

TRIBUTE TO BROTHER CHARLES EVERARD 1918 - 2007

Br Joseph Hendron

Dear Noreen, family and friends of Brother Charles, dear Brothers, members of staff and friends of the Community. On behalf of the Brothers, staff and friends I offer family members and particularly Noreen our sincere sympathy on the death of Brother Charles. This appreciation of him could consist of a reading of tributes to him that we have received since his death. But that would take too long to complete. There have been so many of them. They have come from every corner of the world: Australia, Malaysia, Burma, United States, Continental Europe, Malta, Ireland and people in Britain. One eight-page email was a collection of messages of sympathy from former students of Brother Charles. It is not just that he was well known,



particularly after spending thirty two years in Rome, some of that time as Guest Master when many Brothers, Religious and lay people came to know him. Above all he was loved by those who met him and, in the case of his former students, revered and highly esteemed. It is this love and esteem that have evoked such a widespread feeling of sadness and loss. I can only mention a few of these messages; they are typical of those received. From a former student of the Brothers' school in Rangoon: "...he was my mentor at the arts and crafts class in school, and as a boarder I had the opportunity of really getting to know the Brothers. Many that knew him and had contact with him, even just momentarily will surely miss him; he loved kids and all the kids loved him; he will surely be blessed for all the goodness and love that he had spread. Because of his goodness many of us have benefited..." Two messages regarding his kindness and hospitality when he was Guest Master in the Generalate in Rome. The first, an extract from a letter I found among his effects and dated December 2006: "It has been many years since we met but you have never been forgotten. I am so glad to have the chance to write to you and say how much we all

appreciated your hospitality when in 1983 we visited Rome and stayed at the Mother House.... We were a family travelling by motor home with three young children aged then 7, 10 and 11 years....The children particularly remember you taking us to your Ristorante on the roof area. We remember too the recital you arranged for us to hear the organ played by one of your Brothers... We recall losing my wallet on the day we saw the Pope – the only day we forgot to leave it with you for safe keeping..... We send our very best wishes to you – always remembered for your outstanding kindness and caring whilst with you...." (from Graham Hellams, South Australia.) And a message from Brother Emmanuel in

Malta: "...I happened to be his successor in Rome as Guestmaster.... His kindness and generous hospitality became a legend and religious Orders seemed to love coming to the Generalate, assured of Charles' welcome." And two Christmas cards that arrived recently after his death: one which says: "My Dear brother, I am an old student from Class 1A, Standard 1, of SJI, Singapore in 1945 just after the Second World War. I now reside in Melbourne, Australia. An old man of 73", and he has enrolled Charles in a Christmas novena of Masses. The second is from a Brother in France: "Your memory brings back to mind your sweetness and your many helps to me, when in Rome. I often think of and pray for you. Very faithfully yours in Our Lord. Brother Raymond Gagnane."

As I have said, this appreciation could be a reading of many similar messages we have received; but there is another way of looking at Charles' interesting life: as five or six distinct and very different stages. There was his childhood in Burma. He was born on 6th September 1918 in Meiktila, Central Burma, the second of three children of William George and Mary (née Brinkworth) Everard. The other children were sisters May (deceased) and

Noreen. He was baptised in the local Catholic Church on 25th September, 1918, receiving the names Carl Maxwell. His nephews and nieces always referred to him affectionately as 'uncle Mac'. His father had been brought to Burma by the British to help plan and build the Railways. Carl Maxwell's mother died when he was nine years old. His father, who had been supportive of the De La Salle Brothers' pioneering work in Burma, sent his son to St. Peter's boarding school in Mandalay. There he met the Brothers and later decided to join them. This is a brief sketch of what must have been a difficult phase of his life, losing his mother at such an early age and having to leave home for boarding school. This phase ended when he left his homeland to begin his formation as a Brother. There were no formation houses in Burma at the time.

A three day journey by boat from Rangoon to Ipoh in Malaysia in 1933 was the beginning of the next stage of his life. He entered the novitiate in Penang on 17th March 1937, and received the Religious Names Henry Charles. He made first vows on 18th March 1938. He taught for a time in Ipoh but by February 1942 was teaching in Singapore when the city fell to the Japanese invading army. Enemy aliens (those carrying British passports) among the Brothers were rounded up and interned in Changi Prison. Brothers of other nationalities including Charles were not sent to prison but set to teach in the morning and attend language school in the afternoon; Japanese was to be the medium of instruction. It was a difficult period especially with gradually diminishing food supplies. In 1943 the Japanese authorities approached the Bishop and the Catholic community with a proposal to transfer to a jungle settlement in Bahau, Malaya. They painted a picture of rural bliss; rice would be supplied for six months. Thereafter Bahau would be self sufficient, even supplying Singapore with rice!! Bahau was something of a disaster from the start. Malaria was rife, many died including 2 young Irish Brothers. Basics were not provided as promised. Charles is listed among those who helped with gardening. Later he established himself as an expert tailor. With his sewing machine he was able to produce rather fine shirts. There was no direct ill treatment by the Japanese of the Brothers in Bahau, apart from the horrible way they abandoned them to horrendous conditions.

At the end of the war the Brothers returned to Singapore and had the difficult task as he put it himself of getting the students back to the discipline of study and school work. At this time there were about fifteen Burmese Brothers in Malaya. Burma itself was recovering from the ravages of the Japanese invasion and a plea was made for the return of some Burmese Brothers from Malaya to help with the Brothers' recovery work. Some were too old to return, some were needed still in Malaya. So, about five headed by Brother Charles returned to Burma in 1950. He wrote about his happiness of returning to his beloved Burma after such a long absence. So ended another phase of his life. There is an interesting tailpiece to this stage. While he was still in Singapore, the Manchester United squad of the time came to play in Malaya/Singapore and did their practice on the St. Joseph's playing fields. Charles became a United supporter from that time. Some would say it was the only instance of poor judgement in his life! From around this time too he had a special place in his heart for the Royal Family – their photographs adorned the walls of his room and office wherever he was.

The next stage he enjoyed immensely – among his own people, in his own culture, teaching Burmese boys, and in close contact again with his family. It is the students of this period who have swamped us with emails of sympathy and appreciation. Some of these students are present with us today. They have kept photographs of their class groups, first Communion and Confirmation groups etc., with Charles in the middle. One who phoned me from Australia said he remembers Charles as a holy man – like a Buddhist monk. *"He was devout himself and taught us to be holy."* Charles was very happy there. But this period was brought to a cruel end in 1969 when the government expelled all those of mixed race, and also took over the schools. Charles left his homeland again, January 25th 1969, this time forcibly, never to return again: exiled and stateless.

He arrived in Rome with Brother Urban, another exile, who died in Rome a few years ago. They were given work in the Generalate. Charles began work in the personnel office in 1969 keeping the records of the Brothers throughout the world. It was a big task in those days. It was also the time when

large numbers of Brothers left the Institute. Charles received and processed the relevant information regarding them. It broke his heart to receive almost every day new information about Brothers who had asked for dispensations. This was yet another sad and disappointing period of his life. After a few years he moved from that office and became sacristan.

It was a full-time task in the Generalate, but he probably derived more satisfaction from it. He liked flowers and decoration of the altar and chapel and keeping things in order. It was a hidden work – most people just expected everything to be in order in the chapel as though it all happened automatically. When the Pope visited the Generalate on November 21st 1981 to speak to the whole Community, say Mass and have a meal, Charles of course was very busy in the chapel preparing everything and tidying up afterwards. Security even in the house was at a maximum - all Brothers present were issued with tickets for each function. No-one was admitted to the talk, the Mass or the meal without the proper ticket – or if one arrived late. Charles stayed behind to tidy up in the chapel after the Papal Mass and was late for the meal – it was only with great difficulty and protracted negotiations that he was allowed in to the meal – in his own house.

In the final ten years or so in the Generalate he was Guest Master. It was in this post that so many people, Brothers from around the world, family members, friends, school children, other Religious, a host of guests, came to know and love him. They were welcomed by him with everything needed to make them feel at home and at ease, including the famous hand-written names on guest room doors. If one was lucky an invitation to the famous

Ristorante on the roof was a special treat – for a private function so to speak. It was well stocked with bottles and foods for all tastes. Among his guests were the present Pope as Cardinal Ratzinger who was chairman of the Pontifical Biblical Commission that held meetings in the Generalate. Also Cardinal Suenens of Belgium always stayed in the Generalate when in Rome and Cardinal Popalardo from Naples. But Charles could mingle with the great and the good and neither be overawed nor obsequious. He was not one to be seen

photographed with them or to name-drop at table: “I welcomed Cardinal Ratzinger this morning and showed him to his room” or “I’ve just had a chat with Cardinal Suenens.” All who came were accorded respect and a warm welcome.

In 1992 he entered on the final stage of his life. He retired to the Bournemouth Community having successfully negotiated the process for obtaining British citizenship. He spent ten happy years there usefully occupied with little tasks in the service of the Community. I am grateful to Brother Joseph O’Keefe, Director at the time for a recorded interview that he made with Charles. This gave some interesting detail on his earlier days that I have used. Then in 2002 he transferred to Clayton Court.

Any one of these stages into which I have divided his life merits a much longer treatment than is possible on this occasion.

Those who knew him only in the final few years of his illness and frailty would never have suspected the varied, challenging and difficult life experiences that lay in the past. He did not boast about them nor was he embittered by them. He lived a peaceful, unruffled life that found expression in his friendly smile. That says a lot for his deep spirituality – as his former student said to me: “*he was a holy man.*” He needed to be deeply attached to his vocation to cope with and survive so many setbacks, difficulties and disappointments. Some thought him somewhat naïve; but that was to underestimate seriously his inner strength, his astuteness and his single-mindedness in following through on what were his responsibilities. He had a capacity and talent too for quietly side-stepping whatever annoyed or frustrated him.

My final word is one of thanks to Cheryl, our Manager and our staff for the care given to Charles in the last years and months of his life. It was professional, compassionate and respectful. For as long as he was capable of expressing it verbally he was immensely appreciative, and the staff equally devoted to his care and wellbeing. One of his clear and memorable expressions up to the last was “Thank you.”

We thank you Charles for all that you were to us and to so many others around the world.

May you rest in Peace with the Lord. Amen