity to be remembered.
 With dockland friends we remould together towards authentic brothering.

In the beginning was costly, failure-laden kinship
 And with friendships at the margins
 We reclaim our plain, simple, small, hidden, mundane passions.
 Not having to be other than what is already within
 There is no need for biblical, canonical, sociological or philosophical
 definitions.
 Because in kinship with struggling people around here
 We are emptied of our distraction for successful outcomes.

Martin Byrne

The spirit of identification and of emptying ourselves into the
 lives of people and of communities struggling with the violence
 of extreme poverty demands that we leave behind notions of
 comfort, of careerism, of being saviour, of successful projects
 and of straddling easily into the world of the power players.
 Kinship is costly. Jesus went beyond slivers of identification with
 the struggling despised. He nailed his colours to the mast.



Van rammed and burnt to
 destroy the local security
 camera beside our home.

Stream of Consciousness

Seán Beckett

The cold and the heat; the warmth and the frozen. The welcome and the cold-hearted. The glow and the black ember. The light and the darkness. The sun and the moon. The sweet and the bitter. The snow and ice and the frost bite.

A mood of sadness just descends from nowhere, all of a sudden, without warning. It spells disaster, the unknown, the uncertainty. It longs for tears, it cries aloud in pain. It is dry and numb. It craves comfort and understanding.

Another milestone. Another venture about to be taken. Step off and forge ahead into the deep. Plans are in place now it's action! Confident and purposeful, positive and affirming. Let's go!

Someone else sees the beauty. Someone else sees the surprise. Others are more awake, more observant and more acute. It's in those moments of revelation that 'the penny drops' and clarity dawns.

Sense of achievement. Sense of success. Sense of fulfilment and elation. Sense of companionship and partnership. Sense of potential, purpose and involvement.

Tears of sadness, tears of regret. Tears shed for those who do not know or cry anymore. 'What ifs' and 'might have been'? Who we have hurt and hurt so badly. Is sorry enough? Do we go on hurting

them as we may be also to blame? Unsure, uncertainty, mistrust, suspicion. Will there be a venue to talk, listen and share? Will it help to understand and heal and 'move on'? How open and accepting must we become ... are we willing to begin?

Alone, in one's space, forgotten, lonely, neglected, abandoned, ignored, unnoticed, of no regard or consequence, worthless.

How free can I be to remain true to myself and allow others be free? Even if I don't agree, can I allow them be what they wish to be and wish to do? Can I keep myself in a safe, balanced place and accept the situation?

Generosity from surprised corners. Unexpected and sincere. Touching and appreciative. It's recognising empathy, understanding, sacrifice,

concern. It must be honoured and remembered.

The feeling of being ignored is pretty tough. It 'kinda cuts' at you. It's rough. It belittles you. It's worse than taking you for granted. It can cause you to become suspicious, to doubt, to feel anger and inflict pain ... and later experience great regret.

We are who we are. We are who we think we are. And who are we really? What makes us now and into the future? What shall we become? We can change for the better. We can attempt new things. We can take risks. We can be more alive!

The 'not knowing' feeling. The darkness and the numbness in between. The anguish, the search for meaning and nothing clear coming through. A time of worry, impatience and waiting.

A time of waiting or a time of wastefulness? Prepare to wait ... and often the surprise comes. Leave yourself open to the unexpected, to the gift of the moment. No one can tell you how long to wait, just wait and see for yourself.

The joy of welcome ... the words of appreciation. Openness and Value and Warmth. People are open and accepting. People are offering opportunities and the hand of friendship to create and build Community.

Knowing when I'm wrong, admitting when I'm wrong. Making a miscalculation. Learning from my mistakes and open to other ideas and solutions. Prepared to listen, to wait and be patient. Don't always look for quick answers. Allow process time for yourself and others.



New destinations ... new journeys ... new ventures ... new experiences. New discoveries and learning curves. Appreciate 'the new'. Be in 'the new' of the experience. Be alert. Notice!



Given another chance, a resit, a replay. A time to take stock. Learn from a mistake and go try another attempt. There's no shame in repeating. Carry the wisdom of others as you move forward.

What am I avoiding? What am I running away from? Why do I go into 'my cocoon' and seek self-comfort? It is inward-looking and avoiding and may also really be about laziness, apathy and selfishness.

Soft rain has fallen, refreshing the earth, the plants, the flowers. Rain has cleaned the area and the environment. Rain has nourished the place. Rain has dampened the high spirits of excited youth.



Venturing forth on your journey, Continue your path, discover and learn. Are you prepared for the journey ahead? Try to be open and trusting. Trust your own inner wisdom and guidance. Notice the wonder in the light and the colours of the world.

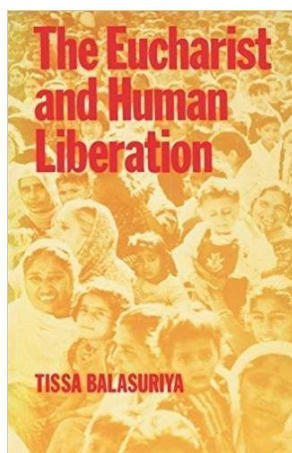
The weird and the beautiful. The strange and the familiar. The unknown. The mystery. The shock and terror and anxiety. The warning, caution and alarm. Be afraid, be very afraid!

The surprise of a moment, lifts the spirit, brings a smile and opens eyes bright. Reaction can be speechless, sheer delight, hugs, kisses and quick, quick chatter. And then awe!

Suggested Reading

The Eucharist and Human Liberation

Tissa Balasuriya



I first heard of Tissa Balasuriya almost thirty years ago when I came across his book 'Right Relationships'. Since then I have followed his career until he died in January 2013 at the age of 89.

Tissa Balasuriya was born in Kahatagasdigiliya, in the northern part of Sri Lanka to a middle-class family. His father, who was on the government payroll, sent him to a prestigious Catholic school. After graduating in economics from the University of Ceylon he spent six years in Rome studying philosophy and theology before being ordained in 1953 in the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He did postgraduate studies in agricultural economics at Oxford University before returning to Sri Lanka.

Tissa Balasuriya was radicalised by the youth rebellion in 1971, when Sinhalese students and unemployed new graduates mounted a violent uprising against the government. The uprising was put down with ruthless brutality. Some 8,000 insurgents and their sympathisers died. Balasuriya

abandoned his post as a lecturer at Aquinas University College and started working in slum areas of Colombo.

He became an outspoken social activist and liberation theologian. He was excommunicated in 1997 for challenging official views on the Virgin Mary, the concept of original sin, the need for baptism, the right of women to become priests and the role and value of other world religions. The ban was lifted a year later, but Balasuriya remained a strong critic of Joseph Ratzinger, who in his role as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had been in charge of the Vatican's proceedings against him.

To summarise the book under review, I cannot do better than to quote from the blurb on the back cover:

The Eucharist is central to the life of the churches, but not in the forms in which it is so widely celebrated today. Liturgical reform is only skin-deep and does not touch the real problems; the Eucharist is in captivity to the institutional church. It has been socially conditioned. What began with sacrifice for the liberation of others has long been a means of domesticating believers. The form of the Eucharist has been maintained, but its meaning has been evacuated or distorted.

The book itself is quite a short, easy read. Having said that, I would like to add a caveat. A lot of Tissa's writings tend to be somewhat repetitive and the editing and proof-reading of the translations can be a bit haphazard. However, I think they are well worth reading as I hope the

following few extracts from the book under review will show:

Whereas it (the Eucharist) began with the sacrifice of self for others, it has for long been a means of enslavement and domestication of believers.

Jesus offered the Eucharist only once. It was not something to be easily repeated, to be multiplied without much meaning and serious thought. For him it was so full of meaning that it was not necessary for him to offer it twice. We have to be careful that we do not try to make up for an absence of commitment and seriousness by all manner of other means, such as increasing the frequency of celebration, by ritualisation, through growth of the priestly caste that alone is capable of presiding, through the construction of big buildings where the Eucharist is to be offered with use of colourful and rich vestments, the accompaniment of beautiful music, the display of decorations, or the gathering of vast crowds. All these can be useful if there is a meaning. If, on the other hand, the Eucharist does not lead to commitment, to personal and societal liberation in a serious manner, then all these externals are a mere distraction, a lessening of the real meaning of the Eucharist.

For Jesus, too, the last Supper, the first and inaugural Eucharist, was closely associated with his self-giving. He gave bread and wine saying: "This is my body", "This is my blood". It was not merely a symbol, rite or ceremony.

Unless a fair proportion of priests share and experience the oppression and suffering of the poor, the priesthood as such will not know what it is to be exploited and underprivileged..... will not understand the exigencies of the cause of human liberation.

There's lots more like that in the book. I had so many quotes collected as I read the book that I had difficulty in selecting which ones to use and which to omit!

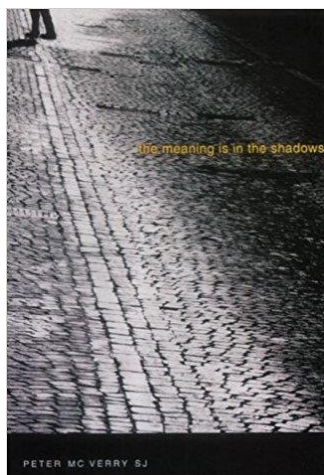
The full text of many of Tissa Balasuriya's books seems to be available free of charge on the internet. Well worth a look.

The Eucharist and Human Liberation; Tissa Balasuriya, SCM Press Ltd, London, 1977.

Paul Hendrick

The Meaning is in the Shadows

Peter McVerry SJ



In this book by Peter McVerry, we are brought into the lives of those who are on the margins of society. It is brought home to us clearly that their lives seem meaningless when he shares the following; their life "is about being born, suffering,

and then dying ... They know that if they disappeared off the face of the earth, no one would even notice they had gone."

Regarding those who are 'poor', they have been made poor because "their dignity was taken away, they were ignored and unwanted." This was done to them by those so-called responsible and respectful figures in authority and in government. Often the message heard by those on the margins is; "you are a person but not quite a person – instead you are ... a problem."

their life "is about being born, suffering, and then dying ... They know that if they disappeared off the face of the earth, no one would even notice they had gone."

Peter McVerry speaks of his experience of moving into social housing in 1974. Quite a lot of the problems that he listed still exist today, such as rain, rats, overcrowding, noise, rows, and "sleep was just as scarce as food for many children."

He shares with us an understanding of how children and teenagers drift into petty crime, vandalism, joy-riding even before they get caught up in the drug scene.

He believes that the true cause of homelessness arises from "apathy, bureaucratic inactivity and interdepartmental fighting." We witness this today in the 'talk-talk and no action' regarding solutions and the slow progress with the building of appropriate housing schemes.

As a Christian, Peter goes to his God as one of the people of God, not as an individual. “My relationship with God exist as a part of the relationship of the People of God to God, not independently of it.” He cannot live his faith and be in relationship with God independently of what is going on and happening in the world around him. He believes that he has to be concerned about justice and injustice “wherever it exists within the people of God.” This is our challenge too if we claim to be Christian.

“a place where everyone is treated equally, where no-one is marginalised, no-one is made to feel unwanted, no-one is excluded, no-one is treated as a second-class citizen”.

He tells us that the Church needs to reflect the Kingdom of God on earth, a real authentic reflection of reality. This reflection is made up of the good and the bad, the struggles and the weak that’s part of our life and our world today. Peter’s image of the Kingdom of God is “a place where everyone is treated equally, where no-one is marginalised, no-one is made to feel unwanted, no-one is excluded, no-one is treated as a second-class citizen”.

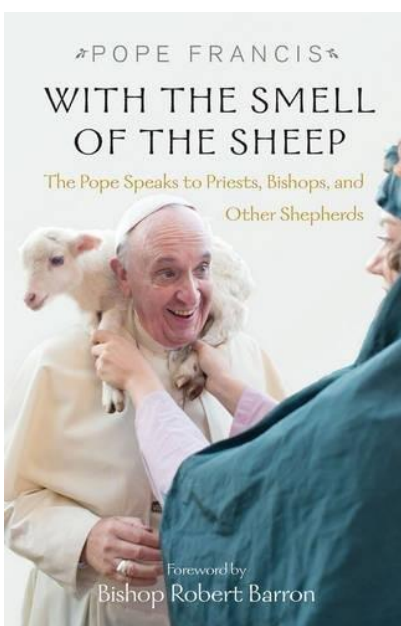
For McVerry it is the prayer of discernment and the prayer of desperation that forms his faith and prayer life. Here he is challenged, grounded and vulnerable.

The Meaning is in the Shadows,
Peter McVerry, SJ; Veritas, 2003.

Seán Beckett

With the Smell of the Sheep

Pope Francis



What a great name for the title of a book on evangelisation, "With the Smell of the Sheep". One of my dad's childhood Wicklow stories was of searching for sheep under the mountain's snow drifts in the dire winter of 1946. Shepherds know stuff. In stark contrast I don't know anything about finding or tending to or smelling of sheep, and I need to be reminded.

I'm penning this book review in August 2017. I am conscious that the cover articles and photos of The Tablet magazine over the past six months have many featured articles on Pope Francis.

The Tablet's leading headlines were as follows:

July 8th 2017 - Francis Feels The Heat, creating an independent court at the Vatican to judge bishops accused of covering up sex abuse.

June 3rd 2017 - A New Pentecost, how Francis is unleashing the Spirit in the Church.

May 6th 2017 - Pilgrim of Peace, Pope Francis' historic visit to Egypt.

March 11th 2017 - Unstoppable, Pope Francis' attitudes to his opponents is hardening.

Feb 25th 2017 - Following Peter, Amoris Laetitia, Francis' leadership under scrutiny.

Feb 18th 2017 - Understanding Francis, the key words at the heart of Francis' drive to reform the Church.

Volumes of commentary on Francis' writings abound and there is no end to the amount of people jumping on the Francis bandwagon. In this book review I'm suggesting we should leave the reams of commentary and the agendas of the users to one side and go straight to the words and to the teachings of Francis himself.

The book consists of fifty-three short conversations and addresses given by Francis to bishops, priests and seminarians. The four major themes are naturally in Francis' own clear, warm, grandfatherly and at times spicy tone. The four main themes discussed are:

- Pastoral closeness and proximity, in contrast to clericalism and careerism.
- Spiritual detachment and availability to people in need, in contrast to a focus on comfort.
- Joy, in contrast to moaning crabbiness that marks the

lives of many religious people.

- Having our prayer antennas finely tuned-in to God's Word about us, so that we broadcast God's kingdom.

This collection of advisory colloquia resulting from engagements with issues of clerical caste and of priestly culture has a broader relevance. For example, we as Christian Brothers, who today employ the language of community engagement could learn much from the following six consecutive sections, pages 104 - 122:

Do Not Be Afraid of Poverty and Mercy, (Cuba, 2015)

Gratitude and Hard Work, (New York, 2015)

Collaboration and Shared Responsibility, (Philadelphia, 2015)

The Lord Does the Work, (Nairobi, 2015)

Memory Fidelity and Prayer, (Kampala, 2015)

Living with the Anxieties and Hopes of the People, (Sarajevo, 2015)

If I were back working in formation, this book would be required reading for the novices. This broad range of reflections is as much about humanising society as it is about renewing the face of the Church in our time. We all need a good guide book if we are serious about working and doing no harm as servant leaders in the field hospitals with the smell of the sheep off us, and this book is a

good start. Ron Rolheiser states, that this book "helps us to minister with Jesus' delicate balance of gentleness and truth", a style of presence so well modelled for us by Pope Francis himself.

With the Smell of the Sheep: *The Pope speaks to priests, bishops and other shepherds*, Pope Francis, Orbis, Maryknoll, (2017).

Martin Byrne

A Final Note

Welcome to Scribbles from the Margins as we enter our fourth year and thirteenth issue. Thanks to everyone who has taken the time to give us feedback – we really appreciate it.

Christmas approaches. We thought we might leave you with a few reflections from the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh, the fiftieth anniversary of whose death occurs on 30th November 2017.

A Christmas Childhood

*I nicked six nicks on the doorpost
With my penknife's big blade—
There was a little one for cutting
tobacco,
And I was six Christmases of age.*

*My father played the melodeon,
My mother milked the cows,
And I had a prayer like a white
rose pinned
On the Virgin Mary's blouse.*

The Great Hunger

*God is in the bits
and pieces of Everyday.
A kiss here and a laugh again,
and sometimes tears
A pearl necklace around the
neck of poverty.*

Advent

*Oh after Christmas we'll
have no need to go searching
For the difference that sets an
old phrase burning -
We'll hear it in the whispered
argument of a churning
Or in the streets where the village
boys are lurching.*

*. . . and please God
We shall not ask for reason's
payment,
The why of heart-breaking
strangeness in dreeping hedges
Nor analyse God's breath in
common statement.*

May the peace, joy and hope of Christmas be with us all.

Seán, Paul, Martin.