

LOVERS OF BEAUTY

G.K.
CHESTERTON



CTS Biographies

SIX CHRISTIAN ARTISTS

By Fr. Lorenzo Carraro, 2021

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Gilbert Keith Chesterton

MADLY IN LOVE WITH THE CHURCH

Described by critics as “the prince of paradox”, by his wife as “the jolly journalist” and by others as “a beneficent bomb”, the English writer G. K. Chesterton is one of the most remarkable figures of the early twentieth century. A modern intellect, he strove for integrity, his religious faith and conversion to Catholicism inspiring his greatest books and profoundly influencing other great literary converts like C.S. Lewis, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene. A large man in every sense, perhaps his greatest discovery was that ‘the secret of life lies in laughter and humility’. The Church may soon honor him as a saint.

“Did you catch this man?” asked the colonel, frowning. Father Brown looked him full in the face, “Yes,” he said, “I caught him, with an unseeing hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread”. This dialogue is in one of Father Brown’s stories, in the first collection published by Chesterton in 1911, more than a decade before his conversion to the Catholic Church in 1922. Father Brown is an imaginary priest-detective and he was inspired to Chesterton by the figure of a simple country priest, Fr. John O’ Connor, who is the one who, later on, received the writer into the Church. Father Brown’s sentence already prophetically describes the author’s journey of conversion.

“The moment men cease to pull against the Catholic Church they feel a tug towards it. The moment they cease to shut it down they begin to listen to it in pleasure. The moment they try to be fair to it they begin to be fond of it. But when the affection has passed a certain point it begins to take on the tragic and menacing grandeur of a great love affair”. Here in barely a paragraph, Chesterton has presented his life’s journey in a nutshell: the initial pull against the Church, the subsequent tug he felt towards it, his

desire to be fair leading to a fondness and thence, in time, to a great love affair with it.

Joseph Pearce, the writer of Chesterton's last biography and himself converted to Catholicism by Chesterton's influence, writes: "Certainly, there were other love affairs in his life, most notably and obviously with his wife, Frances, but also with his brother, Cecil, and his great friends Belloc and Shaw. Yet these were only subplots, subsisting with the great love affair with Christ. Chesterton put the matter poetically: "If seeds in the black earth can turn into such beautiful roses what might not the heart of man become in its long journey towards the stars?"

Few years later Chesterton published the book by the title "*The Catholic Church and Conversion*"(1926). With his usual ironic and brilliant originality, the great English writer gives an account of the anxiety of his soul constantly uncertain during the three phases preceding his entering the Church of Rome: the assumption of an honest attitude towards it, then the progressive and irresistible discovery and lastly the impossibility of abandoning it once he entered it.

At the end of his pilgrimage, Chesterton reaches the same conclusions as pope Benedict XVI, discovering that the foundation of the authentic universality of the Catholic Church consists in its rationality and freedom. When Chesterton speak of religion, he starts always from reason and the experience of life. His discourse is never churchly or clerical. He can start from a sunset or a lion's tooth, or anything and his point of arrival is each one's relationship with the Mystery of God. That was what happened to him: The Mystery revealed itself to him through the humble but powerful signs of family happiness, the taste for beauty seen in everyday reality.

The king of Fleet Street

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was born at Campden Hill in Kensington, London, on May 29 1874. He was educated at St Paul's School and attended the Slade School of Art in order to become an illustrator and also took literature classes at University College London but did not complete a degree at either. In 1896 Chesterton began working for a London publisher. During this period he also undertook his first journalistic work as a freelance art and literary critic. In 1901 he married Frances Blogg, to whom he remained married for the rest of his life.

In 1902 he was given a weekly opinion column in the *Daily News*, followed in 1905 by a weekly column in *The Illustrated London News*, for which he would continue to write for the next thirty years. Chesterton took Fleet Street by storm, writing a huge number of essays, biographies, poems, novels, plays and debating with all the great names of the day. He became and remained a public figure known as G.K.C. Chesterton already exhibited something of the personality later to become famous –absent minded, good-natured but tenacious in maintaining his ideas, and deeply concerned with grave problems in many human areas. In appearance he was then as after, a tall, clumsy, untidy scarecrow.

Chesterton was a large man, standing 6 feet 4 inches (1.93 m) and weighing around 21 stone (130 kg; 290 lb). His girth gave rise to a famous anecdote. During World War I a lady in London asked why he wasn't 'out at the Front'; he replied, 'If you go round to the side, you will see that I am.' Chesterton usually wore a cape and a crumpled hat, with a swordstick in hand, and had a cigar hanging out of his mouth. Chesterton often forgot where he was supposed to be going and would miss the train that was supposed to take him there. At heart, he was someone who loved the friendship of children, idolized his wife and was sustained by his great friendships with Hilaire Belloc, Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells.

Throughout Chesterton's writings there prevailed a sense of youthfulness and high spirited foolery which caused his detractors to call him childish, but behind which his defenders found a seriousness and keen insight. Chesterton has been called the "prince of paradox". For example, he wrote, "Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it." Chesterton is well known for his reasoned apologetics and even some of those who disagree with him have recognized the universal appeal of such works as *Orthodoxy* and *The Everlasting Man*.

As a political thinker, he rejects both liberalism and conservatism, saying, "The whole modern world has divided itself into Conservatives and Progressives. The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of the Conservatives is to prevent the mistakes from being corrected." Chesterton routinely referred to himself as an "orthodox" Christian, and came to identify such a position with Catholicism more and more, eventually converting to Roman Catholicism from Anglicanism.

George Bernard Shaw, Chesterton's "friendly enemy", said of him, "He was a man of colossal genius".

His writings consistently displayed wit and a sense of humor. He employed paradox, while making serious comments on the world, government, politics, economics, philosophy, theology and many other topics. When *The Times* invited several eminent authors to write essays on the theme "What's Wrong with the World?" Chesterton's contribution took the form of a letter: *Dear Sirs, I am. Sincerely yours, G. K. Chesterton.* Chesterton here combined wit with a serious point – that of fallen human nature and humility.

He wrote, "Reason is itself a matter of faith. It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all". Again, about his approach to Nature, "The only words that ever satisfied me as describing Nature are the terms used in the fairy books, 'charm,' 'spell,' 'enchantment.' They express the arbitrariness of the fact and its mystery. A tree grows fruit because it is a MAGIC tree. Water runs downhill because it is bewitched. The sun shines because it is bewitched. I deny altogether that this is fantastic or even mystical. We may have some mysticism later on; but this fairy-tale language about things is simply rational and agnostic".

"A Defense of Nonsense"

Chesterton entered his final period when he was received into the Catholic Church. His conversion at 48 had been gradual, carefully reasoned, and deeply felt. His works became more serious and committed especially to explain and defend his Christian and Catholic faith. Chesterton was neither conventional nor reactionary. He was a rebel towards the prevailing ideologies of the time. His very reliance on tradition was original and creative. Almost alone in the midst of the pessimists, agnostics, materialists of the beginning of the 20th century, Chesterton "came home": he rediscovered England, Rome and the West.

The essence of Chesterton and his thought is balance, a balance seen in his dynamic synthesis of reason and faith, the real and the ideal, the prose and the poetry of life. Because he related the ephemeral to the eternal, issues to principles, few of his writing will date. Not a few authors, among them C.S. Lewis and Ronald Knox, have acknowledged their intellectual and spiritual debt to this man whom Etienne Gilson called "one of the deepest thinkers

who ever existed”. “*Orthodoxy*” (1908) was an attempt to state “his ultimate attitude towards life”, posing Christianity as the answer to universal questioning. Some of his most profound works like *St. Francis of Assisi* (1923) and *The Everlasting Man* (1925) that did much to convince many of his audience that Christianity is alive and important.

During the last 11 years of his life, Chesterton’s amazing literary productivity continued, he travelled to the United States and Canada, and also did a series of broadcasts for the B.B.C. Chesterton died on June 14 1936, at his home in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire. The homily at Chesterton's Requiem Mass in Westminster Cathedral, London, was delivered by Fr. Ronald Knox. He is buried in Beaconsfield in the Catholic Cemetery. At the time of his death, Pius XI bestowed on him the title of Defender of the Catholic Faith.

Chesterton wrote around 80 books, several hundred poems, some 200 short stories, 4000 essays, and several plays. He was a literary and social critic, historian, playwright, novelist, Catholic theologian and apologist, debater, and mystery writer. His best-known character is the priest-detective Father Brown, who appeared only in short stories, while *The Man Who Was Thursday* is arguably his best-known novel. He was extraordinarily able and versatile and is estimated now as highly as during his lifetime. Much of Chesterton's work remains in print. Ignatius Press is currently in the process of publishing a Complete Works.

His essays developed his shrewd, paradoxical irreverence to its ultimate point of real seriousness. He is seen at his happiest in such essays as “*A Defense of Nonsense*” (1901), in which he says that nonsense and faith are the “two supreme assertions of truth” and “to draw out the soul of things with a syllogism it is as impossible as to draw out Leviathan with a hook”. Many readers value Chesterton’s fiction most highly. But the most successful association of fiction with religious and social judgment is in Chesterton’s series on the priest-sleuth Father Brown.

The road to holiness

G. K. Chesterton is well known for his clever and humorous writing, and his thought-provoking paradoxes. But he might also be known as a saint, if the proposal to launch his cause of beatification goes forward. It is the initiative of the cultural association dedicated to him, the Chesterton Society, founded

in England in 1974 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the great author's birth, with the idea of spreading awareness of the work, thought and figure of this extraordinary personality. For years there had been talk of a possible cause of beatification and in 2009, during an international conference organized in Oxford on "The Holiness of G.K. Chesterton", it was decided to go ahead with this proposal.

Many people feel that there is clear evidence of Chesterton's sanctity. Testimonies about him speak of a person of great goodness and humility, a man without enemies, who proposed the faith without compromises but also without confrontation, a defender of Truth and Charity. His greatness is also in the fact that he knew how to present Christianity to a wide public. According to the ancient categories of the Church, we could define Chesterton as a "confessor of the faith". He was not just an apologist, but also a type of prophet who glimpsed far ahead of time the dramatic character of modern issues. The English Dominican Aidan Nichols sustains that Chesterton should be seen as nothing less than a possible "Father of the Church" of the 20th century.

One rarely reads pages that speak of faith, conversion and doctrine that are so clear and incisive, while being free of every sentimental or moralistic excess. This comes from Chesterton's attentive reading of reality, given the fact that the modern world has suffered a mental fall possibly greater than the moral one. Faced with this reality, Chesterton chose Catholicism, and affirms that there are at least 10,000 reasons to justify this choice, everyone of them valid and well-founded, but able to be boiled down to one reason: that Catholicism is true. The holiness of Gilbert Keith Chesterton that the Church will certainly recognize, already shines before the world.

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Antoni Gaudi (1852-1926)

A FORCE OF NATURE

Gaudí's unfinished masterpiece, the church of the “Sagrada Família” at Barcelona, Spain, has been under construction since 1884 and is considered the “Cathedral of the XXI century”. Antoni Gaudí, the creator of this great temple which is unique in the world, besides being a talented architect, was also an exemplary and committed Christian. His figure is deeply Franciscan in spirituality. In stone, Gaudí has created a “Canticle of Creatures” like Saint Francis of Assisi. He spent the last years of his life at the foot of what is the work of his life, in celibacy and poverty, like one of the medieval master builders. Pope Benedict XVI made the consecration and dedication of the “Sagrada Família” a symbol of the new evangelization of Europe.

On November 7 2010, Pope Benedict XVI, during his visit to the Spanish nation, consecrated the cathedral of the *Sagrada Família* at Barcelona. Although the building is still incomplete, the interior of the church is open and accessible giving a spectacular view of the expansive forest-like nave. The use of external light through the stain glass windows and the 'Glory of God' window in the roof is ever changing and dynamic. The elevators that take you up to the various nooks in the spires give access to a multitude of viewpoints that provide breathtaking vistas of the cathedral and Barcelona.

The pope gave a unique importance to the occasion because he saw in the consecration of the *Sagrada Família* a symbol of the revival of Christianity in Europe. During his homily he said: “The joy that I experience in presiding this Eucharistic celebration increased when I came to know that this sacred building, since its beginning, is tied to the figure of Saint Joseph. I was moved especially by the certainty with which Gaudí, in front of the innumerable difficulties he had to face, used to exclaim, full of trust in divine Providence: ‘Saint Joseph will complete this temple’. Because of this,

it is now not without meaning the fact that it is a pope by the baptism name of Joseph to dedicate it”.

The dedication of the cathedral of the *Sagrada Familia* was a historical event not only because of the presence of the Holy Father Benedict XVI who presided over the celebration, but also because of the unique, majestic, most beautiful Basilica, rich in biblical, theological, liturgical and catechetical symbolism, that was planned and initiated by the gifted architect and servant of God, Antoni Gaudí. By many this Basilica is considered “The Cathedral of Europe” or “The Cathedral of the World” or even “The cathedral of the XXI century”.

When the architect was still alive, the papal nuncio to Spain of that time, Mons. Francesco Ragonesi, paid a visit to the work in progress of the construction of the *Sagrada Familia*. Full of enthusiasm for what the artist was expounding to him about his huge project, the nuncio exclaimed: “Truly, you are the Dante of architecture!” A praise which is as much simple as it is marvelous.

“In this ambience, - continued the pope in his homily- Gaudí meant to join the inspiration that was coming to him from the three great books from which he was drawing his nourishment as a man, as a believer and as an architect: the book of nature, the book of the Holy Scriptures and the book of liturgy. This is how he joined the world reality to salvation history as it is told by the Bible and made present to us by the Liturgy. He brought into the temple stones, trees and human life so that the whole creation might converge in the divine praise, but, at the same time, he took out the ‘*retablos*’ in order to put in front of our eyes the mystery of God, revealed in the birth, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ”.

Alone with nature

Antoni Gaudí was born at Reus, in the province of Tarragona in southern Catalonia, Spain, on June 25 1852. The artist's parents, Francesc Gaudí Serra and Antònia Cornet Bertran, both came from families of coppersmiths, pot and kettle makers. He studied at the Escola Superior d'Arquitectura in Barcelona and graduated as architect in 1878. Almost his entire professional activity took place in Barcelona, where the greater part of his work is found.

He designed his first major commission for the Casa Vincens in Barcelona using a Gothic Revival style that set a precedent for his future work. He

worked in northern Spain at the time of an enthusiastic revival of all things Catalan, and became absorbed in the idea of producing a style of architecture for the region.

During his youth, Gaudí suffered many times from the rheumatic fevers that were common at the time. This illness caused him to spend much time in isolation, and it also allowed him to spend lots of time alone with nature. It was this exposure to nature at an early age which is thought to have inspired him to incorporate natural shapes and themes into his later work.

Gaudí, throughout his life, studied nature's angles and curves and incorporated them into his designs and mosaics. Instead of relying on geometric shapes, he mimicked the way human beings stand upright. The rounded forms he borrowed from nature were easily reinforced by steel rods and allowed his designs to resemble elements from the environment. Gaudí was so inspired by nature, he said, because: *Those who look for the laws of Nature as a support for their new works collaborate with the Creator.*

Because of his rheumatism, the artist observed a strict vegetarian diet, used homeopathic drug therapy, underwent water therapy, and hiked regularly. Long walks, besides suppressing his rheumatism, further allowed him to experience nature. Gaudí's originality was at first ridiculed by his peers. Indeed, he was first only supported by the rich industrialist Eusebi Güell. His fellow citizens referred to one of his major works, the *Casa Milà* as *La Pedrera* ("the quarry"). As time passed, though, his work became more famous. He stands at present as one of history's most original architects.

I belong among the poor

In order to develop his enormous architectonic work, Gaudí gathered an exceptional set of collaborators, such as architects, sculptors and craftsmen (decorators, plasterers, specialists in forge, smelters, carpenters, glassworkers, ceramists, etc.). All of them developed in their respective specialties an enormous body of work that was closely supervised by Gaudí himself who had a perfection persistence that frequently forced them, time and time again, to repeat works he considered insufficiently elaborated.

Gaudi's undoubted masterpiece is the unfinished church of the *Sagrada Familia* in Barcelona, where he worked from 1884 until his tragic death in 1926. Gaudí was a devout Catholic, to the point that in his later years he

abandoned secular work and devoted his life to Catholicism and his *Sagrada Família*. He designed it to have 18 towers, 12 for the 12 apostles, 4 for the 4 evangelists, one for Mary and one for Jesus. Work on the church charts the styles Gaudi evolved during his career. At the crypt level a Gothic design is used, but as the building climbs towards the sky the structure becomes more surreal and fanciful, finishing in the four intricately carved, cone-shaped spires. Work to Gaudi's designs is still continuing on the church. Completion of the *Sagrada Família* is planned for 2026, the centennial of Gaudí's death.

In 1912, one of his closest family members – his niece Rosa Egea – died, only to be followed by a faithful collaborator, Francesc Berenguer Mestres, two years later. After these tragedies, Barcelona fell on hard times economically. The construction of the *Sagrada Família* slowed down. Four years later in 1918, Eusebi Güell, his patron, died. Perhaps it was because of this unfortunate sequence of events that Gaudí changed. He became reluctant to talk with reporters or have his picture taken and solely concentrated on his masterpiece, the *Sagrada Família*. He spent the last few years of his life living in the crypt of the church itself.

On June 7 1926 Gaudí was hit by a tram. Because of his ragged attire and empty pockets, many cab drivers refused to pick him up for fear that he would be unable to pay the fare. He was eventually taken to a paupers' hospital in Barcelona. Nobody recognized the injured artist until his friends found him the next day. When they tried to move him into a nicer hospital, Gaudí refused, reportedly saying "I belong here among the poor." He died three days later on June 10 1926, at age 73, and was interred at the *Sagrada Família*.

A praise of God made stone

One of the scholars of the symbolism of the temple wrote that the whole Basilica is a great hymn to Jesus Christ. Gaudí used to contemplate nature as God's handiwork and as such an inspiration for the great architect. At the same time, he, the artist, felt called to cooperate very intimately with the Creator with his artistic work. As a believer, Gaudí was turning more and more to God as he was going on with the building of the cathedral and for this reason he was renouncing many other requests and building commitments, concentrating on his masterpiece and daily increasing his familiarity with holy Scripture, another source of his inspiration.

Pope Benedict said in his Homily: “We have dedicated this sacred space to God, who has revealed himself and given himself to us in Christ in order to be definitely God-with-us. The Word of revelation, the Blessed Humanity of Christ and his Church are the three greatest expressions of God’s manifestation and his gift of self to humanity. What is the meaning of this dedication or consecration? In the heart of the world, in the sight of God and of humanity, in a humble and joyous act of faith, we have erected this immense mountain of matter, fruit of nature and of an incalculable effort of human intelligence embodied in this masterpiece of art. This building is the visible sign of the invisible God to whose glory these towers are soaring like arrows that indicate the absolute light of God who is Light, Height and Beauty itself.

Antoni Gaudì’s creativity, inspired by his ardent Christian faith, succeeded in making of this church a praise of God made stone. This God’s praise has, like in Christ’s birth, simple and humble people as main actors. In fact, with this church, Gaudì wanted to bring the Gospel to all people. This is why he equipped it with three outer porticos as a catechesis about Jesus Christ, like gigantic rosary beads, the prayer of the simple people, where one can contemplate Christ’s joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries.”

Because of the Holy Father’s visit, many people will discover that Antoni Gaudì, the creator of this great temple, besides being a talented architect, was also an exemplary and committed Christian. His figure is deeply Franciscan in its spirituality. He spent the last years of his life at the foot of what is the work of his life: the cathedral of the *Sagrada Família*, in celibacy and poverty, like one of the medieval master builders to whom we owe our cathedrals. Gaudì has created a “Canticle of Creatures” like Saint Francis of Assisi. His work renews the Gothic style, conferring a greater agility to it, a greater opening to nature, a greater presence of a variety of God’s creatures –plants, fruits, animals- and giving it a greater quantity of light which is the symbol of Divinity.

We hope that in a not too distant a future, the unparalleled surroundings of the new Basilica may host the solemn beatification of its architect whose tomb is placed in the crypt. The beauty and originality of a temple which is unique in the world because of its style, monumental size and symbolism would be the right setting for the first architect to be publicly honored for his holiness. &&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&

Léopold Sédar Senghor

BRIDGE BETWEEN CULTURES

One of the first black Africans to become a university professor in France, Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001) fought in World War II, survived a German concentration camp, made himself a name as a poet and an intellectual, entered politics, guided his nation, Senegal, to independence and was its first president. Senghor was a born harmonizer whose career was full of paradoxes: although a Catholic, he headed a predominantly Muslim nation; a fervent supporter of African culture, he also appreciated the culture of Europe. Considered one of the best poets of the XX century, he was in addition a professional politician of great skill and proved to be an able and effective leader. He received many honors in the course of his life and was named honorary doctor of thirty seven universities. As the father of the “Négritude” intellectual movement, he has left an immense legacy in the field of dialogue between different cultures.

In 1940, the German army invaded France and, among thousands, also the young African Léopold Sédar Senghor was captured. In 1928 he had come from Senegal, West Africa, to Paris on a partial scholarship and continued his formal studies at the Sorbonne. He had subsequently started teaching in French Universities.

During these years, the exceptionally gifted young African intellectual had discovered the unmistakable imprint of African art on modern painting, sculpture, and music, which had confirmed his belief in Africa’s potential contribution to modern culture. Those were the seeds of what would become Senghor’s famous “Négritude” intellectual movement.

In 1939, Senghor had enrolled in the French army with the rank of private within the 59th Colonial Infantry division, in spite of his higher education and his later acquisition of the French Citizenship in 1932. Together with all the French colonial troops, he was interned in different camps, and finally at Front Stalag 230, in Poitiers.

Front Stalag 230 was reserved for colonial troops captured during the war. The German soldiers wanted to execute him and the all others the very same day they were captured, but they escaped this fate by yelling: *Vive la France, vive l'Afrique noire!* ("Long live France, long live Black Africa!"). A French officer told the German soldiers that executing the African prisoners would dishonor the Aryan race and the German Army. That is how they were spared and herded to the concentration camps instead.

In total, Senghor spent two years in different prison camps, where he occupied most of his time writing some of his most inspired poems. In 1942 he was released for medical reasons. He resumed his teaching career while remaining involved in the resistance against the Nazi occupation.

The determined student

Léopold Sédar Senghor was born in 1906 in the village of Joal on the coast of Senegal, about one hundred km from the capital Dakar. His family had converted to Christianity, and Léopold was brought up a Catholic, but the Senghors still kept respect towards the ancestral religion of the Serer and appreciation of the cultural traits of the ethnic group to which they belonged. Later in his life, Senghor would be a fierce advocate for the "inculturation" of the Gospel, arguing that Christianity in Africa and elsewhere should reflect the local culture, languages and even worldview, and not appear as willing to impose as universal its European expression.

Senghor attended a school founded by the Holy Ghost Fathers, a congregation of Roman Catholic priests and brothers, in a neighboring village, before graduating to a high school in Dakar which was run by the same Catholic mission. He was a brilliant student, especially in the humanities, Latin and Greek, and for a certain period, he seemed to be intentioned to become a Catholic priest, but he was also strong-willed and considered stubborn by his teachers.

Senghor's schoolmaster, Father Lalouse in particular was uneasy with the young student's attitude of challenging the prevailing idea that in order to embrace Christianity, Africans had first to rid themselves of their tribal and cultural legacy. Eventually Father Lalouse gave in and decided that it was better for the young Senghor to join the public high school and complete his degree in that secular environment. It was after graduation that he won a partial scholarship and moved to France.

“Négritude”

With the help of Aimé Césaire, a young man from the French Caribbean island of Martinique, in the mid-1930s, Senghor initiated the poetic, intellectual and political movement known as '*Négritude*'. The choice of the term *Négritude* – derived from the highly derogatory and racist word “*nègre*” – was deliberately and proudly appropriated to assert and stress what they believed to be distinctive African characteristics, values, and aesthetics.

This was a reaction against the too strong dominance of the French culture in the colonies, and against the perception that Africa did not have a culture developed enough to stand alongside that of Europe. Building upon historical research identifying ancient Egypt with black Africa, Senghor argued that sub-Saharan Africa and Europe are in fact part of the same cultural continuum, reaching from Egypt to classical Greece, through Rome to the European colonial powers of the modern age. *Négritude* was by no means an anti-white racism, but rather emphasized the importance of dialogue and exchange among different cultures.

Senghor defined the concept in contradistinction to Europe and gave it more positive meaning. According to Senghor, the Black African is intuitive, but the African mode of experience is far from irrational: the experience that proceeds from intuition is fuller and more comprehensive than that derived from a discursive approach.

In the area of political philosophy, Senghor examined African socialism. For him, socialism is not new to Africans, where communal principles of social life have been central in pre-colonial times. Residing part-time in France, he wrote poems of resistance in French which engaged his Catholic spirituality even as they celebrated his Senegalese heritage. Senghor is the author of several collections of poetry. He also edited an original anthology of work

by African poets which carried an introduction by Jean-Paul Sartre who spoke famously of “*Black Orpheus*”. Senghor’s thoughts are gathered in five volumes under the title: *Liberté* (Freedom).

Négritude and Christianity

Senghor also co-founded the magazine *Présence Africaine* with Alioune Diop. *Présence Africaine* represents the efforts of Catholic African intellectuals in dealing with their dual identity as Christians and Africans. Alioune Diop wrote: “The question of the Catholics in the bosom of the Church can be summed up thus: the African Catholics want above all to make sure of their double quality of Catholics and Africans. They suffer in Africa the uneasiness of not being able to assume their cultural heritage...It is clear that the solution would be to be able to express their African personality in the very heart of the vitality of Catholicism”.

The vision of the *Négritude* is born in the context of dialogue with the Christian faith. First of all because in the *Négritude*, in the very heart of its emerging, there is the influence of a Catholic theologian: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Moreover, the respectful attention and assimilation of the humanistic culture on the part of the *Négritude* reveals an opening to Catholicism which had deeply imbued that cultural heritage, even if not identifying totally with it.

Thus, the *Négritude*’s disposition to “dialogue” , not “contrast”, makes it prepared not to eliminate the Christian presence as if it were something alien or heterogeneous, but to look for a relationship of mutual enrichment. The *Négritude* movement, with its deep appraisal of the black African culture, undoubtedly promoted the “inculturation” of Christianity in Africa and the “Africanization” of the Catholic Church in particular.

Remarkable and touching is the following statement of the Cameroonian Catholic thinker M. Hebga: “Truly, Jesus Christ is ours and close to us because of the depth of his humiliation as a human being. I can’t help loving him. So doing, I am not a fugitive or a degenerate. I am a son of my people...A truth imposes itself: whatever the historical vicissitudes of Christianity, with Christ we have a blood-brother in humiliation. Let us not make him guilty of the weakness of human beings. Christianity is a hundred miles away from imperialism. The message of Christ has never allowed itself to be used as an instrument of human domination; it has always

exploded in the hands of those who would have liked to make use of it in order to crush their fellow human beings... This irresistible dynamism ought to create a favorable prejudice and a victorious attraction”.

The wise and humble leader

Having entered politics, on September 5, 1960, Senghor was elected to be Senegal's first president. In a way, the country Senghor inherited was politically unique amongst its neighbors. Under colonialism, Senegal had had a special status among French West African colonies and as a consequence those areas had a long tradition of democratic multiparty elections and a number of political parties were already active when Senegal became independent.

Senghor thus took over a country with some kind of democratic legacy, but this was initially short-lived under his presidency. In 1962, his political ally, long-time friend and prime minister, Mamadou Dia, was accused of plotting a coup and imprisoned for life, but released after twelve years in 1974. Senghor responded to the perceived threat by establishing a one-party authoritarian system like so many of its neighbors.

Still, it was perhaps the poet in Senghor that prevented him from going to the extremes of most authoritarian leaders. It was perhaps the poet in him too that led him to do two things typically unheard of amongst those with such a tight grip on power. Firstly, in 1976, after 14 years of single-party rule, Senghor reversed his earlier thinking and decided that Senegal should take up again its democratic traditions. As a start, three political parties were officially recognized. More importantly, however, the press was also given far greater freedom, and a culture of fiercely independent journalism developed rapidly.

Secondly, in 1980, Senghor resigned from politics and retired to France. He is one of only two African heads of state who surrendered the power peacefully and of their own initiative. The other was Julius Nyerere, the saintly Catholic politician, the Father of Tanzania's independence. Though many problems remain, Senegal today is seen as a beacon of democracy and stability in the region, and Senghor – who is celebrated as providing a valuable example for leaders across Africa – is to thank in no small part.

“One who cannot be ashamed”

Having freely resigned from the presidency, Senghor spent the last years of his long life in France, his country of adoption, attending to his beloved poetry and studies, assisted by his devout second wife, Colette Hubert, who had been his French secretary. Since she entered holy matrimony in 1957 with the congressman Senghor, she did not find an easy life, but followed her husband with unfailing devotion and became First Lady of Senegal. She suffered with him the loss of their only child Philippe in 1981 and outlived her husband. Senghor had other two children from the first wife.

Senghor’s legacy, without a doubt, justifies his middle name, Sédar, which translates as *“One who cannot be ashamed”*. In the context of the *Négritude* movement, he coined the famous sentences: "Emotion is Black, Reason is Greek" and *“Négritude is the totality of the cultural values of the Black World.”* Senghor’s beliefs however extended well beyond those axioms, and until the final years of the XX century, he continued to work on the open-ended question of black cultures and black arts.

Senghor strongly advocated dialogue, encounter and the coming together of cultures, claiming that *metissage* (or interbreeding) – in the past as well as for the future – is the necessary condition of any great civilization. Even in politics, he left a strong mark: the Father of Senegal’s independence, he was a prominent statesman who led by example and helped advance democracy in a continent long considered ‘forgotten by human rights’.

He discovered the roots of his socialism in the African tradition and avoided the Marxist and anti-Western ideology, favoring the maintenance of close ties with France and the western world. This is seen by many as a contributing factor to Senegal’s political stability: it remains one of the few African nations never to have had a coup and always to have had a peaceful transfer of power. Not a small achievement.

But Senghor was a poet first and foremost. He once famously declared that if he had to choose between his accomplishments as a poet, a thinker or a statesman, he would like his legacy to be that of a poet. The best way to comprehend such a remark coming from a man who is considered to be one of the most important African intellectuals of the XX century and one of the heroes of independent Africa, is to understand that he was not really making a choice at all. What Senghor’s declaration really meant was that his philosophy as a thinker was that of a poet; and that as a statesman faced with

difficult political choices, he tried to never lose sight of the poet within himself.

Senghor died at his home in France at the age of 95. His funeral was held on December 29, 2001 in Dakar. Jacques Chirac, the president of France, said, upon hearing of Senghor's death: "Poetry has lost one of its masters, Senegal a statesman, Africa a visionary and France a friend".

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José Maria Velez Zaragoza

A LEGACY CAST IN STONE

An outstanding Filipino architect, Jose Maria V. Zaragoza (1912-1994) lived his life for the glory of God, and used his talent for this purpose. He played a key role in the reconstruction of postwar Philippines, helping reshape the landscape of Manila ravaged by the Second World War through his striking structures that joined modernism and Filipino traditional motifs and styles. But he emerged especially in designing places of worship like the Santo Domingo Church which is considered his masterpiece and numberless others. A Catholic daily communicant, his personal foundation and original inspiration was his love for the Virgin Mary. He prayed much while he worked and was totally devoted to the Blessed Mother. José Maria Zaragoza was declared posthumously National Artist for Architecture by President Aquino. His legacy will long outlast him because it is cast in stone.

On December 6, 2012, in Angeles City, the Philippines, a unusual circumstance brought together religious and academic authorities: the 100th

anniversary of the birth of one of its most illustrious citizen, architect José Maria V. Zaragoza. For the opening ceremony, the Most Rev. Socrates B. Villegas, D.D., archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan, presided over the mass marking the occasion.

The mass was held at the University Chapel of the Holy Guardian Angel University and was followed by the unveiling of the 40-foot Saint Lorenzo Ruiz beatification mural which Zaragoza had designed and which the Zaragoza family has donated to the Holy Angel University for repair and safekeeping.

Pope Saint John Paul II came to the Philippines for the World Youth Day in January 1995. On that occasion, architect Zamora was given the unique task of designing the background of the Pontifical altar where the Mass was celebrated by the pope at the Rizal Park, to beatify the first Filipino saint, Lorenzo Ruiz. It was the first beatification held outside Rome.

On that same day, the Center for Kapampangan Studies held a program-exhibit on the works of Guagua-born architect at the same Holy Angel University. The family of the late architect graced the events with their presence. We can say of José Maria V. Zaragoza, builder of churches, what we read in the Bible: “How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, God of hosts. My soul is longing and yearning for the courts of the Lord. The sparrow herself finds a home and the swallow a nest for her brood; she lays her young by your altar, Lord of host, my king and my God. They are happy who dwell in your house, forever singing your praise. One day within your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. The threshold of the house of God I prefer to all the other dwellings” (*Psalms* 84).

Birth and Career

José Maria Velez Zaragoza was born on December 6, 1902 to a Kapampangan mother, Rosario Velez of Guagua and a Spanish father, Elias Zaragoza y Rojas, who descended from the same Cepeda clan of Spain to which St. Teresa of Avila belonged.

Zaragoza took up BS Architecture at the University of Santo Tomas and graduated in 1936. Two years later, he placed seventh in the licensure examination and became the country's 82nd licensed architect. Later he got a diploma in liturgical art and architecture from the International Institute of

Liturgical Art in Rome. He also obtained a diploma in comprehensive planning from the Hilversum Technical Research Center in The Netherlands.

Zaragoza's career spanned more than half a century and yielded a significant corpus of architectural works that addressed the spiritual and secular requirements of the modern Filipino. Jose Maria V. Zaragoza belonged to the third generation of Filipino architects, a category ascribed to those educated in local universities prior to the outbreak of World War II. He and his contemporaries advocated the progressive ideas of modernism in rebuilding the Philippines from the ashes of war in the mid-XX century, and in the process, developed an architectural identity befitting a newly independent nation-state.

The extraordinary coherence of Zaragoza's works is based on a solid intellectual framework grounded in modern aesthetics and coupled with nationalist fervor. His professional training was rigorous, allowing him to experiment and generate a new set of building principles that have become indispensable to the understanding and practice of modern architecture in a tropical milieu and in the post-colonial and social context.

In his lifetime, Zaragoza pioneered a path that reveals both his spiritual and professional calling of designing landmark worship spaces, spiritual centers, as well as some of the nation's iconic edifices of commerce and culture. Zaragoza's name is eminently synonymous with modern ecclesiastical architecture. He completed not less than 35 churches in the Philippines and abroad. Zaragoza's architecture for congregational worship is daring and sculptural. It creates an atmosphere that solicits spiritual reflection, fortifying one's faith in God.

He also excelled in secular works, crafting 273 residences, 36 office buildings, three hotels, 15 airport terminal offices, five public buildings, and countless housing projects – all demonstrating his versatility as a designer and his mastery of the modern architectural vocabulary. These made him one of the great masters of XX century Philippine architecture, in the service of God and humanity.

Zaragoza's famous landmarks are the Meralco Building, the Santo Domingo Church, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal National Shrine, St. John

Bosco's Church, Villa San Miguel, the official residence of the Archbishop of Manila, and the renovated Quiapo Church,.

He also designed the *Pontificio Colegio Filipino* in Rome and helped the Vatican do appraisals on damaged and destroyed buildings after World War II. Recognizing his contributions to the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II conferred on Zaragoza the title *Gentiluomo di Sua Santità* (Lay Member of the Papal Household) in 1992. Men who receive such title serve as lay attendants of the Pope in Vatican City. He died at 81 in 1994.

Sacred Masterpieces

Without a doubt, Zaragoza's most famous religious building is the Santo Domingo Church and Convent, which he designed for the Dominicans, his mentors at the University of Santo Tomas. The design married old and new since it follows the plan of the church-tower-convento complex of the colonial period. While the building embodies the simplicity of modern design, such features as arches give it a traditional touch. The Santo Domingo Church is the biggest in Metro Manila and one of the biggest churches in Asia.

The massive church is a unique blend of Spanish colonial and modern architecture. On October 4, 2012, during the traditional enthronement of *Nuestra Senora del Santissimo Rosario*, la Naval de Manila, the declaration of the Philippine Government that the Santo Domingo Church is a National Cultural Treasure was officially proclaimed. The declaration recognizes both the towering edifice and the exquisite ivory image of la Naval with the Infant Jesus as cultural treasures of the nation.

On March 4, 1978, Cardinal Jaime Sin, archbishop of Manila, inaugurated the newly-built Saint John Bosco Parish Church. Also known as the Don Bosco Church, the modernistic sacred building is now one of the most famous landmarks of Makati's Central Business District; its distinctive concave facade features a cross, seemingly riding the crest of a magnificent wave. In the hallowed expanse beneath the wave, thousands of weddings, baptisms and other sacred events have been celebrated for the past 36 years, with the iconic starburst tabernacle upon golden *anahaw* leaf as dramatic backdrop.

Widening ripples above the altar evoke the graces streaming from the Blessed Sacrament and flowing into the vaulted ceiling – a stylized net for the “fishers of men” - arched over the Parish community at worship. Behind the main church is the small Blessed Sacrament Chapel whose tabernacle, mounted on a flame-like structure, shares the same receptacle for the Blessed Sacrament with the main church. Intimate weddings, weekly Parish baptisms and wakes for distinguished parishioners are held in this chapel.

Zaragoza’s daughter Loudette writes: “Daddy said he wanted to give the illusion of a tent. The molded cement ceiling was designed to carry the simulated folds of a tent. He said that to build community and to worship, the Israelites gathered around the fire, which represents Yahweh’s presence. I thought it was a great idea, people intimately gathered in a tent around the flame of God’s loving presence”.

Loudette said that the personal favorite of her father’s work is the Miraculous Medal National Shrine. The church is known for its palm ceiling and fiery-shaped altar. Also this church was patterned after a tent, the worship place in Moses’ time. The fiery shaped altar, where people used to dance, represented God. She concluded: “My father’s works are very symbolic because they came from a faith that was very profound”.

The Meralco Building

His most famous office building is the Meralco Building, still the most beautiful building in Ortigas Center. The late architect and architecture historian, Benedictine Father Rodrigo Perez III, said that the 15-story Meralco building “is slightly curved to give it more stability and to avoid the boxlike appearance of rectangular buildings and the ‘train effect’ of straight corridors. Tapering vertical sun-breakers enhance the gentle curve of the concave façade.” Biographer Ruben David Defeo wrote that Zaragoza, in designing the building, made use of the louver as a significant feature of the structure. He was believed to have been inspired in designing the building from the fender of the fashionable car during his time, the Cougar.

The facade of the Lopez Building (from the name of the owner), alternates solids and transparencies. The sides are solid, like two monolithic towers. Inside are four sections: the pedestrian level, the main structure, an additional level and a crown with a flat roof. The first-class Lighthouse Restaurant at the top floor reflects the owner’s “abiding love for good food”.

Moreover it includes the impressive Meralco Theater.

A bridge which connects the offices, corridors and the elevator lobby supports both portions of the building. Zaragoza likened these to “two people supporting each other, with the bridge serving as outstretched arms.”

When Zaragoza designed and built the Lopez Building, he was at the height of his architectural career. He was ably assisted by his wife Pilar Rosello in most of his architectural projects. Together, wrote Defeo, they were the “tandem to beat, Zaragoza doing the structural aspects of the building, and his wife the interiors made of wood, including the carpentry and furniture.” She designed the theater’s wooden paneling that lines the walls of the auditorium.

Up to the present, “no other building in the country has duplicated his feat of having a series of vertical blades in concrete, arranged in a concave manner, not only to shield the building from sunlight and even rainwater, but to breathe subtlety and supremacy of form into the structure.” Its structural strength was seen when it remained undamaged during the July 16, 1990 earthquake.

Rooted in God’s love

Zaragoza found fulfillment and welcomed the challenge to do complex structures. He put together not just building materials but people’s talents and worked towards consolidation and synthesis. He was bold and daring when he mastered a particular style in architecture to go and explore new lines and curves. Her daughter writes: “Dad conceived magnificent things for others but, for himself he was content with his reliable white Volkswagen Beetle. He drove my younger sister and me in this simple but sturdy vehicle to school every day, sans air-conditioning, along the not so congested EDSA in the late ‘60s till the early ‘70s”.

“Even if my Dad enjoyed music immensely, the only rhythm, cadence and melody in the car were the *Hail Marys* we prayed during our 30- to 40-minute drive from our home in Quezon City to our school in Makati. After the rosary, we used to recite almost chant-like a prayer for every bead of the rosary in Spanish: “*Sagrado corazon de Jesus en vos confio*” (Oh most sacred heart of Jesus, I place my trust in Thee). He set the mood, the focus and the purpose of our day. He even told us about the life of the saint of the day, which greatly inspired my younger sister and me”.

“My father saw his talent as a gift from God. His life was so deeply rooted in his love for God and his devotion to Mama Mary. That is why I am confident that perhaps with the help of those who believe in the preservation of cultural treasures, Dad’s work and memory will live longer than a hundred years”.

“I saw him as a very prayerful man and I feel that his creativity sprung from his daily mass and his devotion to our Blessed Mother. He soared in his humanity because he was rooted in his deep love for God and the propagation of His Kingdom, thus contributing works not only of historical importance, but also for God’s greater glory.

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Nick Joaquin

WORDS CRAFTSMAN

Poet, historian and journalist, Nicomedes Márquez Joaquín (1917–2004) is best known for his short stories and novels in the English language. Considered the best writer after José Rizal, he was conferred the title of National Artist for Literature. In the centenary of his birth, the interest for his body of work is undergoing a strong revival.

Nick Joaquin, the famous writer and journalist, had made many friends among the other writers through the years. Perhaps more than any people, he

was close to José “Pete” Lacaba. A journalist, writer and activist, Pete was working at the Asia-Philippines Leader with Joaquin when martial law was declared on September 21, 1972. Pete’s name was on the list of those wanted by the law but he managed to evade the first sweep of arrests and went underground. In 1974 he was caught and brought to Camp Crame where he was detained and tortured.

Amnesty International failed to free him. What happened next remains one of the best stories told about Nick Joaquin. He was declared National Artist for Literature in 1976. As Pete’s recalls it, Joaquin despised President Marcos’ declaration of martial law and was loathe to receive his award unless he got it on his own terms. Joaquin was advised to accept the award and then ask for Pete’s release. Joaquin agreed.

During the cocktails after receiving the award, Joaquin approached Marcos and said: “I have this officemate, a writer who is detained at Crame. Maybe he can be released already?”. Marcos replied: “Ok, Nick, his release will be part of your award”. So saying, Marcos called for Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile. The next day, Pete was released from detention.

Later Joaquin kept his distance from power, studiously resisting invitations to attend state functions in Malacañang Palace. At a ceremony on Mount Makiling attended by First Lady Imelda Marcos, Joaquín delivered an invocation to *Mariang Makiling*, the mountain's mythical maiden. He touched on the importance of freedom and the artist. He was never again invited to address formal cultural occasions for the rest of the Marcos regime.

A voracious reader

Nick Joaquín was born in Paco, Manila, one of ten children of Leocadio Joaquín, a colonel under General Emilio Aguinaldo in the 1896 Revolution, and Salome Márquez, a teacher of English and Spanish. As a boy, after being read poems and stories by his mother, Joaquín read widely in his father's library and at the National Library of the Philippines. By then, his father had become a successful lawyer after the revolution. When he died prematurely, Nick was only twelve.

The young Joaquín dropped out of school. He had attended Pacò Elementary School and had three years of secondary education in Mapa High School but

was too intellectually restless to be confined in a classroom. Among other changes, he was unable to pursue the religious vocation that his Catholic family had envisioned to be his future. Joaquín himself confessed that he always had the vocation for the religious life and would have entered a seminary if it were not for his father's death.

But he very much remained with the passion of reading. From reading, Joaquín became interested in writing. At age 17, Joaquín had his first piece published, in the literary section of the pre-World War II *Tribune*, where he worked as a proofreader. It was accepted by the writer and editor Serafín Lanot. After Joaquín won a nationwide essay competition to honor *La Naval de Manila*, sponsored by the Dominican Order, the University of Santo Tomas awarded him an honorary Associate in Arts and a scholarship to St. Albert's Convent, the Dominican monastery in Hong Kong.

After returning to the Philippines, Joaquín joined the *Philippines Free Press*, starting as a proofreader. He soon attracted notice for his poems, stories and plays, as well as his journalism under the pen name *Quijano de Manila*. His journalism was both intellectual and provocative, an unknown genre in the Philippines at that time.

One of his contemporaries remarked: “Nick Joaquín the journalist has brought to the craft the sensibility and style of the literary artist, the perceptions of an astute student of the Filipino psyche, and the integrity and idealism of the man of conscience, and the result has been a class of journalism that is dramatic, insightful, memorable, and eminently readable.”

Among his many and various achievements, the novel *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (1961) examines his country's various heritages. *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* (1966), a celebrated play, attempts to reconcile historical events with dynamic change. *The Aquinos of Tarlac: An Essay on History as Three Generations* (1983) presents a biography of Benigno Aquino, the assassinated presidential candidate. The action of the novel *Cave and Shadows* (1983) occurs in the period of martial law under Ferdinand Marcos.

In 1996, he received the Ramón Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts, the highest honor for a writer in Asia. The citation honored him for “exploring the mysteries of the

Filipino body and soul in sixty inspired years as a writer.” Accepting the award, Joaquin did not look back on past achievements but relished the moment, saying that indeed the good wine has been reserved for last and “the best is yet to be.” This from a man who was about to turn eighty when he received the award.

Portrait of a genius

Engaged in a public profession, with a very public name, Nick Joaquin was a very private person. His reclusive character was formed early. He loved going out on long walks, simply dressed, shoes worn out from a great deal of walking (which helped him cogitate), observing the street life of the city, making the rounds of churches.

A person of habit, he wrote about himself : “I have no hobbies, no degrees; I belong to no party, club or association and I like long walks, my mother’s cooking and playing *tres-siete*. I don’t like fish, sports or having to dress up”. Though he gave strangers the impression of someone careless and even wild, Joaquín was a very disciplined writer.

Nick Joaquin however loved drinking. There is nobody else in Philippine history so closely identified with San Miguel beer, as him. He discovered that beer was a good “cover”, because the alcohol relaxed him and helped him to overcome his shyness. Joaquin was capable of drinking enormous amount of beer without getting drunk.

Joaquin’s intense shyness can be traced to his childhood. Of all his nine siblings Nick was the most introverted and reflective, which was brought on by his nature as a writer: contemplative, introspective, deep. He never married and had a felt devotion for his mother, Dona Salome, with whom he lived up to the moment of her death.

He always treated his personal life with utmost dignity and discretion. He never talked about it. He channeled his energies to creative writing. His intense belief in Catholicism pervaded much of his work. He went to Mass and communion with his mother daily, whenever he was free from other commitments and prayed the Rosary every day.

The Filipino Identity

The problem of identity was central in Joaquín's works. In an impressive body of literary, historical, and journalistic writings, Joaquín was a significant participant in the public discourse on "Filipino identity." Already this is present in "La Naval de Manila" which tells of a Manila religious celebration built on the tradition that the Blessed Virgin had miraculously intervened in the Spanish victory over a Dutch invasion fleet in 1646.

It sets forth a major theme Joaquín would develop in the years ahead: that the Filipino nation was formed in the matrix of Spanish colonialism and Catholic devotion and that it was important for Filipinos to appreciate their Spanish past. He wrote: "The content of our national destiny is ours to create, but the basic form, the temper, the physiognomy, Spain created for us."

This peaceful appreciation of the contribution of the Catholic religion did not blind Joaquín who wrote: "The Christian Filipino winces when he hears his country described as the only Christian nation in the Far East. He looks around, sees only greed, graft, vileness and violence. Questioning the value of religious instruction, he sneers, is this Christianity?"

As for his own writing, Joaquín's response to the issue was more blunt: "Whether it is in Tagalog or English, because I am Filipino, every single line I write is in Filipino." In a more jocular vein, he had written about how the local milieu was irrevocably present in his works: "I tell my readers that the best compliment they can pay me is to say that they smell adobo and lechón when they read me. I was smelling adobo and lechon when I wrote me." Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Nick Joaquín, the writer, was that his was always the voice of a deep, inclusive, and compassionate optimism in the Filipino.

When many of his contemporaries had long faded into the background, Joaquín continued to speak of his craft with the verve of a young writer. Well into his eighties, with close to sixty book titles to his name, he was working on more. He also continued to practice journalism and continued to contribute to various publications until his final days. When asked once if he ever intended to retire, Joaquín responded, with typical mischief, "I'm not retiring and I'm not resigned." Nick Joaquín lived in the city and country of

his affections and continued to write until his death in April 2004 at the age of eighty-six.

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John Bradburne

POET, MYSTIC, MARTYR

Good looking, well educated, upper-middle-class Englishman, John Bradburne (1921-1979) fought as an officer during World War II, became a Catholic and wanted to be a contemplative. Instead he was a restless traveler until he settled in a lepers’ camp in Africa. There he served, prayed and wrote poetry. There he suffered martyrdom. His fame of holiness has steadily increased.

An international conference on John Bradburne was held at the *Università per Stranieri (University for Foreign Students) of Perugia, Italy*, on March 30, 2017. It was a truly multi-national occasion, with speakers from Italy, France, Spain, South Africa, and the UK, and an attendance that included academics from several university departments, as well as representatives of the Catholic Church in Italy. Many university students were also present, testifying to the way the story of John Bradburne holds an appeal for young people.

The idea for such an event arose in 2015, during an academic visit to Perugia by Professor David Crystal, the editor of Bradburne’s poetry. The motivation was to make John Bradburne’s writing available to a wider audience in Italy and elsewhere through the medium of translation. Perugia seemed to be the obvious location, for it is close to Assisi – places through

which John Bradburne walked on his several journeys around Italy, and which he often refers to in his writing.

Although the Cause of Beatification of John Bradburne was not part of the remit of the conference, a groundswell of opinion emerged to that purpose. The outcome was the 'Perugia Statement', which was signed by many of the participants. It reads as follows: *“The first International Conference on the life, poetry, and thought of John Bradburne, poet, mystic, martyr, and father to the lepers, is coming to a close”*.

“As speakers and attendees at this conference, we firmly believe that the cause for his canonization should proceed at the earliest opportunity, especially in the light of his role as a model for young people, the poor and marginalized, and the care of those with devastating diseases”. Further support for the move came from Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, Archbishop of Perugia and now Secretary of the Italian Episcopal Conference.

A cave where to pray

John Randal Bradburne was born in 1921 in Skirwith, Cumbria, England. His father, an Anglican clergyman, was the Rector of Skirwith at that time. John was educated at Gresham's, an independent school in Norfolk, England, from 1934 to 1939. He was planning to continue his studies at a University. But, when World War II began, he went straight to the Army.

John was assigned to the 9th Gurkha Rifles of the Indian Army in 1940. He soon found himself with them in Malaya to face the invasion of the Imperial Japanese Army. After the fall of Singapore, John spent a month in the jungle. With another Gurkha officer, he tried to sail a sampan to Sumatra but they were shipwrecked. A second attempt was successful, and John was rescued by a Royal Navy destroyer and returned to Dehra Dun. For his escape, he was awarded the Military Cross.

John Bradburne had a religious experience in Malaya, and the adventurer became the pilgrim. When he returned to England after the war, he stayed with the Benedictines to the Buckfast Abbey, where he became a Roman Catholic in 1947. He wanted to be a Benedictine monk but, after a while, he felt a strong urge to travel.

So, for the next sixteen years, John wandered through England, France, Italy, Greece and the Middle East with only a Gladstone bag as his

companion. In England, he stayed with the Carthusians for seven months. After that, he walked to Rome and lived for a year in the organ loft of the small Church in a mountain village, playing the organ. Along the way, in 1956, on Good Friday, he joined the Secular Franciscan Order but he remained a layman.

John's wanderlust came to the end in 1962, when he wrote to a Jesuit friend in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), who was his old Gurkha comrade. He asked, "Is there a cave in Africa where I can pray?" The answer was the invitation to come to Rhodesia and be a missionary helper. He came and helped in different capacities.

Eventually, in 1969, the Jesuit missionaries introduced him to the Mutemwa Leprosy Settlement near Mutoko, 143 kilometers northwest of Salisbury (now Harare). The 80 or so lepers were appallingly neglected, dirty and hungry, with the roofs of their little tin huts falling in. John immediately decided to stay with them, and never left until his death.

The guardian bees

John lived among the lepers, driving out the rats that gnawed them, cutting the nails of those who had fingers and toes, attending them when they died. He helped build their small church, organizing its music, even teaching the lepers Latin for the Gregorian plainchant.

After a time, Bradburne fell out with the Leprosy Association which, in theory, ran Mutemwa. He hated the fact that it wanted the lepers to be known only by numbers, and refused to do this. He gave each leper a name, and wrote a poem about everyone. He was reprimanded for extravagance because he insisted that each leper should have at least one loaf of bread a week.

He was expelled from the colony, so he went to live in a tent on the mountain above Mutemwa. Then a farmer gave him a tin hut, with no electricity or water, just outside the perimeter fence. For the remaining six years of his life, John stayed there, and continued to minister as best he could. When not attending to the lepers, he lived the life of a hermit, eating very little, writing poetry and praying, often walking a prayer path on the hill.

As a lay member of the Third Order of St Francis, he obeyed its rule, singing the daily office of Our Lady. He lived its hours, rising at dawn for Matins and ending the day with Vespers and Compline. This discipline provides the context for many poems written at the turning-points of the day.

Though John was basically sociable, he did at times relish his solitude, resenting visits and interruptions. He allowed a swarm of wild African bees to nest in his hut, under his desk. They never bothered him, but certainly discouraged all but the most determined visitors. By now gone was the clean-cut military appearance. He was now somehow wild, with long hair and beard framing his careworn countenance. His gaze was direct, unswerving, unsmiling, but his eyes still patient and gentle.

Three wishes

By July 1979, the Rhodesian Bush War, then in its 15th and last year, was coming near Mutemwa. John was urged by his friends to leave but he insisted that he should stay with the lepers. On Sunday, September 2, 1979, the guerrillas came for him. They took him into the bush and subjected him to mockery in front of a crowd, offering him girls to sleep with, trying to make him dance and to eat excrement.

The next day, their leaders interrogated him. John said little, but knelt and prayed. The guerrillas had local reports that the man was harmless, but they became fearful that, because of his abduction, he now knew too much. Eventually, they marched him out of the bush to the main road. Then the guerrilla shot him. His half-naked body was left by the roadside.

After his arrival in Africa, John Bradburne had told a Franciscan priest that he had three wishes: to help the victims of leprosy, to die a martyr, and to be buried in the Franciscan habit. The first two had been fulfilled.

At his Requiem Mass, eye-witnesses saw a small pool of blood which had formed beneath the coffin during the service. The undertaker was worried, thinking that there was an improper preparation of the body. After the mass, therefore, the coffin was reopened, but no sign of blood was found inside it. It was however noticed that John had not been clothed in his Franciscan habit. His third wish was then fulfilled and he was clothed in it. The mystery

of the blood has never been able to be explained other than by being a miraculous event.

Fame of Holiness

His life was a remarkable spiritual odyssey. Given John Bradburne's extraordinary story, his famous charm and oddity, and his martyr's death, it is not surprising that a cult of him quickly grew up. A mass is held in John's memory at Mutemwa every year, drawing as much as 25,000 people each time.

Many pilgrims keep coming to his shrine at Mutemwa, and some pilgrims claim to have been healed by his intercession. A recent miracle in Scotland has been attributed to his aid. In 2009, a Mass commemorating the 30th anniversary of his death was held at Westminster Cathedral in London, England. His cause of beatification has been introduced.

A thriving John Bradburne Society assists this, and contributes the money needed to keep Mutemwa operating because, even today, some 26 lepers are still there and need care. It has just published a selection of the most tangible evidence of John's mind and soul: his verse. His poems filled a wooden box that was delivered to his sister Celia, in England, at his death. With almost six thousand poems, John Bradbury is considered the most prolific English poet of the XX century.

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