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**THOMAS RICHARD HEATH O.P.**



What follows is the nearly finished manuscript of a book published by the Dominican Friars of the Province of St. Joseph in 2010, with considerable minor corrections, the addition of more than 50 high quality photos, etc.

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## Introduction

Shortly after arriving in Kisumu in June 2007, I was asked by the then novice master, Fr. Ben Croell, if I would be able to “go through” some boxes of Fr. Tom’s papers and personal belongings left in the house after his death. As one of “Fr. Tom’s novices” (1978-79), I considered it an honor and a privilege, and soon one thing led to another. I saw the need to establish a biographical time-line in order to situate his papers, letters and the events of his life, and to write a summary of what I found for the brethren of the house and vicariate. Later I had the idea of collecting testimonies of those who had known Fr. Tom, especially in his last years in Kisumu. I thus gathered together, little by little, the material which appears in these pages. This undertaking, which has matured in two years’ time, --years in which I began the post of novice master for the East African Vicariate in the very site where Tom Heath lived his last years, died, and is buried-- has been a labor of love by a life-long admirer of this great friar who taught me to love Dominican values, to cherish Dominican fraternity, and to preach with a flair!

My special thanks to Fr. Richard Ambrose McAlister O.P. for his very generous and expert help in the preparation of this volume for publishing.

If anyone who reads these pages would be interested in contributing further appreciations, anecdotes or data concerning Fr. Tom Heath, I would be happy to collect them, with the possibility (as yet unverified) of completing this volume with something more extensive in the future (appreciations by friars, relatives, former students; his correspondence, poetry...).

This volume was begun around June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Tom’s birthday, and finished in June 2009.

## THOMAS RICHARD HEATH O.P.

### Part I: Biographical sketch

#### Childhood and Youth

Tom was born June 19, 1920 at Medford, Mass. Years later he wrote very frankly about his parents and his own childhood in a particularly autobiographical chapter of the book on the Dominican charism he hoped to publish:

I grew up in a home and a church where fear was my predominant feeling. My parents were marvelous people, serious and careful about their responsibilities, full of self-sacrifice, and kind. [...]

But when I was a boy I feared my father too much. He had a fierce temper. One of his interests was mathematics at which he excelled in college – had even done some graduate work in it at M.I.T. – and so he took it upon himself to tutor his children in that subject. I was not very good at arithmetic. Night after night I was subjected to his rages because I could not remember what seven times eight was, or how to solve the most simple problems.

I was never afraid of my mother, but once or twice a year she would go days without talking to my father because he refused to give in to her on this or that policy or decision. It was a question of two very stubborn people married to each other. I have always been grateful to my father for not giving in to her because her demands were frequently unreal. He was right to refuse them no matter how much pain it cost them both. But the cost of such division to me was great indeed. It tore me apart.

[...] I also went through four or five years of my boyhood terrorized by one of the big kids in our neighborhood. [Also] a gap in my front teeth, ears that stuck out and a skinny body with a protruding chest bone gave me an acute sense of handicap and inferiority. [...]

From those days I acquired and always carried with me a pervasive anxiety. Sometimes it was slight, sometimes

In one of his books Tom gives another slant on this developing ‘anxiety’ in a more positive vein, speaking of the maturing judgment that comes about sometime towards the end of adolescence when one becomes aware of the mystery of evil:

...What moment marked one’s first step into adulthood when the acceptance of the fact of evil was not enough and the mind began to investigate the causes of the fact? Perhaps there is no clear step. Changes like that begin far down in the subconscious and are made known to us by a changed attitude toward a common experience. We surprise ourselves when we do not respond in our usual way to a given life situation, and in that surprise we know we have changed, though often enough we do not know how or why.

Such a change occurred to me when I was seventeen.<sup>1</sup> We drove past an insane asylum. I had always taken such places for granted and had frequently used such occasions to tell wild jokes about crazy people. This day someone else made the joke, but I did not laugh. I simply looked at the bars on the windows high up in the red brick building and felt a strange, sharp pity for the people behind them. While others were laughing I was staring out the window perplexed and silent.

My mind at that moment began to wonder about the problem and the mystery of evil, I was asking myself a question that seemed very much related to life but for which I had no answer: why were there insane people?

*(In Face of Anguish, p. 7)*

He also speaks briefly of his high school days in relation to his developing interest in poetry:

Then high school. John Masefield’s “Sea Fever” was the first poem that took my head off. My two brothers and I used to take trips into Boston and haunt the fishing wharves along Atlantic Avenue, talk to the old salts there, smell the sea, and hear its call. [...]

Mr. Daniel Cotter, our senior-year English teacher, introduced us to *Hamlet*. He was an actor, probably more ham than authentic, but full of enthusiasm for the text and explanation of the text. He played all the roles, not afraid to shout or whisper and do whatever was called for with style. By a happy coincidence, the well-known English actor, Maurice Evans, came to Boston that year with *Hamlet*. I think now it was no coincidence. Mr. Cotter planned it that way. Evans was superb. For years later I imitated his “To be or not to be.” He spoke it meditatively while slowly descending the stairs into the orchestra pit, or so I remember. *Hamlet* was my high-school peak in aesthetic appreciation.

(*Poetry and Preaching*, p. 3)

Fr. Lewis Shea, who lived with Tom many years in Kisumu, recalls Tom telling him anecdotes of being a traveling salesman to raise money for his college expenses.

In 1939, Tom began studies at Boston College,<sup>2</sup> graduating with a B.S in Biology in 1943:

I began writing poetry at Boston College. In their famous *ratio studiorum* the Jesuits called for poetry very early in the curriculum, and so in Freshman and Sophomore English I submitted my verses. I was told to try for publication in *The Stylus*, the literary magazine. I did and was successful.

I loved words...

At graduation time Father William Leonard, the Jesuit moderator of the magazine, who became and after forty years still remains a close friend, and knowing that I was about to follow my brother into the Dominicans, told me that I should continue writing poetry. I agreed.

(*Formed by the Word*, pp. 83.85)

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<sup>2</sup> Tom had a rather hard time of it, it seems:

“I started at B.C. as a Physics major in the class of ’42, flunked my Sophomore year, being lazy and in love. I returned as a Biology, pre-med major and was accepted at Tufts Medical, only to realize, under Fr. Bill Leonard’s patient guidance, that the Lord was

Just before entering the Dominicans, a librarian friend of his gave him Louis Untemeyer's combined edition of *Modern American Poetry* and *Modern English poetry*. "That has been my bread-and-butter poetry book over the years, sixty odd actually." (*Poetry and Preaching*, pp. 3-4).

*Tom's family*: his older brothers "Bud" (Walter) and Dick (Richard), preceded him as Dominican friars in St. Joseph's Province; his sister Mary became a Maryknoll Missionary, and his sister Leslie would marry Mr. Edward Costello: their family became a fundamental personal reference throughout Tom's life. When his nieces and nephews were older, he wrote short poems to each of them, and brought his favorite people (e.g. Roland de Vaux OP, Dominic Moreau OP) to visit their home, delighting in the warmth of their family life. Here are a couple of anecdotes, outstanding among many, many more, which show the insight into human goodness, the delight and humor which Tom derived from watching, and in some small measure participating in the growth of his nieces and nephews:

Feb 5<sup>th</sup>, '69

I was packing, leaving Winchester for Washington after Christmas. It was about noon. Leelee (about 11 years old) was cooking herself a frankfurt. I asked her to put a couple on for me. She did. Peter (about seven) came in and asked her to put one on for him. "OK Peter", she said. A few minutes later I went into the kitchen [and] saw only three dogs in the pan. I went over to the ice box and discovered there were no more. I said to Lee, "whose franks are these?" She said, "Two are for you and one for Peter". I said, "But what about yourself, Lee?" She shrugged and smiled. "O that's all right, I didn't want one anyway, uncle Tom."

I kissed her. "Lee, have one of mine, then we'll both get one." And so we did: and we each ate a frankfurt. But the incident, the unselfishness of an 11/12 year old girl towards her brother was beautiful.<sup>3</sup>

... Dick at Mass gave Mark the kiss of peace by shaking his hand,<sup>4</sup> saying “Peace of Christ, Mark.” For the rest of the Mass Mark looked at his hand. Later he explained he thought Uncle Dick had given him a piece of God.

Somewhere about this time<sup>5</sup> Tom read Franz Werfel’s historical novel about Lourdes, *The Song of Bernadette*, and recalled its influence in his life two decades later in his book *In Face of Anguish*:

I read it first over twenty years ago, stayed up half the night to finish it, and then sat up for another hour or two thinking it over and over. The book led me to Bernadette, to Lourdes, to the Lady, and probably had its influence in leading me to the priesthood. It is a work of art.

## Dominican Formation

Among Tom’s papers there is a handwritten prayer of consecration to Mary dated May 10, 1943 (the date of his vestition as a Dominican) entitled “O Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom...”. He apparently renewed this act once or several times yearly for the next 40 years, usually on Marian feasts, during his annual retreat, and at Pentecost (dates recorded by hand on the same sheet through 1982).

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<sup>4</sup> From several other humorous anecdotes about the same period it is evident that this was the time that the “kiss of peace” ritual was being introduced into the Catholic Mass in the U.S., and was still quite new to everybody. For example right after these family anecdotes he adds this humorous report:

A country parish in Kentucky. The priest came down from the altar to give the kiss of peace to his parishioners. They had not yet seen this rite. “Peace be with you”, he said to the man in the first pew, shaking his hand. Then, “Pass it on.” The man didn’t know *what* the priest had said. But shaking the hand of his wife he said “Pleased to meet you.” And that is what with very broad smiles was passed on down the line.

<sup>5</sup> Before or during his novitiate? At any rate it was “over twenty years

During his novitiate Tom read Raymond of Capua's biography of St. Catherine of Siena, and nearly 50 years later, comments on it (on *her*) in a lengthy chapter of his book *Formed by the Word*.<sup>6</sup>

It remains the most stunning life of a saint I have ever read. [...] Catherine is the spirit of our Order, inebriating us with her tenderness and love and reminding us always that the power and the wisdom of our preaching depends on our loving union with God. Catherine won't let us forget that the Dominican life is a love story, a constant seeking after the face of Yahweh, of finding, delighting, praising, proclaiming our beloved forever. That is the sort of nurture that must be behind our preaching, as it was behind Dominic's and Thomas's. [...] She still remains a powerful influence in heaven for us Dominicans. And like the Order she loved so much, she is a gladsome, fragrant, and delightful garden for all who ask her help. (*Formed by the Word*, pp. 164.167.174)

In his later manuscript, he wrote of his struggles with meditation during the novitiate, and his eventual resolution of the "problem" thanks to Theresa of Lisieux:

I remember that my novice master offered us a "Dominican method" of prayer, written up in a pamphlet by Fr. Nicholas Ridolfi O.P. (which has recently been reprinted). In fairness he did not insist we follow that method. But he did insist that we not read books during our meditation period. Yet, without a book I "gathered wool"; I thought of home, of famous baseball games, great movies, but I could not keep my mind of the subject chosen for meditation.

Later, after our novitiate year, I told my confessor and spiritual director about my problem. He recommended I read the life of Saint Thérèse, written by herself. That book, I think, saved my life. Well, it saved my prayer-life, at any rate. I always use a book now when I meditate.

(*Poetry and Preaching*, p. 160)

At one point Tom makes a very brief reference to his concern for loved ones in the novitiate while World War II was raging on the international scene:

It brought back the days of the war which I sat out at St. Rose – the days of Bud in the subs, of all my classmates overseas, and me – praying for them.<sup>7</sup>

On May 28, 1944 Tom made his *first profession* as a Dominican friar at St. Rose Priory in Springfield, Ky. He later wrote concerning this period:

... in novitiate days, and during the early years of my training, I meditated on vanity and on my inordinate desire for praise. I read the lives of the saints who gave up their most precious possessions for the sake of the kingdom. Painfully and secretly I came to believe that God was asking me to give up poetry. One day, toward the end of my philosophy courses, and before beginning theology, I burned all the poetry I had written.

I wince as I write. Such a decision, arrived at in lonely pride, with no consultation whatsoever, seems insane to me now. But I also remember how I would read and re-read, and read again my own poetry with intense delight, and how I would seek out praise, and live on the slightest crumb that came my way...

During theology and post-graduate studies I wrote some verses but always felt a little guilty about it. Besides, the course of studies was very demanding: there was little time for poetry.<sup>8</sup> I moved along, feeling somewhat torn and bereft, but also somewhat noble because of the sacrifice. I had essentially given up, or blocked off, poetry (and the arts in general) as a source of spiritual help. All that, I thought, was vanity.”  
(*Formed by the Word*, p. 85)

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<sup>7</sup> TH's personal journal, Sunday May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1968 (Vol III, p. 23). “Bud” is his brother Walter. He made a similar mention in his biographical sketch for his 50<sup>th</sup> Class reunion:

I sat out the war in Kentucky and Ohio, praying for my brother J.L. (John Leslie, B.C. '42) on subs in the South China Sea and for my B.C. friends [...] But I wondered if they thought me a coward, I wondered myself. (Class of 1913, *Golden Anniversary Report*, 59).

Despite the foregoing reference to there being “little time for poetry” during his seminary studies, Tom wrote in his more recent book *Poetry and Preaching* [p. 4] that Untermeyer’s aforementioned double anthology of Modern American and English poetry was his “refuge from our demanding and sometimes dry philosophy and theology courses; it was a certain solace on bleak days”.

Sometime “during a very difficult year early in my Dominican life” Tom went through a sort of spiritual crisis (alluded to in *Formed by the Word*, pp. 20-21 as a “very threatening and discouraging period of my own life”) where he came to the jaundiced view that “none of God’s holy people were really joyful”, and that those who appeared to be happy were in fact putting up a front. He comments laconically: “Change of residence and work enabled me to see things in another light.” He later realized that this was indeed a mistaken conclusion, and that joyfulness is in fact one of the characteristics of Dominic’s charism. (*ibid.* p. 22). He wrote again of this critical period in one of the last and most autobiographical chapters in his manuscript on Dominican life, mentioning the constant anxiety he battled with especially in his early years, until finding the secret of confidence in the “little way” of Thérèse of Lisieux:

By the time I was accepted into the Dominican novitiate, my anxiety was under control. It was always with me, a free-floating and vague sort of thing, but manageable. I was coping.

During the three years of philosophy after the novitiate it built to a dark crescendo. In my first year one of the students in the class ahead of me had a nervous breakdown, was hospitalized, took shock treatment, and left the order. The memory of his collapse is searing. One morning he took the little mallet for ringing the chimes in the studentate corridor and began to hit those chimes with all his might, helter-skelter, shouting to us in our rooms, “Go ahead and keep the

A year later another student went off. In one of our classrooms we were watching the film, *A tree grows in Brooklyn*. One painful scene depicts the alcoholic father [...] coming up the stairs to a fourth floor cold water flat, drunk, at midnight, singing “Cockles and mussels, alive, alive ho”. His wife [...] is waiting quietly for him, seething with all her pent-up frustrations [...] When he comes in she explodes. At that point in the film the student in question began to gurgle in a dreadful way. Those near to him carried him out. He too had to have shock treatments.

The officials in the order removed the student master who was a strict and humorless man (though no one blamed him for these incidents) and sent a very benign, fat man to take his place. In consultation with [...], the priest in charge, they lightened our courses, sent us out on long walks through the countryside, introduced better food, organized sports, had picnics. No more incidents like that happened.

The effect on me was devastating. I thought I was next. I was sure of it. Nothing helped: not the long walks, not the sports, not the food, not the picnics. *I was next*. At night I can remember turning in the dark towards a little statue of the Blessed Mother, pleading for her to help, and very, very painfully accepting my insanity, if God so willed it, but asking her for the grace to be gentle in my derangement, to inflict no harm on others.

That was the psychological side. The religious side was bad, too. My feeling was that these two incidents were certain signs of God’s displeasure on us, that our life was neither prayerful nor austere nor studious enough to warrant his gracious blessing. [...] I reflected on how far we were, how far I was, from spiritual perfection.

There was no dramatic turn-around in my state but the reading of that book<sup>9</sup> and making some sort of contact with Therese herself in prayer was something like that moment in a storm at sea when the screaming winds and mountainous waves abate just a little, and the experienced sailor knows that the worst is over. I was not sure of it then, but it was true, the worst was over. My anxiety continued and is still with me but it has never returned with the ferocity of those terrible days.

And I am confident, following my little friend's way, that it will not; or if it does that I shall be able to handle it.

Having a kind confessor, Fr. Gerry Jurasko, also helped. It may have been he who asked me to read *The Story of a Soul*. And moving from the house where all that horror happened helped. During my years of theology in Washington I could feel I was returning to my old self of manageable anxiety and cheerfulness and hope. Perhaps that was due to the good theology we were receiving. Our text was the *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas.

*(Formed by the Word, pp. 235-239)*

Tom received the A.B. degree from Providence College in 1949, and the following year, on June 10, 1950 (nearly 30 yrs. old), he was *ordained to the priesthood*. He recalls a moving interchange with his father which occurred very shortly thereafter:

My father was an admirer of the old Boston baseball teams, the Braves and the Red Sox. When I was a boy he told me about the great players he had seen as a boy... I remember the delight he took in describing famous catches and famous plays made by the greats "from Tinkers to Evers to Chance."

Then I grew up. And my father grew up. He had a serious heart attack. I came home from Washington, just recently ordained. I saw his anxiety but being shy and not wanting to be pious (he hated piety) I thought to cheer him up and tried to distract him from his suffering by asking about his favorite subject. I said, "How does it look for the Red Sox this year?" He looked out at me from a great inner lake of loneliness and turmoil. His answer still rings in my soul. "Who cares?" I think those are the two most poignant words I have ever heard.

[...] His two words told me that he had come to realize that everything in this world is passing.

*(Formed by the Word, p. 54)*

Tom's father died a month later, on July 19, 1950. Elsewhere in the same book Tom writes of his relationship with his father in their mature years:

certainly forgiven each other whatever had been an obstacle to mutual respect and love. (*Formed by the Word*, p. 232)

The following year Tom was awarded the S.T.L. from the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception, Wash. D.C., and the S.T.Lr. from the General Study of the Order of Preachers, Wash. D.C.

### Teaching at Trinity College

From 1951 to 1956/57 Fr. Tom was Instructor of Sacred Doctrine (Theology), at *Trinity College*, Washington D.C. These were unforgettable years for him and for many of his students, as the following testimonies bear witness:

“... as a teacher of college girls for 12 delightful years, I understand Dominic’s admission [that he enjoyed talking to young women more than to old, more than to being *talked to* by old women], and am very glad he made it.”

(*Formed by the Word*, p. 148)

“During my years teaching college girls I remember how frank some of them were in expressing their love for me (and I for them). I always felt they never would have been so free if I had been married, nor would I have been.”

(remarks on celibacy in *Formed by the Word*, p. 176)

In personal messages of the Trinity College class of 1954 collected in their 50<sup>th</sup> reunion booklet, 11 of the 54 respondents recall Fr. Tom Heath by name as a significant influence on their lives:

There were so many good professors at T.C. that it’s hard to single out just one. I guess I’d have to say the most memorable was Father Heath who taught us how to live our lives in a truly Christian manner. (Ellen Daley Prokop)

*Professors that taught me the most---* Sr. Joan [...] and of course –Father Heath– need I say more? (Rosemary

So many of them took endless extra time, and they all really knew us. Of course the Dominicans, especially Father Heath, were a big influence on me – probably on all of us. And friendships have endured for all these years. (Peggy Inglesby Greenslade).

Important Trinity Professors: [...] The study of the Summa, particularly with Father Heath, gave me an appreciation of my faith and of one of its intellectual components. (Maggie Kenny Berkey)

What made it special? [...] it is the people I met at TC that hold the key. Sister Helen, Sister Anne Francis, Sister Joan, Father Heath, Father Eugene Burke, Mr. Stead, all of them have been life-long influences and most of them life-long friends. They have shaped and strengthened my faith, my family, my relationships with other people, my volunteer life and my intellectual life (such as it is!) (Mary Ann Paganelli Lee)

Where is the Catholic Church in America heading? Where is the Catholic Church heading? I suspect that Africa and South America will be its future. I have fond memories of the Dominicans and our dear Father Heath leading us through the truths and history of Catholicism. Is there hope out there? (Maura Smith Emery)

Father Tom Heath O.P., has remained a dear friend and source of spiritual guidance throughout the years. Our class initiated him into the classroom. He has never forgotten us and we have never forgotten him. (Patricia Smith Daley)

I think of the teachers who made such an impression in my life [...] And our dear Father Heath who made theology and religion a most important part of my full and satisfying life. (Ruthann Twomey Arnsberger)

Fr. Tom wrote briefly of the same epoch from his own perspective, in his introduction to *Poetry and Preaching* (pp. 6-7):

My experience of teaching began with college girls. At first I was shy, lacking all confidence. But the girls' cheerful acceptance of me and my teaching both surprised me and slowly built up an inner conviction about the value and even the joy of teaching.

contradictions in life. I saw that many (all?) of the girls would one day meet up with sorrow and suffering.

You that have no lines of former pain,  
 Nor suffered with the dying, held the dead,  
 That feel as yet no anguish of insane  
 Betrayals twisting questions in your head;  
 That have exams and chatter only: How  
 The moon shall kiss the planets when he calls  
 You cannot hear your answers echo now  
 Down vaster than these academic halls  
 Nor can I make you listen. You will learn  
 Of this from lectures less conservative,  
 From sudden storms and flames that smash and burn  
 Your heart with wounds professors do not give.  
 I tell you storms will come. You smile and smell  
 Sweet April, and are restless for the bell.

The poem began with the perception that college life was removed from ‘the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’, and so was somewhat unreal. I saw how vulnerable the girls were to future heartbreak. I saw that I should warn them, but that they would not pay much attention to my warnings.

In 1955 Tom began keeping a “*journal*” of his travels and reflections upon the same. Later, towards 1962-63, he began to ‘keep’ it more regularly, and it became an important part of his ongoing reflection, involving more and more books read, elements of the daily liturgy, poetry he came across, and very personal impressions of events, people, news items, etc. The notes in this journal, kept over some 25-30 years in a total of 10 notebooks, provide some of the greatest insights into Tom’s intense inner life, his theological interests and aesthetic sensitivity, his doubts and his courage, his life of prayer and his own particular expression of faith.<sup>10</sup>

#### Missionary venture in Lebanon

In 1956 (1957?) Tom was awarded the *Ph.D.* from the Catholic University of America, and shortly thereafter undertook, with several other friars from St. Joseph’s

Province, a *missionary venture in Lebanon*. On Jan 25, 1957 (*en route* to Beirut) Tom made a pilgrimage to Lourdes which he remembered fondly twelve years later to the day, in his journal entry of Jan 26, 1969 (Vol III, pp. 60-62), commenting on Psalm 42:

That psalm is in the Breviary for Tuesday at Sext or None. Yesterday it cut deeply into my heart. [...] This psalm hit me between the eyes. They are laughing and saying ‘You *talk* about God, but where is he?’ And I can’t produce Him. I remember Him in my pilgrimages, I remember Lourdes, for example, the exquisite beauty and the Mass in the Grotto at 5 AM on the morning of Jan 25, 1957 after praying most of the night...

A few years before jotting down the above entry, he wrote of a deeply moving experience which would seem to have occurred during the same pilgrimage. He was commenting on the believer’s ‘nostalgia’ of Jerusalem witnessed to by Psalm 139 (“By the rivers of Babylon...”):

I remember standing in a drizzle at Lourdes during the great procession of the Blessed Sacrament. Those of the sick who could be wheeled under the trees in front of the basilica were singing from their stretchers and chairs. The Latin refrain had the word “Jerusalem” in it, whether from this psalm or another I could not tell. It made no difference. The piercing nostalgia was almost unbearable. O if I forget you, Jerusalem, if I place you not ahead of my joy! The strangers and pilgrims on that rainy day at Lourdes were singing the *super flumina Babylonis* again, singing about another Jerusalem symbolized, caught up, and really present in that white circle of Bread held aloft by a priest. [...]

All the cries of a heartbroken humanity broke in Lourdes that day, broke in plaintive song up from the condition of man. [...] I knew that I could never again touch anything on this earth that would not in some way or other sweep me back to Lourdes, and to the Blessed Sacrament carried through the drizzle, and to that song welling up in the throats of the sick. (*In Face of Anguish*, pp. 158-159)

Easter week 1957, probably after arriving in Lebanon, Tom visited the Holy Land:<sup>11</sup>

Once when visiting in the holy city of Jerusalem –it was Easter Week of 1957, when riots were breaking out in the streets, when alien forces were doing their utmost to cause enough confusion and panic to make easy their annexation of Jordan– I was given the privilege of offering Mass on the altar set up above the hill of Calvary. At my Mass every morning were some of the Little Sisters of Charles de Foucauld whose work was with the Moslems, who went into the Moslem homes every day, washed floors, nursed the sick, cleaned the rooms, and spoke of Christ only by the witness of their poverty, humility, and simplicity. They gathered together every morning around the altar, this little family, kneeling on the stone floor, very devoutly following the liturgy. At Communion time they came up and received Our Lord with hungry souls. They needed His strength, and He gave it to them.

In the old city of Jerusalem, then, and on Calvary’s heights, I caught a glimpse of the New Jerusalem. Christ, I thought, does not wait until we arrive in heaven to be with us as our God. He does not wait until then to wipe away every tear from our eyes. No, every morning He strengthens and consoles us and wipes away some of the tears of the previous day, and wraps us warmly in His love. And if we do not experience this it is because we do not feel the real need of Christ, do not hunger for the only good that will ever satisfy us, and the only strength, and the only love: it is because we are not poor enough and not hungry enough...

1957-58: 16 months<sup>12</sup> of *Dominican Mission in Beirut, Lebanon*: “I learned to speak French”. Tom had invested a lot of himself in the prospect of missionary work, but the experience itself was a terribly disappointing

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<sup>11</sup> Would he / they have stayed at the Ecole Biblique? Perhaps not, since there is no mention of it in his later writings, even when he speaks of the École and its brethren. However, it is also very possible, given that it is only a kilometer away from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, to which he

one,<sup>13</sup> due to the lack of adequate coordination and the impossibility of fulfilling their initial reason for going there: to found a University. (cf. *Formed by the Word*, pp. 135, 120). In his book *In Face of Anguish* (1966) he writes of a traumatic experience they had of human evil: a friendly little boy who sold newspapers was horribly killed by a terrorist bomb-attack.<sup>14</sup> Tom considered the Dominican mission in Lebanon (and himself) to be a dismal failure (Journal, March 13, 1963), and took quite some time to recuperate his joy in living... Dominique Moreau OP, whom Tom considered “the holiest man I had ever met”,<sup>15</sup> accompanied him at his send-off, encouraged him by letter while in the mission and consoled him upon his return:

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<sup>13</sup> It was not, however, without its light moments. There is a humorous anecdote from his very first days of “missionary life” in Lebanon, which Tom mentioned and recorded 24 years later during his first year of mission in Lesotho. (What made Tom recall this incident was a breakfast table discussion where the names of Dorothy Day and Doris Day got mixed up):

“Later, in the kitchen, doing the dishes with Peter and Pheko I told them about my first night in BethMari in the Lebanon mountains where I had gone to teach English. Small room, hard cot, mosquito netting over me, all alone feeling, now I am a missionary, far from the USA. And suddenly, from a blaring loud-speaker “Que será, será, whatever will be, will be”: a recording of Doris Day singing the song that made her famous, being played in a Roadhouse right across the road! You can’t escape!

We did the dishes, all three of us, singing away “Qué será, será,” and laughing over my Lebanon experience.”

(TH, personal journal, May 6, 1981: Vol. X, p. 27)

<sup>14</sup> “In 1958 I was in Beirut, Lebanon. I shall never forget a newsboy there who used to wave and smile at us in great merriment, probably because we spoke hopeless Arabic, and poor French, but returned his own friendliness in a more universal language. He was selling his papers in front of a restaurant in the Bourg. A car came up. Out of it stepped a man carrying some loose newspapers. He placed them gently in a barrel directly outside the restaurant. He got back into his car and drove away. A minute later came the deafening explosion. About forty people in the restaurant were killed or wounded. Our merry newsboy was blown to bits.” (In *Face of Anguish*, p. 10)

Shortly after that I left the country to go to my first mission in Beirut, Lebanon. With my family at dock-side to say good-bye was Father Moreau. He wrote to me while I was there, simple, encouraging letters, and I wrote long letters in answer. When the mission failed and I had come home, very disappointed and almost bitter, he was able to sweeten some of the bitterness and heartbreak. After all, he said, he had to leave his beloved Congo after more than thirty years, where most of his heart still was, so he could at least understand my sadness. (*Formed by the Word*, p. 188)

May 28-June 20<sup>th</sup> 1958: on his way back from Lebanon to the US, Tom spent some time visiting Europe (Rome, Florence, Siena, Prouille, Paris), and kept a travel journal of his impressions (46 narrow, handwritten pages).

In the early evening of Wednesday, June 4, 1958, another Dominican Father Louis Every, and I arrived in Florence Italy. We were on our way home from Beirut, Lebanon, after closing down a mission there, and were traveling through Europe for three weeks. We luckily ran into a white-robed friar in the train station who invited us to stay at San Marco's. And so we did.

The next day we went over to the museum. It had been the Dominican residence for centuries, but the state had decided it was a 'monument' because of the Fra Angelico paintings, and had taken it over. I liked the museum immediately and found that I wanted to linger on it, to be saturated with the work of this brother who had painted on those walls five hundred years ago. The serenity, the purity of intention, the sheer goodness, innocence, and above all, the joy, overwhelmed me, [how someone] living in a period of turmoil, could create his little islands of beauty and truth for others, if he could accomplish that and still remain a faithful, even a holy Dominican, then perhaps there was some hope for me, still cautious and confused about poetry, art, about artists, and how they can dedicate themselves to the Lord's service.

[...] What did it mean for me? I think it was the beginning of liberation from a narrow puritanism and sanctimoniousness. Art could be a valid way of preaching.

was, good news. One could write poetry. I could write poetry. At least I would be free to do so. That would be God's will for me. And in his will I would find, I did find, peace. (*Formed by the Word*, pp. 86.90-91)

## Teaching and Writing Theology

1958-64: Fr. Tom was Assistant, then Associate *Professor of Theology*, *St. Mary's College, Notre Dame* Indiana. 1964-65: Associate Prof. of Moral Theology at St. Mary's Graduate School of Theology.

In this period Tom speaks of a wonderful experience of a study circle on St. Thomas, organized by an erudite Dominican laity couple, Jean and Jack Oesterle both of them professors of philosophy:

Jean and Jack, when Charles [DeKoninck, guest philosophy professor at Notre Dame] was in town, organized a seminar sort of thing at their house on Friday nights. Charles would read one of St. Thomas's philosophical works and lead discussion on it. Those Friday nights were extraordinarily happy ones for me. Charles usually came down for the winter sessions. Snow would be all round. I can remember driving over to the Oesterle's with Dominican Fathers Mark Egan and Buzz Arnoult, my two confreres at St. Mary's, settling down in a leather chair, the Commentary on the Metaphysics on my lap, listening to Charles expound the text, fielding questions brilliantly, seeing the snow through the window falling on the towers of Notre Dame across the fields, and realizing that this was one of the great learning experiences of my life. We were a group of students and professors freely come together to learn from St. Thomas and from one of his ardent disciples. Study has never been so enchanting. Surely the "charism" of Saint Dominic was present on those nights. (*Formed by the Word*, pp. 178-79)

Early fall 1964: while in Dover for a few months,

Ecole Biblique, since he was asked to be his driver to a series of talks at Harvard University. He found de Vaux most engaging, delightful, edifying in his work capacity, endearing in his fraternal openness, fidelity to community prayer, and humility. Tom took the biblical scholar to his sister's home for a boisterous family evening with his nieces and nephews. De Vaux thoroughly enjoyed it, and later returned on his own for another evening of the same. Tom and he later saw each other on several occasions: at Notre Dame and in Washington D.C., and kept a sporadic, warmly personal correspondence. Having read *In Face of Anguish*, de Vaux wrote to Tom, congratulating him for his sensitive treatment of the mystery of evil from a biblical point of view. That appreciation of his book by one of Tom's "heroes" meant a great deal to him.<sup>16</sup>

It was during these early years of the 1960's too, that Tom, along with the rest of the Catholic world, was inspired by the figure and writings of Pope John XXIII and the stunning events of the II Vatican Council as he testifies towards the end of the book he published in 1966, citing Pope John's *Pacem in Terris*:

"Every believer in this world of ours must be a spark of light, a center of love, a vivifying leaven amidst his fellow men. And he will be this all the more perfectly the more closely he lives in communion with God in the intimacy of his own soul." Pope John wrote these words almost on the last page of his great encyclical. After outlining so many great projects for the Christian, he came full circle back to the source of all strength and power, man's own personal communion with God.

Without that there simply cannot be Christian courage or Christian action. We must all, in the end, strive for union with God through love, for the deeper we are joined to God the more deeply will we be joined to our neighbor, to all men. Love is the key. (*In Face of Anguish*, p. 182; cf. 211-212)

Tom himself exemplified that “spark of light, a center of love, a vivifying leaven amidst his fellow men”, according to the remembrance of a St. Mary’s college student of those years:

“As a beloved chaplain at St. Mary’s during the 1960’s, Father Heath touched many of us with his unpretentious, down-to-earth manner and his compassionate and caring way. It was a time of much change in the church and in the world. Father Heath helped provide a steady and common sense approach to young women for whom the foundation on which they had planned to build their lives seemed shaken and vulnerable. His openness made him approachable and there were often long discussions involving many Vatican II changes as well as the turmoil surrounding the Vietnam War and our generation. Father was also a favorite professor in Saint Mary’s Graduate School of Theology...”<sup>17</sup>

1965-70: *Associate Professor / Professor of Moral Theology, Dominican House of Studies.*

The year 1966 saw the publication of Tom’s first work destined for a wide readership (his 1957 doctoral dissertation was hardly that): *In Face of Anguish*, on the problem (and mystery) of evil. It was not to be a dry philosophical rehearsal of the question, but rather a sort of experiential approach to an insoluble ‘problem’ whose mystery is illuminated by another, greater mystery: that of God made man who suffered and died for us, and rose again. In many of its pages he indeed waxes eloquent with deep human sensitivity. It was dedicated to one of his severest critics, who doubted the validity of the whole affair: his sister Mary, Maryknoll missionary in Hong Kong at the time:

When I told one critic about the first draft of these pages she wrote from Hong Kong that no one ought to write a treatise on evil until he was very old, had seen life, and had suffered much. In other words, she thought my efforts would probably prove too abstract or too pretentious. On the basis of that and other criticisms, though I still do not fulfill her age requirements, have not seen all of life, and have not suffered enough, I have gone ahead and reworked the manuscript, striving for greater simplicity and honesty. In any case, I hope she finds these pages (which I have dedicated to her) neither too abstract nor too pretentious, but rather like the conversations we and all my family used to have around the kitchen table late at night when the world was young and we were invincible. Those nights taught us all, I think, to be aware of the pain in the world and to be clear in our thought. I hope I have been clear. Both light and love should come from this book. (*In Face of Anguish*, preface, p. ix)



Picture of Tom from the dusk jacket of *In Face of Anguish*

Justice and Peace work

In the latter half of the 1960's Tom and several

*living at '123 House'*". It was a life-changing experience for him, even if after 18 months he decided to withdraw from the experiment and continue his religious life along more conventional lines. I quote at length his autobiographical description of that whole project because it presents in a sterling way Tom's own honesty, compassion and evangelical self-questioning:

During the sixties many in the Catholic community in the U.S. became involved in the Civil Rights Movement. A key document that helped them make the decision was Martin Luther King's *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. He wrote it to his northern white liberal friends who while they were raising money for his cause were still standing aloof from any personal agony. King put to them that old question, first asked by Thoreau of Emerson, "Why aren't you in jail with me?".

Many in the Catholic community were also reading books coming over from France on the priest-worker movement [...] One such book, written somewhat earlier, was Jacques Loew's *Mission to the Poorest*. He was a Dominican priest who lived and worked with the dock-workers in Marseilles. I read and was moved by that book, as also by the "Letter from a Birmingham Jail". And all along I had been reading Dorothy Day's monthly *Catholic Worker*. More than any other publication that one served to keep me honest –or fairly honest– concerning the issue of voluntary poverty and service to the poor. Frequently after reading it I would feel ashamed of my comfortable situation, would wonder what I should do about it and how I could be more a part of that kind of Christianity.

In the fall of 1966 an opportunity came. I was then teaching moral theology at our House of Studies in Washington. Three other Dominicans in Washington were feeling the same sort of unrest I was and wanted to do something about a more explicit reaching out to the poor in that city. The poor never came to the House of Studies – a very large and somewhat formidable structure just off the campus of the Catholic University – or if they did, it was to break in and rip off whatever they could lay hand on [...].

A prominent Catholic layman, a black man, Llewellyn J.

whatever he could beg, running this hostel for needy men for over 40 years. He was 75 years old, was beginning to have permanent ailments and felt he should leave the work to live with his nephew in the suburbs. We talked with him, and while we did not think we could take over the Hospice we did think we could find some committed Catholic laymen to do so. Also, two of the Dominicans had had training in law and were mostly interested in [...] getting a free legal aid center going for the poor.

We talked it over with our superiors; they were agreeable but cautious – they felt the move could be divisive for the House of Studies, and warned us not to develop a sort of contempt for the work being done there, the academic work, and to try our best to keep good relations with the people in that House. We talked it over with many others, most notably, Dorothy Day. We traveled up to New York to see her. She was delighted that we were going to carry on Scott’s work (they were friends); she spoke very frankly about some people in the Church wasting their time polishing marble corridors, and so on, but on the whole she was very positive and encouraging. [...]

Two of us moved into the Hospice in February of 1967. We were there for three or four months before we found a house containing adequate space for living quarters, a legal aid office, and a general gathering place for the people of the neighborhood. It was a very simple house and we all were rather proud of it (and of ourselves for having found it). We called it “one, two, three” since its address was 123 11<sup>th</sup> Street, N.E.

At the same time Dominican Sisters from different American congregations had been informed of our plans and invited to become a part of them. Five of them responded. [...]

Five of us [friars] moved into the House in May or June [...] During the summer we settled into our various jobs. Once a week we had a liturgy either at 123 or at the Sisters’ place, followed by a meal and a meeting. The spirit was marvelous. All of us in one way or another felt that we had finally been able to concretize a commitment – the gospel’s commitment – to the poor, that our love for our black brothers

We participated in many public marches. [...] Before every march we met in a Baptist church near the Capitol, had a prayer service, sang Civil Rights' songs, and listened to inspiring talks. By this time the song "We Shall Overcome" was somewhat overused, so we sang another in its place, every bit as stirring. The words were:

O freedom,  
 O freedom,  
 O freedom over me.  
 And before I'll be a slave  
 I'll be buried in my grave  
 And go home to my Lord and be free.

The happiest memories I have of those days are connected with that song. I sang it all the time; we used it as a closing hymn for our liturgies. And of course we sang it along the marches. Most of us Dominicans were able to make most of the marches and though, by design, we did not walk together, I felt my heart swell with pride whenever I caught sight of a Sister in the black and white habit striding along.

We priests wore our clericals for we thought the concern of the Catholic Church for the blacks should be visible. Along the way we were shepherded by policemen, some of them puzzled, some angry. One came up to me, very upset, "Father, I'm a Catholic. Do you know what you are doing? You're being led by a gang of Communists and pinkos." I didn't have time to respond but it gave me a good insight into the real anguish some Catholics were going through during those days over the Civil Rights issue and the issue of priests and sisters on marches. (One mother superior I heard of refused to allow her sisters to march. She said, "We're not a marching order!") But on another day a girl in the march said to me, "Well, I'm glad to see *somebody* from my church in the march. You priests have been silent too long." Of course, I felt as she did, but my heart broke a little for that bewildered and angry policeman who just could not understand what we were doing. [...]

On Sunday mornings all year round we had an outdoor Mass in the backyard of the Hospice. A group of maybe a hundred people would come, mostly white Catholic lawyers and their families - those who were helping with the Legal Services credit union, and which were very successful to

neighborhood came, though there were only a few Catholics living around there; Llewellyn Scott, looking for a successor; some of our Sisters (the others were teaching children in their parish) some seminarians, Dominicans and others. One of these played a wicked guitar so that we were able to sing up a storm, mostly of very simple hymns with a refrain that all could learn before the Mass.

After the gospel the celebrant would offer a few thoughts then open it up for a dialogue. Sometimes that would go on for 45 minutes, usually intensely interesting and instructive. It was there that I learned the simple truth that many heads (and hearts) are better than one in figuring out the meaning of the gospel. [...]

(Tom then speaks at length about two very special people in his life, Walter and Mary, both indigent people he met in the inner city, who edified him by their simplicity and love. See a whole chapter dedicated to them in *Formed by the Word*, pp. 107-114, and mention in the introduction to *Poetry and Preaching*, p 15.)

And so the days went. My life was very full – and exhausting. I was lecturing at the House of Studies, then returning by public transportation to 123, helping in the kitchen, doing the dishes, attending meetings that went long into the night after which I had to prepare for class. I used to crawl into bed at two or three in the morning. [...]

After eighteen months of living my dual life I knew I had to come to a reassessment. [...] My lectures at the House of Studies were beginning to show the strain. And I was, too.

At 123 we had different views on how our work for justice should be integrated into our Dominican life. We were not praying very much together – there was just no time. We had not set aside a place to be a chapel – there was just no room. So we concelebrated haphazardly on the kitchen table, ourselves in old clothes – though we continued the more formal weekly Mass with the Sisters. Our community life was very thin since we were all so heavily involved in outside work. [...]

I spoke with one or two people, prayed about it, but not very intensely since I was distracted and tired most of the

could speak on with a new authority. I knew I would look less relevant, less authentic, but that actually I would be doing what I could do.<sup>18</sup> I had, I thought, compassion and a true desire that justice be accomplished in the black community, but I had no expertise to bring to that task. But I did have some talent, and also training, as a teacher. [...]

I made my thoughts known to the community and we argued it out. We were very good at argument, sometimes having shouting matches, each one making impassioned speeches, denouncing everything in sight. The arguments left us drained but also, curiously, close to one another. I knew that the Legal Aid would continue since it was solidly established, but I contributed nothing to that. I guess I felt like a bump on a log. Anyhow, I held my ground and the others began to understand. I insisted that I was not abandoning the project, that I would be their advocate at the House of Studies, especially with the more skeptical faculty members and students, that I would still see a lot of them and the Sisters. They reluctantly let me go. And I don't think any of us can look back on that year and a half without a feeling of deep respect and affection for each other.

*(Formed by the Word, pp.99-106).*

During those first postconciliar years (1967-72) Tom wrote and spoke frequently about his (and the generally felt) anguish<sup>19</sup> over the controversy and divisions

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<sup>18</sup> "I would be doing what I could do": cf. the following remark made towards the end of his (then recently published) book *In Face of Anguish*, in which he questions himself whether a professor's reading about world problems is a purely 'academic' exercise, or whether it has relevance in face of the urgent needs of the world. In it I see Tom hesitatingly discovering the validity of his own vocation as a teacher and writer:

What of the dilettante, the "professor" who knows the facts (of social problems) but merely uses them to build up lectures? Well, I suppose that depends on the lectures. If they are objective and truthful, the truth will out. He will be a bearer of the word to others, and that may be exactly what God wants him to be. If, on the other hand, he is interested only in the academic value, the use of knowledge for conversation pieces, or as new embellishment to old lectures, he is the salt that has lost its savor. (p. 178)

<sup>19</sup> For a near systematic and truly philosophical treatment of this theme

in the Church, when some wanted to throw everything out the window, others wanted to keep everything the way it was, and the hierarchy seemed woefully out of touch with the ‘man in the pew’. The secularity debate (social action vs. ‘religious’ activities) was something over which he agonized, and to which he frequently returns in his personal journal, stimulated by homilies, magazine articles, discussions and events of the day (from the local urban happenings to the worldwide controversy concerning Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae*). The aforementioned anguish was only deepened by the aggravating events of his day: inner city poverty and crime, the Vietnam war, the assassinations of Pastor Martin Luther King and Senator Robert F Kennedy, the US. Democratic convention of 1968, the radical political stance of the Berrigan brothers, etc.

At the same time Tom had momentary “glimpses of heaven” which kept him going, such as he describes on Feb 17<sup>th</sup>, 1968:

Every day, almost, at 12:20 noon the CU [Catholic University] chimes play some antiphons to Our Lady. The Lourdes Hymn, an *Ave Maria*, one I don’t recognize, the *Ave Maris Stella*, the *Salve Regina* and the *Ave Regina Caelorum*. I am usually studying at that time – holding off lunch until about 2. This year I have been translating St. Thomas’ tract on Our Lady by Fr. Gilby, and recently have been writing the Introduction, which involves an historical survey of Thomas’ works.

When the antiphons start I sometimes sing them quietly. I am thrown back to the Middle Ages – to the long lines of Dominicans in their great convents singing these antiphons – to St. Dominic himself singing them on the road.

And with the *Ave Regina Caelorum* my heart leaps. It is the best of all. (He then proceeds to cite the hymn and its accompanying prayer in both Latin and English).<sup>20</sup>

Following that he muses on the heights of the Christian vocation:

What is the best act a man can make? When he says from his heart: ‘O my God, I love you.’ But he who sings prays twice. So let him sing it from his heart: ‘O my God, I love you.’ But he who bows his body prays three times, so let him sing it while bowing his body: ‘O my God, I love you.’ But no man is an island. It is better if he does it with others who love God and each other: ‘O my God, we love you.’ But no man and no group of men can accomplish what *Christ* accomplishes, so let them all sing this with Christ, i.e. at Mass. “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name” or “Per ipsum cum ipso et en ipso...”

But all this excludes the acts of justice and mercy and love towards our fellow men. Is my theology a “heavenly” theology? Is this true in heaven but not on earth where men still suffer? We are *building* the Body of Christ says St. Paul. Maybe the highest act is one of *building up* the Body of Christ, i.e. justice.

Or a combination of the two somehow: a worshipping of God by a just community. Psalm 110:1 says, “I will thank the Lord with my whole heart, in the circle of the just and in the congregation.”

Maybe it’s a silly question and cannot be answered abstractly. Maybe I have to ask what is the highest act for me – with my talents, graces, opportunities, on this day, this house, in this community with these problems.

“To be doing the will of God” – that is how Bonhoeffer would answer that....<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Personal journal Vol III, 6-7. Compare the entry of Nov 8<sup>th</sup> 1968 (p. 55):

A delicious moment a while ago. Late afternoon, dusk, a cool, almost cold draft of air in the room from an open window, lights of cars streaming by on Michigan Avenue; the CU chimes playing *Ave Regina Caelorum*. I was cast back into the Middle Ages. St. Thomas

A year later, in a long entry in his journal dated Feb 9, 1969, Tom remarks with great honesty, personal anguish and charity about his experience of teaching moral theology in the Studium:

Another phenomenon in today's Church is the bored and angry seminarian. What a pain it is to go into class and lecture and see that a couple of the students are absolutely refusing to listen, refusing to take notes, and showing their complete boredom by looking out the window or at the floor with grim, pained faces.

Then, when you invite them to your room, they tell you – using (as is the fashion these days) your first name, that you give lousy lectures, that the whole idea of lectures is stupid, anyway, that they can't stand it around here and that they don't mind saying so (the mystery is why they want to stay).

So I look across the twenty years that separates us and realize that I am inadequate to their needs, and wonder who would help them, and gladly would be replaced for someone more relevant.

At the same time I wonder how the leadership in Christian living can ever come from one who believes in cruelty as a mode of getting what he wants.

Christ's whole life was a going up to the humiliation of Jerusalem. Mine I guess has been in preparation for the humiliation and suffering involved in teaching moral theology in a Dominican studium in Washington D.C. in this painful year of Our Lord, 1969.

But then he adds:

What I have said above is an exaggeration, written in a moment and in mood of pessimism. Most of the students here are deeply Christian and are the hope of the Church, I think. But there are hard days ahead for all of us. The night grows darker yet / and the sea rises higher.<sup>22</sup>

In a reflection which he offered on this period 35 years later, Tom wrote of a much greater consolation than that offered by dreaming with carrillion bells. His constant

source of hope and strength amidst all the confusion of the times were his Christian heroes:

I came to the seminaries in Washington, D.C., in 1965 and stayed until 1974 --crucial and terrible years for church and country [...]. It was a time of trouble for the Catholic Church. Seminarians were critical and hostile. They left. Priests left and wrote scathing books. Catholic sisters left. What a wounding time.

The lives of the saints and holy people kept me going: the four Thomases (the truculent Apostle, Becket, Aquinas, More), Dominic, Catherine of Siena, Bernadette, Thérèse, Bosco, Newman, Chesterton, Vincent McNabb, Bede Jarrett. They were to me the most authentic people who ever lived. They gave hope. I was never tempted to leave.<sup>23</sup>

At several junctures in 1969 Tom mentions a book he began writing, but then left off (it seems), concerning his experience of Christian life. This was probably the earliest version of what would be later *Formed by the Word*:

St. Joe's, Somerset, June 1 [?] 1969.

I have come here to be quiet and to write a book on the necessity of keeping the eschatological dimension alive in the Christian life, and the book has turned into a quasi-autobiography. My idea was to affirm God's grace in my own life, and to make that as convincing as possible. And then to reflect on inner city work, secular theology, etc.

The book moved very well for about 70 pages but now I am bogged down, wondering who would care to read about me anyway; all the graces I describe are quite ordinary and have led to a very insignificant life. So discouragement is with me now – and doubts about going [on] in this vein. I didn't intend this but it happened so spontaneously that I let it happen. And now I am feeling – who am I to write about God's grace. I'm not even sure I have it.<sup>24</sup>

July 9, 1969

[After musing extensively on Thomas Merton and Daniel Berrigan, and their respective commitments to peace...] I feel Berrigan's thing is not mine. But what is? Prayer and study and hard thinking and clear writing on issues such as peace? Yes, perhaps that. Even *that* is enormously difficult.

... My experiences with old books found on the shelves of our libraries give me hope for my writing. A biography, for example, of a minor Dominican like Bertrand Wilberforce, who led by all accounts a quiet sort of life, writing one book on charity, but living the Dominican life without pretense (Is it Wilberforce I am thinking of? He died anyhow in Granada, an old man): such a book gives me a sense of continuity with our past, and a willingness to go on.

There is no doubt of my attachment to our past... the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but also the revival in the last century, and today the great work of the Ecole Biblique, and the work of Schillebeeckx, people like that. Who can find the thread of continuity in all that? It is partly the choral office, partly the study that was fruitful, partly St. Thomas, partly Our Lady, and so on. But it is a good tradition – with much aberration too – and worth keeping alive. So I hope to write a book celebrating this way, hoping that if the book will make its way to a few library shelves and give the same kind of impetus to some who follow that the Wilberforce book gave to me.<sup>25</sup>

1970: *lecturer in Moral Theology at Mount St. Mary's Seminary*, Emmitsburg MD. In the fall term of that year he had a semester sabbatical in New Haven to research and write; it was for him a “honeymoon of the Dominican life”; his subsequent return to teaching at the House of Studies in Washington felt like a “return to Purgatory”.

St. Mary's, New Haven  
Sept. 8, 1970

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<sup>25</sup> Personal journal, Vol. III (Feb. '68 – Aug. '69), pp. 101-102. A few years later he also mentions on two occasions (Dec. 13, 1969; Feb 8, 1970) the idea of publishing his personal journal (*Personal journal*, Vol.

Am here to 1) do vol. 35 of Gilby Summa; 2) read for two new courses next semester, 3) look in on Yale Divinity School for course or seminar in Christian Ethics, 4) write independently articles for *Sign* on Bosco, Neri, Cath[erine of] Siena.<sup>26</sup>

Jan. 2, 1971

I haven't written in this book at all this fall. No desire to. The four months (almost four) have been hard-working no, not hard, but steady-working and happy. On some mornings as I settled in to the work it was like a honeymoon of the Dominican life- reading St. Thomas [...], praying with the brethren, good talk with the brethren on the Leonine Commission about St. Thomas, attending a seminar at Yale on Christian love, occasional walks through the campus which is medieval in its architecture.

Dick came through one day from Providence and tramped around with me. He later told Leslie that I was deliriously happy. I didn't feel that strong about it, but I see how he could say that.<sup>27</sup>

Jan. 20 '71

Am back teaching, mostly settled in, though I have too many books for my small room and have got to clear many of them out.

Someone said "How do you find coming back to the House of Studies?" I said "It's like returning to Purgatory. Or it's like trying to find a comfortable spot in Purgatory." He laughed out loud. (It was Chris Kiesling down here for a visit from New Haven)

Well it is – but I'm fairly certain I belong in Purgatory. Why so hard? The basic suffering is: not measuring up, day after day, to the seminarians' demand for interesting, relevant, exciting, humorous, profound, bone-tingling teaching. It's their boredom that cuts me up, and their veiled hostility. But I think I'm right in what I'm doing and in how I do it (mostly), and they are wrong. They want release from all classes, discipline, work (an exaggeration) and I have got to fight that in them.

However, so far in my two courses: Faith; Love – I find interest and attention. So maybe I'm wrong. How I hope so.<sup>28</sup>

About this time Tom was also moving toward a pacifist position, initially with respect to the Vietnam War (following the nationwide anti-war demonstrations and controversy), but later raised to the level of a general personal philosophy and moral conviction.<sup>29</sup> He has numerous entries during the years 1968-1972 debating this topic with himself, in relation to the many germane books and articles he was reading, and in dialogue with his fellow Dominicans, young and old. A good example is his response to multiple levels of reporting and dialogue in the first week of December 1969:

Dec 3 [1969], Wed.

*Life Magazine* came in yesterday with the story of the killings in Song My the little village in Vietnam. *Newsweek* today has a cover story on it (Dec. 8 issue).

I am sickened by it, really shocked that the American GI's were that hardened to killing women and children. One little boy was bleeding in the arm. His brother fell on him to protect him. A GI shot them both. A photographer took a picture just before the shooting. Incidents like that. All horrible.

After reading *Life* yesterday I went over to the World Justice and Peace Seminar and listened to [the various speakers]. While there I met Tom Conrell of the Catholic Peace Fellowship. He's done two years in jail as a C[onscientious] O[bjector] and is the American Catholic leader of the CO's, I think. Anyhow I told him about the Song My article in *Life*, how it had affected me. He said, "Watch out, you sound like a pacifist." I said, "I know it."

I am changed. The thought kept coming back that a bomb from an airplane is just as cruel, and we have been doing that all along.

Oh God, make me an instrument of your peace. <sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Tom's *curriculum vitae* mentions membership in "War-Nation-Church Consultation" from 1971-80, and an ongoing membership in Pax Christi.

<sup>30</sup> Personal journal Vol IV (Feb. '69 - March '72), pp. 15-16. A few months earlier he dedicated 6 pages of his journal to musings on whether

A few years later, a very significant intersection of his concern about peace and his dedication to theological research / writing came in the discovery of the German Dominican, Fr. Stratmann. In the relevant pages of *Formed by the Word* cited below he describes both the genesis and the growth of his admiration for the man, and his efforts at making him know to a wider readership:

In the summer or fall of 1971<sup>31</sup> I read an obituary notice in the *Catholic Worker* of Franziskus Stratmann, a German Dominican. I had vaguely remembered reading some things he had written on peace in the same paper in the early forties, and I also recalled seeing a book of his called *The Church and War* in our library, though I had not read it. The obituary was signed by a Gerald Pora, from Chicago, with an added note that he possessed copies of a recent pamphlet by Father Stratmann on our responsibility to coming generations. He would send a copy if asked.

I asked. A Dominican who devoted his life to the works of peace, as the obituary said, and in Germany at that, had to be an interesting man. I asked Pora for more information. He wrote a long letter back, saying that as a boy he had known Stratmann in Berlin, before the Great War (the First World War) when Stratmann was chaplain to the Catholic students. Pora had gone to hear him preach, sought him out for spiritual direction, and they became friends. Pora had come to the States with his family after the war, but had kept in touch with Stratmann over the years. He possessed many articles that Stratmann had written, some books and letters. I urged him to write something, maybe for the *Catholic Worker*, on Stratmann, or even to do a small book. He begged off, citing

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crowd. For this intense debate that Tom held with himself, cf. Oct 5 - Nov 15, 1969 (ibid., pp. 6-11). Four months after Tom's entry about the Song My massacre, another entry describes his hesitating steps as a peace picketer in front of the White House: personal journal, Vol IV (Feb. '69 - March '72), entries March 19-21, 1970, pp. 31-35. Particularly poignant are his meditations upon war after visiting Gettysburg PA on Dec. 16, 1971: "My inner world is becoming more and more pacifist" - personal journal, Vol IV, pp. 95-96

his age –he was in his mid-seventies– and his lack of facility with written English. I was tempted to try but my own lack of facility in German held me up. But after some months went by, and I realized that nothing would be done, I decided to brush up on my German, and give it a whirl.

I visited Pora in Chicago, took away copies of things he possessed, and set to work. It soon became apparent to me that many gaps existed in the materials I had, long silences during the war years (1939-45), very little about his life as a Dominican. I had a three week break coming up, from the end of the winter to the beginning of the summer session, and asked the Regent of Studies for a grant of six hundred dollars to go to Germany and fill in the gaps. (The round-trip New York-Luxembourg fare on Icelandic Airlines was two hundred and twenty dollars in those days.)

On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1973 I left New York. Two days later I was settled in a room in our house of studies in Walberberg, Germany, which is mid-way between Cologne and Bonn. Stratmann had lived there for twenty years after the war, was buried there; all his books and papers were there. But more than that, a good friend of Stratmann's was there, Father Paulus Englehardt, professor of moral theology, general editor of a new German edition of the *Summa*, a busy man, but a marvelous host. He made me feel completely at home, took me to the library, pointed out the things I should know about, sat down with me for two or three hours on the second day of my visit and went over a complete Stratmann bibliography that he himself had prepared, pointing out the most critical articles, giving me quick summaries of their contents, and so on. Those hours with Paulus were alone worth the trip. I was able to xerox copies of the material, to have them translated later by two friends in the States. Paulus also gave me invaluable help in appreciating Stratmann as a person, as a Dominican friar. (He spoke in broken English, since I couldn't speak German, and when Paulus had trouble getting the English word or phrase, we went into French, which I had learned to speak in Beirut while on mission there.) I was even able to interview (in French) two laymen friends of Stratmann who had been jailed by Hitler during the war. Paulus arranged that.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, two other possible avenues of ministry presented themselves to Tom, but at this point in his life he chose to avoid both of them. Both, however, would largely define the rest of his life: Dominican novitiate formation, and mission work in Africa. The latter was the first opportunity which he briefly considered, but then chose not to follow at that time. In the fall of 1971 he writes:

The September Provincial News Digest asks for volunteers for an African diocese (Machakos, Kenya), and I am tempted. Is it a cop-out? I simply do not have much heart for the 'revolutionary' priesthood (Berrigans), nor, these days, for teaching in seminary nor parish work. What's left? Writing? Writing what? Missions? Doing what?

[After considering all the world and Church problems that impacted upon him:] And I sit here writing about it. And a request for volunteers for Africa?

Where do I stand?

I stand for the poor, but not for revolution. I stand for the Catholic faith and Catholic Church, and the Pope etc. as the revelation of Jesus Christ. This is *central* to my belief. I stand for our political system (cleansed by Common Cause). I stand for moderation and reason and love. But I see extremes, irrationality, and hatred.

How do I best insert my values into our society? By going to Africa? No, I don't think so. By teaching them (as I do); by preaching them (as I do), by writing about them (which I am determined to do this year)? Maybe.

Stay at my post, slug it out right here. Pray. Do penance. Study. Write. Be laughed at. Be despised. Preach Christ and him crucified – and accept ridicule from the left, ridicule from the right. Love all men. Pray for the world.

O Jesus Christ, help me. Mary, Seat of wisdom, give me wisdom, courage and love.<sup>33</sup>

In July of 1972, his other future work presented itself to him, with his same decision to stay where he was:

I was teaching sisters at the summer program for religious studies at Providence College. I picked up a phone message from Fr. Ray Daley asking me to come to Washington. The newly elected provincial and his council were interviewing candidates for the job of novice master. My name, one among five or six, had been suggested. When I arrived I appeared before the council and read the following statement that I had written on the plane:

To be considered for novice master is a serious honor. I am quite humbled by it.

When I heard from J.D. Campbell two weeks ago that my name had been mentioned for the job my reaction was first, unbelief, and then apprehension. When I had the message yesterday from Ray Daley my reaction was gloom. I'm still gloomy.

Yet I am fighting my tendency to 'cop-out-itis', i.e. to avoid responsibility, to do my own quiet thing, teaching here at 487 and at Mount Saint Mary's, and writing. If you want me I shall accept in somewhat the spirit of a timid, sad yet patriotic man going off to war.

Still, I urge upon you various reasons for turning me down: 1) My age; I am 52. You need a younger man. 2) My disposition; I tend to be impractical, suspicious and paranoid. You need a practical, relaxed, trusting, affectionate man. 3) My actual experience: I am not overly popular with the students here; am not a popular confessor; I still think a certain distance is necessary between teacher and student, but most students think otherwise.

My friends on the council (who had probably put my name on the list) felt I had taken too negative a view, that the students respected me, that I could be a tiger at meetings, and so on. Reading the statement now, ten years later, I want to change it. I want to delete words like "timid", "suspicious", and "paranoid". But it's what I said; it's what I felt. For me, then, it was not exaggeration. I see clearly now what was operating was just plain fear of a job I did not want. I felt that if I were brutally honest the council would never appoint me; and they didn't.

However, they quizzed me for about an hour on my views of Dominican life, what I thought of Dover as a place for the novitiate – a question much argued in the province –

my humor occasionally comes out in a wild way. It did then. We had several hearty laughs over the problems in formation. I felt you either had to laugh or go crazy. When they let me go I sensed I had made my point but also that they were sympathetic to my views, and to me.

*[Formed by the Word, 253-253A]*

Nevertheless, two years later Tom would be novice master in Dover, and eight years later he would begin his long African sojourn, in which at various times and in various ways he would collaborate in the formation of young Dominicans. In his manuscript on Dominican spirituality, Fr. Tom describes with amazing frankness and provocative humor how he made the decision to accept what he had earlier rejected as a new path of ministry:

Two years later, I received a phone call from the provincial. He said the novice master – who had been in formation work for a number of years, and had been transferred to that job from another one – wanted to resign. The provincial wanted to put my name up for approval by the council. Would I take the job? I paused for about ten seconds during which I said to myself, Damn; then I shrugged and said, still to myself, What the hell. Over the phone I said, Yes.

A month or two later I arrived at Dover [...] carrying my books and notes of 23 years teaching.

*(Formed by the Word, 254; also described a month after the fact in his personal journal, Vol VII, pp. 35-36)* <sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> A close look at his journals corresponding to this period (May '73 – March '74: Vol VI and March '74 – Dec. '76: Vol. VII) shows how divine providence was preparing Tom for this new ministry: reflections on the “goodness, loveliness of the best in the Dominican tradition” (Marcg 2, 1974, Vol VI, p. 145a); his resolution to read more and deepen in the Dominican spirituality (March 29, 1974, Vol VI, pp. 156-157); a dream of the statue of St. Dominic which came to life, went into the priory, “and he started to dance like Zorba the Greek. Several young Dominicans and myself danced with him.” He comments succinctly: “I woke up. That was bizarre, I thought. But nice.” (April 16, 1974, Vol VII, p. 4); an expansive prayer celebrating all his Dominican brothers and sisters that have gone

## Novice Master in Dover

1974-80: *Novice Master*, St. Stephen Priory, Dover MA.

Years later, Tom described his relations with the “senior community” and the novices, and in both cases he speaks about superlative happiness:

The priests and professed brothers in the house, numbering about 20 in those days, were a good lot. Except for one or two they helped me in my job, not meddling in the novitiate, and giving full cooperation when I asked. Thursday nights were reserved for two meetings; the first, which all were expected to attend, was mostly a business meeting. We made decisions about the use of the house cars, about the budget, heard reports about the various programs, aired complaints – we went round-robin so that everyone had a chance to speak – and sometimes listened to admonitions from the prior. The second meeting was voluntary, to which about a dozen came. It aimed at deeper communication. That meeting helped me to express in a very personal way my own views of the novitiate, to explain some of the policies established by our formation team, and to field objections. While some of the men disagreed with what we were doing, and said so quite bluntly, the meeting helped to defuse the smoldering hostility and to head off the formation of cliques that failure in communication frequently causes. In all my years at Dover I never had the sense that a certain group was against me. On the contrary, I experienced a general friendliness. This, of course, helped to bring my paranoia down to a negligible degree and made my stay there the happiest years of my life. Twice a year at the general house meeting we had an open discussion about the novices. The mood of that meeting – except for one awful meeting when it seemed to be open season on novices – was friendly. The men were happy to report positive things, and when they brought up negative stuff it was usually in a humorous way. Frequently gales of laughter swept over the room. (I am sure that the same sort of thing happened when the novices discussed us.)

About my relation to the novices, I find it difficult to say much here. My instinct is to let the novices judge, and leave the rest to God. I knew moments of great anxiety – one recurring dream I had when the novices were home for a few days after Christmas and I was alone in the novitiate was of the morning they were due to return. None of them showed up. [...]

Yes, my anxiety was present with me, but I don't think it impeded me. It was a monkey I had been carrying for a long time and had now become something of a friend, like a medieval bishop's beggar. We had a wry relationship; we respected each other; we got along. But that was offset by moments of inexpressible happiness. A novice would say something quite innocently, not realizing it was revealing the depths of goodness in his soul; or another who had been thinking about leaving and praying about it would come in and tell me he had realized that his whole happiness lay in preaching the gospel. Once under very painful circumstances I asked a novice to leave. He felt I was unfair and went to the others for backing. They were able to give me a quiet endorsement and in such a way that he understood. I put up a note saying that never in my experience had men acted so maturely. I was deeply touched, and I think they were.

What I liked to do most was talk to them, not as a group, but individually, about our life, about good Dominicans I knew, good books I had read by or about Dominicans, or just any good books, novels, poetry, biographies. And I would listen to them talk about their families, their spiritual journeys, so to speak, what they were currently reading, their hopes. I would encourage them to write, or pray, or forgive, or to understand other novices whose views they could never share. Many times after such interviews I would stand at the window looking out at the trees in the distance, smoking my pipe, realizing that no one could ever be happier.

*(Formed by the Word, 257-259)*

Tom's mother died on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1977; his presence in Dover permitted him to be near her in her final months as he writes gratefully in an autobiographical chapter of his

At the end of her life, my mother and I became good friends; we more than patched up our differences, and I was able to help her, not only as a priest, but as a cherished son, to be born into the fullness of eternal life.

*(Formed by the Word, p. 232)*

During his years as novice master in Dover, the friars' community welcomed a sizeable group of sister novices with their respective formators, for an "Inter-community Novitiate Program" which lasted three months each fall. Although Tom had doubts about its suitability and timing for the friars' novitiate, he generally enjoyed the presence of the sisters, who shared classes, liturgy and meals with the friars. This photo was taken sometime in the fall of 1976, and shows him very comfortable and happy in the midst of this mixed group of young people.



Speaking of his Dover years, Tom mentions his very close friendship with Sr. Margaret Ormond OP (who became novice directress for the Columbus Dominicans in the fall of 1979 and was a lover of Dominican spirituality).

as he narrates here, also helped him to discern his calling to Africa:

Margaret had a wonderful sense of the mission of Saint Dominic, and of Dominic himself. While in Europe she had gone to Caleruega, Fanjeaux, Prouille, had steeped herself in the early history of the order, and had reflected on its meaning for our times. For me, it was exhilarating to hear someone so enthusiastic. I told her about the book I had begun (this one), showed her rough drafts and sketches, and received her comments, sometimes glowing, sometimes cautious and tentative: “Do you really think that belongs?”; sometimes direct “Sexist language!”. And so we became friends.

A few weeks before our friendship happened a letter came to me from the provincial, enclosing another one from Fr. Liam Walsh, who was an assistant to the Master of the Order in Rome. He said he had visited South Africa and talked to our men there. They were looking for help. One of their needs was for a Dominican to live in a new house in Lesotho, a small country surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. The new house would serve as the novitiate and the new man, if he came, would help to beef up the personnel there. [...] The Dominicans had lined up four black candidates and saw the future in the successful recruitment and training of blacks. My provincial asked me if I would care to go.

(Formed by the Word, pp. 260-261)

Journal entry Vol IX, p. 63: Oct 15, 1979:

“Provincial wrote asking me if I wanted to go to South Africa – they need an OP down there. I said, terrific [...] I am excited by prospects.”

In his journal Tom recalled other hopes he had: to return to teaching and the House of Studies, and a rather ambitious plan to get “a Dominican press going in the United States.” He wrote a letter to the provincial, and sent a copy of the letter to his brother (Mark Heath, then regent of studies in Washington D.C. who was counting on his return to the teaching staff) “to see what he thought”:

Before hearing from either one I decided to show the

She was appropriately serious, almost solemn about it all. When we met she said, “Do you want me to tell you what you really want to do?” “Yes, if you can figure it out.” “You want to go to Africa”. And she pointed out phrases in my letter where I gave myself away without knowing it.

I knew she was right immediately. I felt great relief. About the press, deep in my heart I knew I was no entrepreneur nor a money raiser. The best I could do would be to inspire someone else, much more practical than I, to get the thing going. [...] About the teaching, I knew that Mark could find somebody – he was a genius at that, though I did feel I was letting him down. Later he came to Dover and we tramped through the woods one sunny winter’s day and talked it all out. He gave me his blessing.

Margaret was right. I really wanted to come to Africa. The excitement that began in my heart then, after talking with her, was simply wonderful. I was a young priest again, going on the missions. Everything that was latent in my romantic and missionary heart was set on fire.

I write these words almost six months to the day of my arrival in Lesotho. The fire is still burning brightly. I am extraordinarily happy.”

*(Formed by the Word, pp. 262-63: these are the very last paragraphs in his manuscript)*

Oct 30<sup>th</sup>, 1979, Journal entry:

“[...] Later, the Provincial, Dick and I got together, and agreed that it was okay for me to go to Africa. That seems to be the next step, then, in the curious odyssey of my life.”

Jan 7, 1980: Dominican formation workshop in Adrian, Michigan. Tom preached on (and was very powerfully struck by) 1 John 4:18, “perfect love casts out all fear”. He would remember this date in future years, and this text would be key in his liberation from fear. (Testimony of Margaret Ormond OP)

Formation work and teaching in Lesotho

In the fall of 1980, Tom took the road to Southern Africa, via France, where he spent a few days in a sort of personal pilgrimage:

“In October 1980, I was on my way to an assignment in Lesotho, in Southern Africa. I stopped at Prouille to make a retreat and to visit the holy Dominican places in that area.

*(Formed by the Word, pp. 152-153).*

He also stopped at Lisieux, and passed a day visiting the sites of St. Thérèse who had helped him to trust in the love of God in his life, though he found the actual sites somewhat disappointing (distracting; not with the simplicity he’d hoped to find there).<sup>35</sup>

Tom had a special ability to remember for decades significant days in his personal history. So it was that he recalled in his journal in Kisumu (Kenya) on Nov. 15, 1996:

“On this day in 1980, feast of St. Albert the Great, I landed in South Africa. Sixteen years ago. And it began my love affair with Africa. I was in Lesotho for five years, in South Africa for another five-plus, and in Kenya since April 2<sup>nd</sup>, ’91. Lesotho with its majestic mountains and gentle people remains my first love. Kenya is a close second...”



“Lesotho with its majestic mountains and gentle people remains my first love.”

1981-82: During his first years in Lesotho (having just finished as novice master in the U.S.), Tom began assembling his notes and writings on the Dominican charism; it seems he wrote the first draft of his reflections while at the St. Joseph’s Province novitiate in Dover, Mass. The ensemble was eventually typed and collated under the title “Formed by the Word”.<sup>36</sup> (Unfortunately this book was never published. Two copies of the typed manuscript exist in the Vicariate archives in Nairobi, from which I was permitted to make a bound photocopy, now kept in the novitiate community in Kisumu where Tom died.)

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<sup>36</sup> For my dating of this revision / collation, cf. pp. 253 (speaking of an event of mid 1972, he writes “now, ten years later”) and 263 (where the last paragraph of the manuscript reads “I write these words almost six months to the day of my arrival in Lesotho”). He had at least several chapters of the manuscript (if not the entire book) read and commented on

Tom taught English Language & Literature and Bible Knowledge at 'Mabathoana High School in Lesotho July 1981 - Nov. 1985 [according to his own *Curriculum Vitae*], and kept till the time of his death several photos of the school's children and staff.

The following very frank and telling commentary, taken from Tom's introduction to his manuscript "Poetry and Preaching", refers to a poem written in Maseru (Lesotho) in August of 1984:

All this leads me to muse on the nature of poetry. [...] But first, in the spirit of this rather autobiographical introduction, my own thoughts about what happens when I write a poem.

First, usually, I find myself living with a feeling, a deep and pervasive feeling. For example, during the years I was in Lesotho and South Africa, during the days of apartheid, I lived with fear. While I was never personally threatened by the South African police or army, or by the partisans of apartheid, I knew enough people who were. Some were tortured or jailed for holding their anti-apartheid views. Some were killed, blown to pieces by letter-bombs or by brutal assassination. I preached against apartheid and lived with the fear that followed.

Everyone had to live cautiously. When the phone rang, one never answered it with a cheerful greeting and identification. That was too risky. The rubric was to pick up the phone and say into the mouthpiece the phone number only, nothing more. It was up to the callers to say who they were, whom they wanted to speak to, and why they were calling. Sometimes you would get silence from the other end and then the click ending the call. Another example is this. Whenever we had meetings or workshops dealing with justice, the feeling always was that spies from the South African police were present and that we were being secretly taped. One could never get away from the sense of impending doom, the sword of Damacles.

peach trees, and in blossom they are beautiful. I was strangely moved by the sight and somehow released, partially at least, of the fear. This is what I wrote later, not all at once, but with two or three different drafts, trying to articulate some sort of meaning, or rather the very meaning of the release.

*Peach trees in Blossom*

O sturdy ten year old girls  
 In delicate pink dresses  
 Dancing on this stern soil,  
 You care not for danger of politics  
 Or starvation or terror.  
 You sing to yourselves  
 In little rows here and there  
 Or alone in bleak and empty lots.

You wound me with your trust.

You say everything will be all right  
 When all our world is forlorn.  
 You say abandon yourself to the dance,  
 But we tremble when we walk.  
 Abandon yourself to the song  
 But we whisper when we talk.  
 And trust in your God who died upon a tree  
 And trust in your God who died upon a tree.

You say there is hope,  
 Bravery, courtesy and charm,  
 No matter the threatening storm,  
 No matter the pain or blood,  
 No matter the fire or flood,  
 Dance when you cannot walk  
 Sing when you cannot talk,  
 And trust in your God who died upon a tree,  
 And trust in your God who died upon a tree.  
 He conquered fear. He set you free.

From that deep pervasive fear came some sort of recognition that the peach trees were not afraid, that they were perfectly willing to dance and sing, and somehow I should be like them; that they were trusting absolutely in God, and so should I. When I sat down to write that poem I had no idea what I would come up with. I had my fear, my release from it, and some sort of crazy sense of freedom and joy that made me want to dance and sing. I also had trust in God that should have been much stronger. Little did I know that I had

On Sept 29, 1984 Tom celebrated the wedding of Steve & Sabine Benk. This photo taken by Tom Monyahan captures Tom in a classic posture: laughing with his audience as he preached at their wedding.



Another photo, taken at the novices' profession of simple vows (Jan '85), became 'classic' in the S. African Vicariate. It shows Frs. Tom Heath and Edmund Hill, back to back, looking in opposite directions and apparently oblivious one to another, or so the moment caught in the photo seems to suggest. Martin Badenhorst OP, who lived with Tom during his postulancy, says it was "iconic of their relationship" - two Dominicans, brothers and friends to one other, but about as different from each other as could be!



Dec 11<sup>th</sup>, 1985, Journal entry at end of the “Lesotho” volume: “End of entries for Lesotho. I moved to *Welkom* on morning of Jan 7<sup>th</sup>, 1986, got a new note book for Welkom.

Unfortunately, his Welkom notebook was stolen in Rome in August of 1993, - - a robbery which has deprived us of a more intimate look at Tom in the next stage of his life.

### Parish Ministry in South Africa

1986-1991: *Parish Ministry, Virginia, Orange Free State, South Africa*

Here are two photos of Tom from the beginning of his stay in South Africa: the first with his brothers Pheko and Jan,





For want of a description of his entry into this ministry, I copy here his first impressions of the Dominican community and situation in Welkom on Aug. 9. 1982:

Welkom. Came here with Greg, Peter, and Peter Struick (?), Dutch Provincial on our way to a Dominican get-together in Sasalburg for feast of St. Dominic. A posh parish, this lovely house and church, two spiffy white schools, one girls' and the other boys, many playing fields out back: soccer 3 fields; cricket 2 fields; girls' hockey 2 fields; and about four rugby fields. From this parish the men go out to the black township. These house workers for the gold and diamond mines in the area. Contrast poverty and wealth. A scandal really. The blacks should obviously have a far greater share in the good things like education, health care, better houses.<sup>37</sup>

In May 1986, Tom spent some 2 weeks in Europe (Amsterdam – Toulouse – Lourdes – Prouille – Toulouse – Amsterdam) on his way to New York for his 2<sup>nd</sup> visit back to the U.S. from South Africa (the first had been 3 years earlier, in 1983).<sup>38</sup> Margaret Ormond OP noted that each time he came home, Tom seemed to have aged, and to be a bit more fragile in his health.

Seven months after visiting his elder brother Walter (Leslie John) for the last time, his brother died. Tom composed a poignant poem (“Bud”) recalling the visit in which both of them faced the approach of his death calmly and without melodrama, recognizing the fact that they would never see each other again on earth, but indeed hoped to in heaven.

In August 1988 Tom wrote a circular letter to his friends because of his inability to keep up with his numerous correspondents. I quote nearly in full this letter written on “St. Augustine’s Catholic Church” (Virginia, OFS, S. Africa) letterhead stationery:

Dear friends:

22 August 1988

I’ve just counted the unanswered letters in my desk drawer. Twenty-eight. And some of you have written twice.

I am fairly busy, but not enough for it to be a legitimate excuse for not writing. I suppose a letter to a friend calls for much more than a business letter. It calls for some personal news, some serious thought maybe, or light-hearted banter. It calls for a reflective mood, oops, a reflective mood. Perhaps it’s that I find hard to summon these days of external unrest and uncertainty. So I send this interim report, with note attached.

[...] I am pastoring a hundred or so families in Virginia, assisting in the near-by black townships, making efforts to get black and white together, with some very modest success.

I stay clear of protest marches and that sort of thing partly because of my vulnerability (my visa could be revoked in five minutes), partly out of the plain realization that no one likes an outsider to tell him what to do, and partly because when I did that sort of thing in Washington during the late sixties and early seventies I was never at ease, never fully convinced it was the right thing for a priest to do. I was always wondering.

Anyhow, I am genuinely happy here, not, I think, in much danger, and glad to serve. But you must pray that I be far more generous with God, that I be a faithful, concerned,

*(space for signature and handwritten personal greetings)*

Echoes of Tom's happiness as a parish priest are heard in the write-up of one of his parishioners. After describing his coming to Africa at the age of sixty in 1980 to work in the novitiate of the Dominican Friars in Lesotho, a parish chronicler writes:

Five years later he was transferred to Welkom. Here he assisted in the parish and was an angel in the confessional. He was moved to Virginia, where he became a parish priest for the first time in his life, at a time when most people go on retirement. On a visit there later, he told parishioners that his five years as parish priest in Virginia were a beacon in his memory. He said that Virginia was 'a little bit of heaven.'

He loved quoting poetry but tended to dissolve into tears halfway. He was a gentle shepherd. One Saturday evening, saying Mass for a very sparse congregation, when he came to the words, "Bless this, your family" he looked around lovingly and said instead: "Bless this, your little family." In this way he assured his parishioners that Jesus has no need of large congregations. Even when only two are gathered in His name, He will be in the midst of them.

It was this gift of celebrating every experience God sent him as if it were of the utmost importance at that moment that made this very humble and poverty-loving priest a great one. His blessed memory endures in the hearts of many.<sup>39</sup>

July 1, 1990 Tom still figured as parish priest in St. Augustine's Catholic Church, Virginia, in a diocese where there were about as many married deacons as priests. under Bishop. J. Brenninkmeijer. We find the following incident, from this same period, in Tom's manuscript on the use of poetry in preaching:

I can see another way of "using" poetry in a sermon. I was once a pastor of a small parish in South Africa. The parishioners were white, but in the same church we had a Mass every Sunday for the black domestic workers in the

town and the Catholic miners who lived near the Church. Their pastor was a black priest from the nearby black township. He and I were good friends, and we used to take turns at the four o'clock Mass. We had agreed on the project of getting the two communities together, and had appointed a committee of blacks and whites to work towards unity. It was a slow process, mostly because of the difference in language. Also the whole apartheid apparatus was in place, and my flock was somewhat timid, although a few had great good will and courage, and became leaders in our efforts at integration.

I felt it was my job to instruct, persuade, challenge and inspire my white congregation to greater fellowship with the blacks. Once I used a kind of poetry to do this. It happened this way:

A Shangaan miner from Mozambique had been killed in a mine accident. He was a Catholic. The mine official asked me to bury him. At the funeral about a hundred and fifty Catholic miners, rugged and strong, from Mozambique were there, gathered about the bleak grave. I knew no Shangaan and was told they spoke a little Sesotho but no English. I spoke to them in Sesotho. I told them I wanted them to sing their friend to rest in their own language while I prayed quietly in Sesotho and English. A leader started a hymn, and they all sang.

Later, at the Sunday morning Mass for my white flock I described that funeral as vividly as I could. I began by pointing out that our black Christians are one with us in Christ, that they believe as we do, worship as we do, gather round the Eucharist as we do, love Our Lady as we do, probably more than we do, and bury the dead as we do. Then I said:

“When the leader started the hymn in Shangaan, all the miners sang in a great swelling chorus. O they sang to the Lord Jesus Christ, for I could hear his name, and they sang to the Lady Mary, for I could hear her name frequently. And as I blessed the grave, blessed the body, they came forward singing another solemn hymn, using both the name of Jesus and Mary. When they took turns to throw dirt on their friend’s coffin, some had tears in their eyes, as did I. Afterwards, they thanked me warmly and hugged me for the little I had done, but mostly, I should think, for asking them to sing.”

My parishioners were touched by what I said. It was a

help them understand the blacks more perfectly, to love them. In other words, my purpose was to persuade, to instruct, to challenge, to convince...

(Introduction to *Poetry and Preaching*, pp. 15-16)

In March 1991 Tom was fêted in a farewell celebration at St. Augustine's parish, of which we have several photos, one of them showing him seated along with Douglas Wiseman on either side of Bishop Brenninkmeijer. Three permanent deacons of the diocese, whom Tom called the "Three Musketeers" were among those who came to wish him well.

## Teaching and Formation work in Kenya

### 1991-2005: Work in the *Vicariate of East Africa*

Tom arrived in Nairobi on April 2, 1991: "At the request of our provincial superior in New York I left my work in South Africa and came here to assist our brethren make a new foundation." (TH, personal newsletter of Nov. 5, 1991). He became the first vicar provincial the month after his arrival, in May 1991.

Aug 8, 1991: feast of St. Dominic. Fr. Tom Heath met Fr. Lewis Shea, coming from Nigeria, at the Nairobi airport, drove him around, took him to the regional house, and a day or two later took him to Kisumu, where he gave him the choice: "Pick what you want. If you take Kisumu, I'll go to Nairobi; if you take Nairobi, I'll go to Kisumu." Lewis picked Kisumu. (testimony of Lewis Shea)

In November 1991 Tom summarized the situation after little more than a half year in the Vicariate;

The need is for teaching, preaching, other pastoral work, and especially to establish the Dominicans and our charism among the Kenyans. We are looking now for suitable temporary housing and for land on which we, eventually, can

Since our arrival here we have experienced many ups and downs, disappointments, wonderful surprises, consummate (oops) frustrations. To describe them all would take a small book. Forget it.

Our great concern is adequate funds...

(TH, Personal newsletter, Nov. 5, 1991)

Early in Tom's period of service as *Vicar Provincial*, he had bouts of forgetfulness which began to worry him (and others). He comments on this in a personal newsletter written during Lent of 1992:

My dear friends,

I want to write a long letter to each of you. How delicious that would be. But alas, the time is short, my energy is limited, and a thousand details will soon be involved in or (sic) moving from this house. So again I resort to this wretched general report, and an appended scribbled note.

I hope you will experience the meaning of the resurrection deep in your bones this time around, deep in your heart, for Easter. One of its meanings is that life is more powerful than death.

I have begun to taste death this year. It comes in the form of a slipping memory. While driving I am forgetting to look left or right, in stores I leave my wallet behind, I lose my hat (a baseball cap) twice a day. So, I shall not drive much more, or bring money with me, or wear hats, I guess; and I don't know what all this means. Shall I stay? Return to the States?

I have long wanted to croak over here, somewhere in Africa, and be buried here. Life is more powerful than death. Maybe that will happen. Maybe not. Whatever will be, will be. I'm cheerful enough, thank the Lord. Pray for me. Me for you.

I'll write again at Christmas and let you know. If I don't forget.<sup>40</sup>

Among the papers found after his death were personal "Notes towards a decision" as to whether to "carry on" or not as *Vicar Provincial*. The more personal reflections are intertwined with quotes from the day's

liturgy (20 May 1992), and confirmed at a later date as a summary of what to say at the June Vicariate meeting:

...I come to the cathedral [while the car is being fixed] to ask for an indication of God's will for me – something honest to say to the brethren on 1<sup>st</sup> of June when we have our meeting. Shall I resign? Shall I say I want to carry on as Vicar Provincial? Shall I say: I don't know what the Lord wants or what I want - and leave the decision to them? Shall I say I'll stay on but preferably not as vicar? ...

I should get a report on my [heart condition] from Dr. Silvestein -and from Dag- for the meeting. ...

[The liturgical] texts tell me to take up the cross as Vicar Provincial- Pray for help, trust it will come from God, the Father, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Our Lady "Never was it known".

But the cross may be the fact that the brothers think me unfit for the job...

My attitude –

- 1) terms of my appointment. I accepted on the condition that you have a chance to confirm or not that appointment.
- 2) Do I really want to carry on? (Frank) I think the Lord wants me to carry on – my feelings are what they were a year ago – the job is a cross, but I'm willing to carry it, if you're willing to approve that decision.

Concerning letters to Tom [Ertele, then provincial] – medical – the vitamin B complex seems to be working. less forgetfulness – no further incidences on the road or at Mass, irritability at candidates reveals I should have little to do with formation...

Fr. Bill Sinkele ended up taking over as vicar on June 26, 1992. Tom himself later<sup>41</sup> spoke about the immediately following period:

When I came to Kisumu in August of 1992 I was asked by the Bishop to teach moral theology at the national seminary at Tindinyo. One course I taught was Social Ethics. I

basically handed on the social teaching of the Church and made application of it to the problems in Kenya.

A later Vicar referred to his activity in the same period:

“Once things got sorted out in Nairobi in 1992 [Tom] came out to KMU and began a very fruitful ministry, teaching and preaching. The teaching was done mostly in the Regional Seminary for Theology, in Tindinyo (about half way between KMU and Kakamega). For several years he would spend three days a week there and return to the Community for the other four.”<sup>42</sup>

Tom elaborates further on his *impressions* of these ministry contacts, especially with the novices of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Anna, who were very special to him, in his typical anecdotal language, complete with a literary allusion, in an early 1993 newsletter:

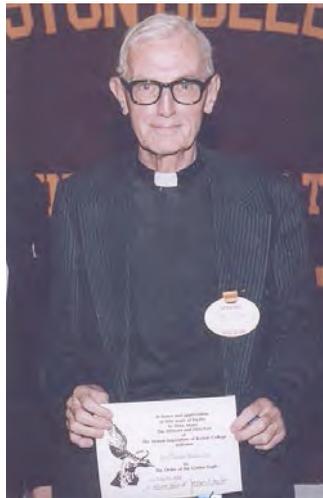
“On three days a week I teach moral theology at a senior national seminary for diocesan priests some 25 miles away (I live there). Full enrollment: many young men wanting to be priests here. On the other four days I offer Mass and preach at a Franciscan sisters’ novitiate near us. Twelve lovely young sisters keep this old guy distracted and do their best to make a home for him, me. Just recently I read *Little Women*, and I thought I was like the father, or that the novices were like the four Marsh girls. At least their love is as warm and their fun lively. They laugh a lot. I also help out at a nearby Ukweli Retreat House. (*Ukweli* is the word for *Truth* in Swahili) staffed by three U.S. Dominican Sisters. I alternate with Father John Pius O’Brien, my Dominican side-kick, at the San Damiano Novitiate and Ukweli.”<sup>43</sup>

In December 1992 the friars purchased a property in **Kisumu**. The first formal Assembly of the Vicariate of East Africa was held on Sept 25<sup>th</sup>, 1993, with Bill Sinkele, Tom Heath, Frank Sutman, Lewis Shea, Kieran Healey,

<sup>42</sup> Letter of Bill Sinkele, approaching the end of his 2<sup>nd</sup> term as Vicar

Paul Okello, Joe Otieno, Jean Claude, and Mikulas Buzicky<sup>44</sup> in attendance.

Tom was the homilist of the Anniversary Mass at his 50<sup>th</sup> Boston College reunion (May 1993), and spoke eloquently on the theme “God is calling us to glory, and that may involve some suffering”. The homily was reprinted in its entirety in the BC Class of 1943 “Golden Anniversary Report”. A handsome photo of Tom receiving an award during his 50<sup>th</sup> Class reunion of B.C. alumni:



During the Rwandan genocide beginning in April 1994, various friars fled Kigali aboard military planes to escape the rapidly escalating horror ... and arrived in Nairobi. The first group arrived on April 11<sup>th</sup>, and a second group of friars on April 21<sup>st</sup>. The *Rwandese novitiate* was officially (but temporarily) transferred to the *Dominican House in Kisumu*. (Chronicle, St. Dominic’s House). Here

is a brief contemporary account given by a brother in the East African vicariate who helped receive the friar-refugees:<sup>45</sup>

“This is just to confirm the info. Franz Hobbi, a Swiss priest, the three Angolan novices and the one from Central African Republic left [Nairobi] on Tuesday for Kisumu. They were able to rest and relax from their ordeal in Kigali. Tom has moved to the other house on the compound next to the novitiate. Kieran is still in the novitiate house to assist them to get settled in. The Burundi novice will come here Friday. (He lost 13 people in his family last October.) Liboire Kagabo, the vicar provincial, will arrive Sunday, then go to Kisumu...”

“Marius Dion, Didier, and the two Rwandese students and three Rwandese novices left the novitiate by tank a week ago. They stayed in a hotel (3 of them) and a hospital. A Russian !!! airplane brought them out of Kigali today. The Rwandese have Canadian passports. So far the plan is for them to go to Kisumu once they have had some rest.”

In his breviary, Tom has a marginal note highlighting the following phrases of the passage Amos 1-2,<sup>46</sup> with the handwritten annotation “RWANDA ‘94”.

...because they have threshed Gilead with sledges of iron...  
 ...because they carried into exile a whole people  
 ...because they delivered up a whole people... and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood...  
 ...because he pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually...  
 ...because they have ripped up women with child...  
 ...because he burned to lime the bones of...

What is clear is that Tom at some point found these words striking in relation to the Rwandan genocide; was it perhaps during those very months when the novice-

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<sup>45</sup> Both of the following extracts were published in the *News Notes* of the Province of St. Joseph shortly after the events described. They are taken

exiles were living in the Kisumu community? It seems likely, but could perhaps have been a later observation.

The following year, at the Inter-African Dominican Conference on Peace and Justice, in South Africa (Dec. 1995), Tom spoke about the experience:

“Our house also became a temporary home for the novices fleeing the horror in Rwanda (for about four months last year). I taught a daily course in English in my broken French. But that was not peace and justice, it was fraternité and chaos! And fun, too.” (Tom’s intervention, p. 61)<sup>47</sup>

Tom taught poetry to the Kisumu novices, remembers Joe Wachira, who was one of them in 1996-97, and really inspired and challenged their poetic imagination. “Kieran Healy taught us the mechanics of voice production” Joe said, “but Tom taught us the mind of the preacher”. At the same time he was writing a manuscript entitled “Poetry and Preaching” which he continued working on till at least 1998.<sup>48</sup> Submitted in 2001 to Paulist Press, he had “no luck” with it, but said: “It was fun to write – I’d been collecting poems that moved me all my preaching life ...”<sup>49</sup> This book, alas, is in the same state of limbo as the earlier one on the Dominican charism: an unpublished manuscript.

In mid September 1997 he and Fr. Lewis Shea experienced personally some of the violence of the political / ethnic clashes, as he described in one of his newsletters:

“Friends in the USA tell us Kenya has been in the news, due to the violence. We got a taste of it. In mid-September our car was stoned by a mini-mob of angry young

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<sup>47</sup> For another poignant and at the same time humorous account of Fr. Tom’s perspective on the Kigali novitiate-in-exile in Kisumu, see his personal newsletter of 4 December 1994.

<sup>48</sup> He cites as “recent” books two works published in 1993 & 1995, (*Poetry and Preaching*, p. 3), and mentions “rewriting” the introduction in

men. Father Shea was driving. I was beside him. The rocks shattered the windshield, but it did not splinter, shattered the side windows, which broke into a million small pieces. We don't know the cause. The violence-virus? vicious vandalism? political anger? Did they think we were somebody else? Anyhow, we escaped without serious injury. Thank the Lord. Lord Jesus, thank you very much! So pray for us; we for you."<sup>50</sup>

When Ed Gorman left to be superior in Arusha, Tom became superior in Kisumu (April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1998).<sup>51</sup>

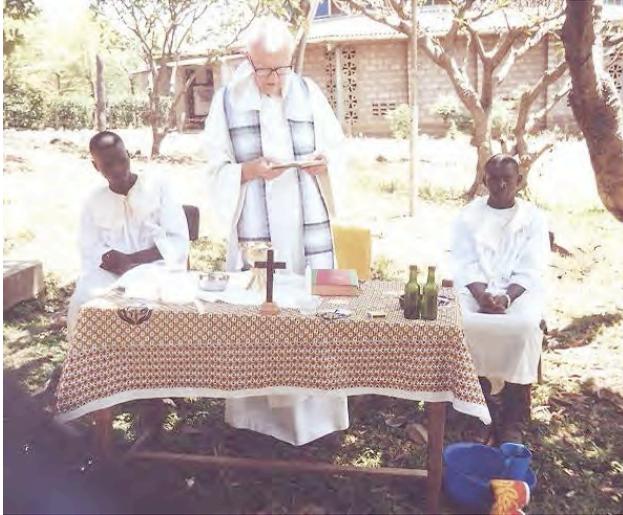
In May 1998 Tom gave witness in a newsletter of his zest for life in typical lyrical fashion:<sup>52</sup>

I'm fine. Looking at my 78<sup>th</sup> birthday next month, can you believe? can *I* believe? Well, I have to, but it's a wonderful mystery how I got that old so quick, and still feel in around forty or fifty, with (I was going to say, with plenty of pep, but will just leave it simply) pep, but not plenty of. But enough to keep teaching and preaching almost every day, and reading a lot for new courses, and loving life.

Yes, Thank the Lord. And I pray for you, and hope all is well. And maybe I'll see some of you in the year 2000, when I'll be home to celebrate my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and fifty years a priest, and whopee! (God-willing, of course.) ▲

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<sup>50</sup> TH, Personal newsletter of Dec. 4, 1997. Fr. Lewis Shea adds that after the attack, they went to the house of an Indian friend Natu, who was the community's mechanic in town, and whose wife washed their wounds and then his son drove them back up to the Dominican compound, a rather valiant service in those times of violence, while they left the car in Natu's care for repairs. His son did a similar "rescue mission" when the friars had



Celebrating an outdoor Mass at St. Paul's parish (wearing one of Kieran Healy's stoles), Kisumu. Undated.

Tom among the brethren of the Vicariate at a luncheon held in honor of the Archbishop of Kisumu at a resort on the shores of Lake Victoria, with his ever present baseball cap:



## His later years: 80 and beyond

As Fr. Tom's health gradually deteriorated, the community was obliged to forbid him certain activities which constituted a danger for himself and for others. These limitations on his lifestyle were not easy for him to accept, but two former employees who had close contact with him are witnesses to his eventual acceptance of this 'poverty' of old age.

Sometime before the year 2000, after seeing that one day he almost set the sleeve of his habit on fire when he was preparing something at the stove (he enjoyed cooking), Fr. Lewis decided that he should not cook anymore himself, so I was charged with preparing for him whatever he wanted. He didn't seem to really understand at the time why he wasn't allowed to drive, to cook, etc. The employees were adverted to be vigilant for his health and whereabouts...<sup>53</sup>

I used to drive Tom around when he wasn't permitted to drive any more (perhaps about the year 2000). At first he resisted that limitation, but later on he accepted it in peace. [...] He would talk about his older brother with me many times, and he really felt for him in his senility, He sometimes boasted that his family was "strong" because they all lived so long.<sup>54</sup>

Fr. Tom left for the U.S. in the very last days of 1999 to visit his brother Mark, suffering from senility, warned that he might die at any time.<sup>55</sup> He stayed on in the States in order to celebrate in June 2000 his **golden jubilee of priestly ordination** (June 10<sup>th</sup>) and **80 years of age**

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<sup>53</sup> Testimony of Idah Achieng' Oliech, former employee

<sup>54</sup> Testimony of Hamisi Hussein, former employee

<sup>55</sup> "I was in Washington D.C. with my brother, a Dominican priest two years older, who had a serious stroke, nearly died, and rallied but not fully. His emotions and his mind are out of whack. But physically he's out of

(June 19<sup>th</sup>). He had, among other celebrations, a joyous reunion with the Trinity College '54 alumnae near Washington D.C.<sup>56</sup> He also had a family celebration with the Costellos around the same time, and they were happy to “have [him] all to [them]selves for a while...”<sup>57</sup> His 80<sup>th</sup> birthday cake at one of these celebrations was in the shape of the African continent; he had become identified with the continent where he had spent the last 20 years of his life. However, due to his own delicate state of health, Tom was to decide at that time whether or not he would go back to Kenya, which he *did*, returning to Kisumu in the fall, and remaining until his death in Jan. 2005.

June 2002: Tom wrote to a Boston College classmate apologizing for not acknowledging sooner his most generous gift:

Thanks for the thousand dollars of some months, maybe a year, ago. I apologize for not acknowledging immediately - probably because of the two prostate gland operations (after the two eye operations) and before the hernia operation: “grow old along with me / the best is yet to be”?? Not on this earth, I’m afraid. But heaven!<sup>58</sup>

Sometime in 2003, Tom experienced a decline in his ability to express himself verbally with ease (a mild stroke? debilitation due to his operations and weak state of health?) and about this time he stopped teaching at Tindinyo. (Testimony of Fr. Ben Croell OP). A letter sent by Tom from Washington D.C. to the San Damiano Novitiate (dated May 29, 2003), expresses well his own experience of the matter:

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<sup>56</sup> letter of Rosemary, June 14<sup>th</sup>, referring to “June 11<sup>th</sup> - 50<sup>th</sup> celebration” and numerous photos of the occasion.

<sup>57</sup> From note of Denise Hogan to TH, mid 2000.

<sup>58</sup> The letter was addressed to J.J. Connolly, lifelong English teacher who at that point was nearly blind and beset by a series of maladies. Tom’s

Dear Sister Matilde and all my dear Sister-Novice[s]:

I write to thank you for that wonderful birthday card you sent to me. My eighty third birthday will be on June 19<sup>th</sup>. Today is Ascension Thursday, May 29<sup>th</sup>, so you are almost three weeks early. But I was, and am touched by your card, deeply touched, especially by all the signatures. How good it is for me to read your names, beginning with my Valentine! I am writing this letter on a computer, but will make many mistakes, because I am still learning. Let me tell you about my sickness. You probably know that I am forgetful. We all are. But my kind of forgetfulness could be related to the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. I do not know very much about it. Sister Matilde would know more. Anyhow I saw a doctor about it, and he put me on two kinds of medicine; one called Zoloft and the other Aricept. They are supposed to help your memory, and also to postpone the arrival of Alzheimer's disease. The doctor thinks I do have the very early stages of that disease, but he says there are all kinds of research happening in the world of medicine, and he feels that some special sort of vaccine will be found quite soon. I pray for that. And I ask you to pray for it also.

Another development in my life is that our local Dominican Vicar in East Africa, Father Maury Schepers, was here, and has asked me to live in Nairobi, to help our students know more about the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas. I told him I would be very glad to be of that kind of service. But of course I will miss you very much. However, I will return around the first of August to Kisumu. I forgot to tell you that I have a very severe body rash; I am seeing another doctor, a dermatologist, to help me with that. And I am using other kinds of medicine also. So pray for that, too. I have had it for more than two years. It is good to be writing to you about all my troubles, for you are my very special children. I think of you frequently. I ask our Lord and Our Lady to keep you safe, also Saint Francis and Saint Anna, to pray for you. I say goodbye, which is Old English for God be with you.

With love,

Budha<sup>59</sup>

When he returned to Kenya in August 2003 he was “not fully recuperated, but getting there, I hope”, and after the Vicariate Assembly in Nairobi, was happy to return to Kisumu.<sup>60</sup>

Millicent Petra Auma, formerly a novice with the Franciscan Srs. of St. Anna, recalls:

I lived for three months between September and November in 2003 at St. Martin de Porres Community. [Fr. Tom] was very much committed to his work and prayer. After meals he could make sure all the drinking water bottles were filled and he could do this when leaning [?] on the ground. We prayed most of the time with Fr. Tom and one day when our Rosaries got exchanged in the chapel, when I asked him for my Rosary, since they were almost similar, given to both of us by Fr. Martin, he told me that he may have my Rosary and I have his so as to pray for each other. I still pray his Rosary up to today.

Tom wrote what was probably his last newsletter (it’s the last one of which I have notice) at the end of March 2004, in which he speaks of his medical trials, not so much to seek the commiseration of his addressees, as to explain and apologize for the long hiatus in many of his correspondence relationships:

My dear friends: 30 March 2004

Hello, hello, hello! How long has it been? I would say something like two years. It began with the removal of two cataract veins, and the ending goes on with periodic visits to the local dermatologist, a good man but confused about how to clear up my skin rash. So I am now preparing to write to every one who has written to me – a

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Even though he had reached the age of a grandfather, he would give a BROAD smile when called “BUDA”, a sheng’ name which means “daddy” but could smile when called “BARI” a

big job, but at least I feel I have the energy to do it. And that's a major concession. But, thank the Lord.

I am sure the main hold up over the past two years was to consult with a medical man, a doctor, a psychiatrist, to make sure that the things happening to me were not the beginning of Alzheimer's disease. He's happy that they were not. But there was a general lessening of energy in me. But that seems to have gone away; and I'm left with less energy but restored interest in life.

Pray for me. I pray for you. And thank you very much for your concern and your help. Now I'll swing over to a few words from my own pen.

Sr. Marcella Auma FSA remembers that in 2004 Fr. Tom's health declined, and especially his sight, leaving him unable to drive. Late in the same year, he started to have loss of memory too.<sup>61</sup>

Sometime during what was probably the latter half of 2004 he wrote a scribbled letter to his Trinity alumna friend, Mary Heidhues, and says this about his health:

I'm OK, a bit slower but still puffing along in a community of about 20 Dominicans – all very busy, thank the Lord!  
[...] Pray for me please. I'm OK just getting older!  
with love

Fr. Tom Heath op  
(I'm 84

On Nov. 30<sup>th</sup> 2004, Tom wrote a note to Brother Mikulas Buzicky OP, "10 minutes" after receiving one from him which told Tom of the difficulty of studying theology in French, "to pass on to you a word of joy and courage (which has been your heritage all along!)".

Tom was present almost all day long at the wedding of Hussein Hamisi's daughter (held at their house) on Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2004. That was the last place most of the people

in Mkendwa village saw Fr. Tom, because the attack leading to his death occurred just about ten days later.

On Jan 1<sup>st</sup> 2005, he wrote one of his last aerogrammes, an unusually scribbly note to Frank & Peggy Fisher (she, a Trinity College alumna); Tom used to spend part of his weekends at their home when teaching at St. Mary's College. The letter is a mixture of Notre Dame football news, concern for earthquake victims, and a plea for God's mercy: "typical Tom".<sup>62</sup>

### Fr. Tom's death and burial

*The attacks on the Dominican house which led up to Tom's death* occurred in late Dec. 2004 - early Jan. 2005. At the time of the attacks, the community consisted of 4 priests (all Americans), together with six Novices, 3 of whom were Kenyan, one Ugandan, and 2 from the Vicariate of Southern Africa. The Rogawski's, a couple adopting a Kenyan child, were also visiting during the time of the first attack.

Martin ("Lee") Martiny, the local superior who was on home leave at the time of the attacks, wrote of the attacks of armed thugs to a local Dominican friar, who sent out the following e-mail:

"Lee Martiny... reports that they had two robberies by over ten thieves each time. Some of the guests were beaten on Christmas night and on January 4th. Two of the elderly priests were beaten. One remains in the hospital with pneumonia and might not make it because he is so weak. The police have pretty much put the gang of between 10 and 15 out of business. They killed 8 of them in two days."

"Lee is busy trying to sort things out related to the crimes and the injured Dominicans. Fr. Lewis Shea was one

of those beaten. He seems to be doing alright, but is sore and tired. Fr. Tom Heath is the other and he has pneumonia. Lee wanted to get this information to the Dominican communities, especially in New Orleans. He is currently in Nairobi and will return to Kisumu on Tuesday, January 11.”<sup>63</sup>

Maury Schepers, vicar at the time, wrote of the same in a letter to the Province:

When I came out together with Carleton Jones and Mike DeTemple on Wednesday, we didn't anticipate Tom Heath's death, which occurred just two nights ago.

You all know already that Tom Heath sustained a beating at the hands of robbers, who invaded our house here in Kisumu the night of Tuesday, 04 January. He was taken to the hospital, treated for cuts and bruises and held overnight. The next day he was home again, however, dead tired but content to be with the Brothers. Then after a couple of days he began to have severe chest pains and went back into the hospital, where the diagnosis was pneumonia (he had taken some serious blows in the chest, which probably caused the congestion). There he remained until last night (Thu, 13.01, therefore). Our Novices took turns during the day sitting with him.

Meanwhile on Tue, 11.01, Carleton Jones and Mike DeTemple arrived in the NBI, and Wed (the day before yesterday) we drove out from NBI to KMU and visited Tom immediately upon arrival. The doctors were cautiously optimistic, saying that he was slightly improved. So also yesterday (Thu) it looked as if the improvement was continuing. In the afternoon we visited him, and while we were there, who called but Dominic [Izzo] himself! And Tom was able to speak with him briefly.<sup>64</sup> By that time Tom was beginning to show signs of being his feisty self, asking (even demanding!) that the doctor was preventing his release to be taken off his case. We went home and retired. At about 11:45 Aga Khan

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<sup>63</sup> Taken textually from an e-mail of Jan 2005, from the socius and Vicar Provincial of the Southern Province, Emiliano Zapata, O.P. transmitting data from an e-mail of Martin's friend.

<sup>64</sup> The brethren who were there with him at the time say that he said to

(the hospital) called to say that Tom was dying.<sup>65</sup> Ben Croell went down and anointed him. He had died in his sleep, and had been pronounced dead at 11:50 (13.01, therefore), but Ben detected a slight pulse when he arrived. Martin Martiny, Carleton, and myself followed, arriving at 01:00. We sang the Salve together and said prayers for the dead.

Tom really surprised us, for one last time. This morning we celebrated MP and Eucharist, missing his voice in the third psalm, "Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth, serve the Lord with gladness," which he always belted out with relish. How we will miss him! Tom has been a pillar of the Vicariate from the very beginning. He was our first Vicar Provincial, and once things got sorted out in Nairobi in 1992 he came out to KMU and began a very fruitful ministry, teaching and preaching. [...] Comparisons are odious, but there is no doubt that Tom was the most beloved of all the Brothers in the Vicariate. Young Brothers rallied around him and felt comfortable with him, while the Elders found in him the wisest of counselors. Up until the time he died he was our assistant Novice Master (whereas earlier in Lesotho, he was in charge of the Novices of that Vicariate for several years). He died in Africa where he *wanted* to die, and he will be buried here too. For the moment I'll stop there. His canonization comes later; for the present we ache for his loss and ask all the Brothers of the Province to join us in our grief. Prayers requested, as we say!<sup>66</sup>

A few days later, on Monday Jan 17<sup>th</sup>, Tom's body was transferred from St. Monica's hospital to the Dominican compound, where an open air Vigil Mass was celebrated followed by a night-watch of prayer beside his body. The next day, Tuesday Jan 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005 a Mass of Christian Burial<sup>67</sup> was celebrated in St. Theresa's cathedral, followed by his burial in the place of his choosing.

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<sup>65</sup> Dr. Allibhoy, at Agha Khan hospital, told Fr. Bert several years later that there was no medical reason why Tom should've died, and that he was about to discharge Tom, when Tom told him surprisingly that "my master will discharge me first". That evening he died.

More than 12 years before, he had already mentioned the wish to die and be buried in Africa, in one of his circular letters, albeit in his typical, irreverent language, as if to wrest too much seriousness from the matter: “I have long wanted to croak over here, somewhere in Africa, and be buried here.”<sup>68</sup> Six years after that statement, a nearly 80 year old Tom Heath returned to the subject, more reverently this time, in a confidential letter to the East African Vicar:

“On the subject of where I want to be buried, my desire is to die and be buried here in Kenya, in Kisumu, on our property across the road from the novitiate, what Kieran calls the Orange Grove.

But if I die in the United States, then let me be buried there, and if possible, in the little cemetery behind our house at St. Joe’s in Somerset, Ohio. Whenever I’m out in that direction I always visit it, gaze at the head stones of the men I knew, and feel a deep peace. It’s a holy, a prayerful place.”<sup>69</sup>

And Fr. Tom *was* –is– buried (as he desired) in Kisumu, in the beautiful Dominican friars’ plot, a garden-like property across the road from the novitiate which he had accompanied as an ‘older brother’, the house where he had spent his last years and where he had sustained the attack which led to his death. It is indeed a peaceful, “a holy, a prayerful place”. His grave is just to the side of a lemon tree that he himself had planted on the day of the novitiate dedication, nearly 10 years before.

May he rest in the Lord’s peace, and enter into the fullness of joy in his presence!

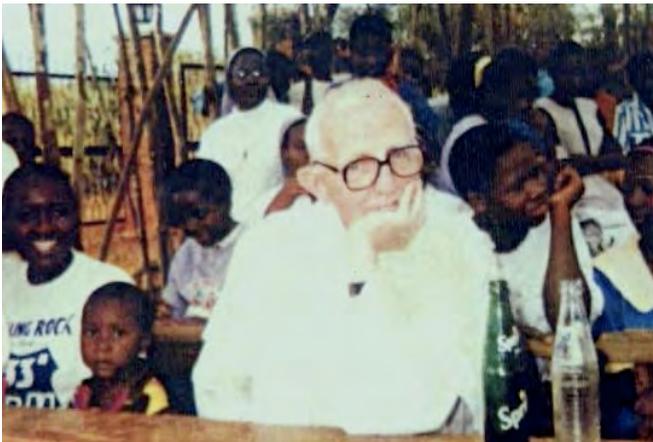
Andrew Hofer, O.P.<sup>70</sup>

Poem for a martyr of the contemporary Church  
Dedicated to the memory of Thomas Heath, O.P.  
2009

Lala salama.  
“Rest in peace,” in Swahili’s song  
still echoes in my ears.  
This lullaby, like the lemon tree,  
hovers over the missionary’s grave.  
Sisters sing to their dead beloved—  
priest, poet, teacher, friend—  
as if rocking a child to sleep.  
Brothers shovel over earth’s wound  
with faith in the Seed, the one Seed,  
that bears much fruit.

In face of anguish, he held the Ancient of Days  
as the Virgin’s child.  
The old was made young in joyful mystery—  
charity’s effect.  
The new Simeon witnessed the marvel.  
His feet then walked in peace  
towards a foreign land he glimpsed  
where martyrs beat drums, virgins dance,  
and dreams unfold like rose petals  
for the Master’s endless glory.  
Lala salama.

Shortly after his death, the Kisumu friars' "African Students' Fund", already in place for the sponsoring of poor and orphaned African students in their primary and secondary education, was renamed "Fr. Tom's Memorial Children's Program" (FTMCP), or more popularly "*Fr. Tom's Kids*". Fr. Tom really loved African children; in the following photo he is seen relaxing at table with neighborhood children at the San Damiano (Franciscan Srs.) novitiate, at one of their celebrations.



## PART II: Character sketch, by his friends in Kisumu

### General impressions of his character

I have compiled a short series of testimonies concerning Fr. Tom's overall character, as remembered by those who knew him during the last stage of his life, in Kisumu, after which the reader will find remarks concerning specific aspects of his personality.

Fr. Tom was an inspiration to many people, both religious and lay, and he also impressed the members of the Muslim community in the neighborhood who knew him as a man of peace and reconciliation. He loved to greet people on the way as he went walking to San Damiano or wherever, and especially reveled in the candid and affectionate greetings of the little children.

“Even though he was aged, he was humble, simple, concerned, joyful, apologetic...”<sup>71</sup>

“He was a very unique person of enormous love, generosity, kind, joyful, compassionate, faithful to his religious commitment, and a strong-willed mind. [...] He was a very sincere and honest person in his words and action, that you could not dare to cheat him. Fr. Tom was a person who said ‘Yes’ if he meant ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ if he meant ‘No’.”<sup>72</sup>

“Tom,

A man whose loving, warm, open, playful,  
reflective, deep, spontaneous and welcoming spirit  
touched the hearts of all who had  
the privilege of encountering him.

Tom,

ever willing to listen and share,  
he went beyond generosity in responding to need

or even to simple request.  
 Once I asked him for a poem on a particular theme.  
 A few days later he presented me with six pages  
 of typed poems he had selected to share with  
 me.<sup>73</sup>

Fr. Tom was an inspiration for me in my  
 vowed life. I admired in Fr. Tom his total commitment,  
 dedication and endurance when he carried his obligation  
 in celebrating the holy Eucharist with novices in San  
 Damiano and entire members who were present.<sup>74</sup>

Fr. Tom was a quiet man, who didn't speak a  
 lot, but he loved the Bible; every time I would visit him  
 I found him reading the Bible. And he loved people. I  
 never saw him a single time in an argument with  
 anybody. He was always a good listener, and one who  
 always kept his promises. He maintained his principles  
 to the end.

He was very frank; he would tell you on the  
 spot if you did something that bothered him, for  
 example cheating him. He was not selfish; he would  
 share with people whatever he had.<sup>75</sup>

### His humour / laughter:

One of Fr. Tom's most characteristic traits was his  
 humor. One sister referred to this characteristic as "a child-  
 like heart".<sup>76</sup> Another one wrote "Rev. Fr. Tom was very  
 jovial and he found joy in the activities he undertook. He  
 could greet people with a lovely, happy and open heart and  
 this made me always feel very comfortable to be in his  
 company".<sup>77</sup> "He was a very happy priest" said Idah  
 Achieng', who worked as a housekeeper in close contact  
 with Fr. Tom for more than 10 years; "I *never* saw him

<sup>73</sup> Testimony of Sr. Mara Frundt SSND

<sup>74</sup> Testimony of Sr. Angelin Odie ESA

annoyed.” Abu Balili, a child at the time who used to frequent Tom’s room, agreed with that appreciation.

A Franciscan Sister of Lwak remembers an endearing trait of Fr. Tom’s: the attention given to remembering people’s names, but her remembrance also portrays Tom’s ever present humor:

Something quite unique about Father Tom was his power of memory through which he was able to call each one by name after the first day of introduction as he was always present on the novices’ clothing day. If at any time he forgot a novice’s name, he would look direct into her eyes, hold firm to her hand meanwhile patting it with the other palm of his hand and shout out the name and break into laughter.<sup>78</sup>

He had a *disarming* humor: the ability to laugh at himself and to invite others into laughter with him. Even his celebration of the liturgy and his preaching were characterized by his zesty laughter. The photo on page 52 of this booklet is a good illustration of his laughter while preaching, - a characteristic stance as I (one of his former novices at Dover) recall. Sr. Mara Frundt SSND speaks of his “total ability to be distracted by the smallest things during the liturgy - - and then to be frank and laugh at himself with the congregation - - ‘unpretentious’ is the word!” An anecdote from the same community illustrates the point:

One day during Mass in the SSND house, Tom was fumbling through the Missal trying to find the right page after having sung: “Let us pray”. After a long and uneasy pause, still not finding the page, he intoned in a solemn Gregorian melody: “And I can’t find the page”, whereupon he and everyone present erupted in hearty laughter.”<sup>79</sup>

Several different people recall him singing “Alouette” to entertain others at the workers’ annual New

Year's party, at celebrations of the sister novices, or in gatherings of the brethren.

Fr. Tom not only lightened others' burdens and encouraged them to persevere through his gift of humor; he also found new strength himself through his own appreciation of humorous happenings. This is what Sr. Joddy Martha FSA noted in her meditation on Tom, addressed to him:

In some instances I saw you so worn out and weary, but in the next stage you were laughing and walking as if you were flying! You were mysterious [...]

You ran the good race. You kept the faith. Welcome us in God's abode with your characteristic smile! Fare thee well! Fare thee well!

### A life dedicated to words and the Word:

Tom was an avid or, rather, a *voracious* reader. Practically all 10 volumes of his personal journal are a running commentary and intrapersonal dialogue concerning the books he was reading: novels, poetry, biographies, historical studies, pacifist writings, theology... Sometimes he would read 6-8 books during an 8 day retreat or a week at the beach. Oftentimes he would read in succession several works by or about the same author to get a feel for the variety, depth and true value of a given writer, whether poet, statesman or philosopher.

When his memory was failing, and he was prohibited from driving the vehicle, he would sometimes head off to town on his own by matatu. When the friars / employees discovered this, some of the employees would be sent to find him and bring him back, and they always found him either sitting and reading in the library, or on his way back from the library with a pile of books under his arm. He loved to read.<sup>80</sup>

The same witness, who knew Tom from his early years in Kisumu, also spoke of his struggles with the local languages:

Upon arriving in Kisumu, Fr. Tom was very quiet, and couldn't interact much at first. Fr. Tom called her "dada yangu" (among the few phrases he knew or used in Kiswahili), and she called him "Babu". When he was already established in Kisumu he went for the Kiswahili language course in Musoma TZ, but came back saying that it was "very difficult" because of the [noun] classes. His favorite words in Kiswahili were "Habari" and "Nzuri". He learned very little Dholuo.

A most memorable feature of Fr. Tom's ministry of the Word was his great concern to translate his homilies, so that those who did not know English could benefit from his preaching. One appreciation of Tom which highlights this aspect of his character affirms that he was "able to explain the Scriptures very well in a simple way such that people could understand him and benefit spiritually from his talks."<sup>81</sup> Indeed, he wanted everyone, old people and children alike (who often knew only the local language, Dholuo), to be able to understand his homilies, so (the same witness relates) he "made us become his co-preachers by teaching us the sermon and we could translate for children every Sunday at Mass."

It was remarkable with what zeal Father served his Lord that he prepared for the holy Mass in a unique way by preparing together with his translator a day before the exact Sunday for over an hour with total patience expressed toward the one translating, and was ever ready to change his example in case the translator failed to get the correct words.<sup>82</sup>

Every time when it was his turn to celebrate Holy Mass at Ukweli Pastoral Centre Chapel, Fr. Tom made sure that he did thorough preparations of his homilies by taking his time to go through it into the

language (i.e. Luo) that the Christians were able to understand. This was done on Saturday evening or if he could not make it on Saturday, then he could do it on early Sunday morning either with Sr. Irene or [one of the other sisters. *--line missing from photocopied testimony*]. On my part Rev Fr. Tom could take me through the homily patiently until he made sure that I had understood. He taught me how to address the congregation and made me gain courage to stand before many people and to deliver appropriate information to them, i.e. the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>83</sup>

Sr. Irene (FSA Provincial) relates that she has a whole file full of Fr. Tom's homilies, which he made in two copies, one for his translator, and one for himself. I have examined several schemas of his homilies (shared with me by another sister who also acted as his translator), and they are characteristically outlined in didactic form, with simple, down-to-earth comparisons and an underlying message of grace.

### Faith: the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary:

Various people who shared testimonies concerning Fr. Tom mention his great devotion to the Eucharist. Several speak of his touching reverence for the sacred species:

Fr Tom in his old age had a wonderful respect for the Blessed Sacrament / host, and if by mistake it fell down during the distribution, he could take a purificator with holy water, bend on his knees and wipe the ground as old as he was.<sup>84</sup>

Fr. Tom Heath was a man of great reverence to the Holy Eucharist, and in his old age, occasionally due to tremors of the hands, the Blessed Sacrament would fall from his hands to the floor, Fr. Tom was often seen bending down to clean the area kneeling

down on his knees for he had great faith in the presence of Christ himself in the Eucharist.<sup>85</sup>

Others mention his unhurried, devoted manner of celebrating the Liturgy:

He had room in his heart for the massive love for Jesus and Mary, that made him to take his time in celebrating Eucharist. [...] He could sing so nicely during the Holy Mass.<sup>86</sup>

Such authentic devotion and reverence for the Eucharist did not, however, exclude a certain ‘abstraction’ for which the Heath brothers were famous in St. Joseph’s Province:

In Tom’s later years  
 while his feet shuffled his spirit soared.  
 During Mass  
 he could,  
 while entering into the sacredness of mystery,  
 delight in simple joys,  
 chuckle and share a thought or memory  
 or even reveal an oversight or “failure”  
 with utter humility  
 thus interweaving,  
 in poetic sensitivity,  
 the sacred with the seeming “mundane”  
 confirming the Spirit presence in  
 all that is.

Tom... extraordinary in embodying that Spirit presence  
 will, I believe,  
 live on in those who emulate his way of life  
 and love.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Testimony of Sr. Beatrice Mary FSA

One of Tom's friends speaks of his love of the Blessed Virgin, which is abundantly evident from his published writings, newsletters and journal:

... he loved reciting the Rosary whenever he was coming to San Damiano Novitiate in the morning to celebrate Holy Mass for the novices. He had especial devotion to our Lady of Lourdes and special love and devotion too to St. Therese of Lisieux.

When we had a journey together with him, travelling in a vehicle – KWA 303, we could recite the Rosary after which we could sing Salve Regina, because that was his favorite song.<sup>88</sup>

Hope: his unflinching, hope of heaven

Although perhaps tempted to give in to depression or anxiety due to his own health problems, the demise of so many loved ones and the seemingly endless needs of the poor who came to the house seeking help, Fr. Tom managed to maintain an attitude of supernatural hope in the midst of it all. The saints were his constant companions, and he was not afraid to speak of this hope with others:

Rev. Fr. Tom was a priest full of hope, hope for heaven. When I met him, and [we were first] introduced [to] one another, realizing my name was Celestina, then Sr. Celesta, he told me I belonged to heaven, that was where I belonged and it was where we were heading to; this he expressed so joyfully. Even in his homilies when he could talk about heaven, one could see how he had great / high hopes of total surrender in hope of meeting God. I remember before Communion he could also pray:

*“Lord Jesus Christ, with faith in your love and mercy, I eat your body and drink your blood. Let it not bring me condemnation but health in mind and body.”*

Rev Fr. Tom loved very much [this] prayer, and whenever he said this prayer I felt God's presence in my heart and I developed love for this prayer.

This confirmed Rev. Fr. Tom's trust and faith in the Holy Eucharist and his hope to be with the Trinity in heaven, of which I believe he is really enjoying with the seraphim singing celestial hymns.<sup>89</sup>

### Love: his special loves and apostolic charity

Fr. Tom was a very pastoral man, someone in love with the people of God, not just in general but in concrete. The great number of lives he touched witnesses to this fact.

Rev. Fr. Tom was a loving priest and father; this was always portrayed and revealed in his relationship with God's people, his love for Africa – Kenya and Kisumu, and he could always share his experiences in the missions where he had worked, e.g. Lesotho.<sup>90</sup>

He was particularly affectionate toward children:

He loved children so much that he often knelt down when hugging them, and called them "my darling". Small children could follow him up to the altar and surprisingly enough he could share with them the only chair meant for him.<sup>91</sup>

When he went somewhere walking he'd often take a long time, because he'd stop to talk to the kids on the way, whom he loved so much, even the littlest of them.<sup>92</sup>

One adult neighbor shared some beautiful childhood memories of Fr. Tom's dealings with him:

He *loved* children. Once, when I was angry (as a child) he gave me a soda and biscuits. Another

<sup>89</sup> Testimony of Sr. Celesta Adhiambo FSA

time when I was returning home and it started raining, Fr. Tom gave me a jacket and a hat to go home with. Since he hadn't said whether I was to keep them or not, the next day I returned them to him, and he took the jacket but let me keep the hat.<sup>93</sup>

Fr. Tom had a special love and affection for the Franciscan novices of the Lwak Congregation (Franciscan Srs. of St. Anna). They were his “darlings”, and he was not afraid to call them that wherever or whenever he met them.<sup>94</sup> He was chaplain to the San Damiano novitiate community, but went far beyond a simple sense of “duty”, faithfully attending all their vestitions and professions celebrations; he enjoyed sharing meals with them as well as the daily Eucharist. Various sisters mention the affectionate name they gave him: “Buda” (Kiswahili slang for “Father”, “Daddy”), and which he greatly enjoyed.<sup>95</sup>

Fr. Tom had fun and his story of “Lala Salama”<sup>96</sup> was always repeated, etc. As novices we called him “Buda”, meaning Father, and he called us his Darlings.<sup>97</sup>

He was a Spiritual Father and we admired the service he offered to us. [...] He made us to cherish our birthdays because on that day of our birthday he would pray for us and our family. On that day you would be sure of getting a half of the big host. Fr. Tom touched our lives so much...<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Testimony of Abu Balili (who came to know Tom as a grade-schooler)

<sup>94</sup> He was also affectionate towards the SSND postulants who “passed through his hands”, but had more frequent contact with the Franciscan novices.

<sup>95</sup> See his 2003 letter to the San Damiano community on p. 66 (above), where he himself signs the letter “Budha.”

<sup>96</sup> Tom was reported to say mistakenly at the end of Mass [in place of “Nendeni na amani” i.e. “Go in peace”] “Lala salama” i.e. “May you

Fr Tom loved us and indeed loved all the novices. He could always and everywhere wherever he met us, could always call us his darlings. [...] Fr. Tom was friendly and fatherly to all of us. So caring, so humble and very committed to his pastoral activities.<sup>99</sup>

--his way of loving inclusively won him many people both laity and religious who regarded him as a source of their inspiration, a Father and a counselor, especially the Franciscan Sisters of St. Anna (Lwak). Over 70 novices of the Franciscan sisters of St. Anna passed through his formation. [...] In every Eucharistic celebration he had an intention to offer including the intention of each novice and other members living in the Novitiate.<sup>100</sup>

Tom was beloved for his knack of giving different ‘names’ to the various classes of Franciscan novices (and SSND postulants as well). Each group, depending upon the number of members, became the (3) Evangelical Counsels, the Four Loves, the (5) Joyful or Glorious Mysteries, the (6) Commandments of the Church, the Seven Sacraments or Seven Horns of the Lamb, the Eight Beatitudes, the (9?) Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Ten HailMarys, the Twelve Disciples or the Twelve Joys of Mary...

I knew Fr. Tom H. in Novitiate San Damiano [...] When he met our group, he straight away named us the Joyful Mysteries. This is because we were five in number. Why Joyful Mysteries he knew better than any of us. I was the first mystery, because my name starts with A: (Novice – Agnetta).<sup>101</sup>

In our group we were twelve and Rev. Fr. Tom named us the twelve joys of Mary. After my profession day I was posted to Ukweli Pastoral Centre. One day I went to visit “Dad” -Fr. Tom-, and it was a great privilege to me since he explained to me all the twelve joys of Mary. I was also very glad because I was

the Joy number one. I sincerely thank God for this unique gift of Fr. Tom.<sup>102</sup>



Tom with the Franciscan Sisters' profession class of the year 2000 (the "Seven Sacraments", with an elder sister and another priest)

Fr. Tom also used mnemonic devices to remember the sisters' given names according to their initials: so one sister whose initials were L.I. he remembered as "Long Island", another whose initials were M.P. became "Member of Parliament", and so forth.<sup>103</sup>

A particular expression of his charity was Tom's unexpected (and very deeply appreciated) attendance at funerals. In the Luo culture (predominant in Kisumu),

<sup>102</sup> Testimony of Sr. Celeste A. FSA

<sup>103</sup> Of course, there could be amusing mistakes made on the basis of these same sort of "memory jogs". At one point Tom was having difficulty remembering the pat Kiswahili response to the question "Habari?" ("How are you doing?"). The word "Nzuri" ("Fine") just didn't stick in his memory. So, seeing that it sounded pretty much like "Missouri", he decided that that US state name would be a good way to remember it. One

attendance at burials is one of the most solemn duties of any family member, near or distant, and Fr. Tom's practice was thus an example of inculturated pastoring.

Fr. was so loving that once he loved you [he] could sacrifice his time and reach you. This I proved when my father died in South Nyanza. He in his old age came to feel with me.<sup>104</sup>

I came to realize that Rev. Fr. Tom had a great concern for me when I lost my dear brother. That day I did not expect him home since it was already very late in the evening. I was called from the house that some priests had come, going out I was very much surprised to see Fr. Tom and Rev. Fr. Martiny with other brothers, they were from Sr. Antonnete's home for a burial. Tom held my hand and spoke a word of condolence to me, they prayed and then after some time we shared a meal and for sure they had to leave my home at night. This was a great challenge to me. Even after I had gone back to the community he still extended his consolation to me. I thank God I felt someone somewhere cared, since in such moments, not only me but everybody needs someone to stand by his / her side and to show solidarity with him / her. I always thank God for the Dominican friars.<sup>105</sup>

In more than three funerals I saw you weep genuinely with compassion! Your tears cut deeply into my heart and I joined you in my tears too! I exclaimed in my heart "Lord, how great you are for having created Uncle Tom!"<sup>106</sup>

Among Tom's greatest friends were those whom he directed and counselled, who were privy to his intimate sharing and words of encouragement. Here are a few testimonies of those whom he directed:

Fr. Tom was a spiritual leader, one could feel this, through his sermons and the talk in confessional room, very encouraging words and full of wisdom.<sup>107</sup>

The late Fr. Richard Thomas Heath [...] was my intimate friend. I knew Fr. Tom for a period of thirteen years, this was from the year 1992-2005.

We became friends in 1993. By then I was staying in San Damiano Novitiate working as Assistant Novice Mistress. In 1994 I was transferred to Lwak as a Nursery teacher. Fr. Tom suggested to be visiting me in Lwak once in a month, and that was on a Saturday. The commitment was carried on faithfully for the twelve years except from the year 2004 [when] he had started declining in health, age, and his sight could not allow him to drive. But once in a while he was driven by a driver down to Awasi Convent [where I was then living] to come and see me. Late in the year 2004 he started to have loss of memory. I therefore took turn to visit him. Although those moments we could not share much because of his memory becoming poor[er and] poorer, but he knew me very, very well. I thank God for that.

Fr. Tom was a friend as well as a mentor to me. I learnt to acknowledge friendship, and I thank the Lord for it. There [is] nothing so good, so nice as friendship. His friendship helped me to grow spiritually and emotionally. We spent our noble time to enrich each other, but I felt that he was advanced in everything, but he lowered himself down to earth so that we could understand each other in spite of our educational background, nationality, culture, and religious background. He was a Dominican and I'm Franciscan, but that was our link, because St. Francis and St. Dominic were close friends.

Fr. Tom was good at writing poetry. He could write some poems and [send them] to me on my birthday. I have much to say about him but unfortunately I am not a good write[r], neither an author, but our friendship was beyond this. I felt his

goodness and still feel it even now that he is no more, but his spirit is still with us.<sup>108</sup>

Fr. Tom was an outstanding member of the Dominican community and a mentor to all Christians who knew him. His activeness and courage in spite of his age, inspired in all those who went for his peace, trust and confidence. He always beamed with joy and hope. [...]

Fr. Tom was a great man of prayer who loved God. He demonstrated this by his love for people. He was a keen listener. He had an open heart and understanding to other people's problems. If it were a problem he could not solve immediately, he would dismiss you with the words "I will pray for you."<sup>109</sup>

Fr. Tom's charity was open to everyone: family, friends, Muslim neighbors, strangers, the sick...

Fr. Tom organized for Bro. Paul to study in Nigeria, and gave a sizeable donation to his family (about KSh 10,000 which was then quite a bit) to fix up their new family home in "Corner Mbaya".

He helped Imam Abdallah get medical treatment in town, and when he was not able to work, Tom arranged for him a 'soft loan' with Fr. Lewis so that his wife could sell paraffin near "Keep Left".

He used to visit the sick and dying in St. Monica's hospital and in the village. Once he called me to accompany him to visit a dying person.<sup>110</sup>

Fr. Tom also did marriage counselling; among the couples he counseled were Idah Achieng' Oliech (employee) and her husband, at a time when their marriage was in crisis. He called Idah's husband and talked to him. He also told *her* to recall the day of their wedding before

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<sup>108</sup> Testimony of Sr. Marcella Auma FSA

doing anything precipitatedly. (They are still together today as husband and wife.)



Tom Heath, with Ida and her husband on a trip to Nairobi

He always visited the sick in the hospitals and in their homes; he would make impromptu visits to peoples' homes, especially in times of sadness (sickness, funerals), which people really appreciated. When the friars' Sunday employee, Lynette, fell sick (HIV+), Tom visited her up to three times a day in St. Monica's hospital, even spoon-feeding her, because she would only accept food when he fed it to her, but would refuse when others tried to get her to eat.<sup>111</sup>

He blessed me the last day of his life. In fact I was perhaps the last person he saw before he died, because one afternoon I went to visit him, and after calling him twice, he woke up and turned to me, thanking me for being a good friend, and then he blessed me. The next day about 8:00 I heard that he had died.<sup>112</sup>

## PART III : Bibliographical Data

## UNPUBLISHED PAPERS / NOTES

Tom's "*file cabinet*" was a cardboard box with the front side cut low to see the files easily. It contained materials typical of a man who was poet, theologian, teacher, formator and missionary: handwritten annotations from retreats, rough drafts of poetry and lectures, typed collections of his poems, short essays, book reviews, plus some more extraordinary things, such as an unpublished play and correspondence with Leonard Bernstein (through the latter's personal secretary) over TH's thoughtfully critical review of his musical, "Mass", which apparently raised quite a stir. The titles of his folders illustrate well his range of interests and writing, and his favorite themes. They also reveal what a prodigious poet he was: some 250 poems over nearly 50 yrs. of writing. I mention here only what has to do with his poetry:

Poetry in Christian Worship / Liturgy Notes (long before his June 1998 Dominican Ashram article on Preaching and Poetry, he wrote a short piece: DEB 5:1 Winter 1964 on "Poetry and Liturgy")

Poems I:	College	(1939-43)	(= 23 poems in 4 years)
Poems II	Nos. 1-65	1943-46	(= 65 poems in just 4 years!)
Poems III	Nos. 65-139	1957-1965	(= about 80 poems in 8 yrs.)
Poems IV	Nos. 140-179	1965-72	(= about 40 poems in 7 yrs.)
Poems V	Nos. 180-205	1972-1980	(= about 25 poems in 8 yrs.)
Poems VI		1980-88	(= nearly 25 poems in 8 yrs.) <sup>113</sup>

<sup>113</sup> This sixth folder of his poetry contains 2 sets: "A Dozen Songs from Africa", a typed, booklet format of 12 of his poems written in Southern Africa, given to "Celia" (Sr. Celia Evers OP, of Ukweli Reflection Ctr. in Kisumu); and "African Verses: A Collection", 23 hand-written poems (includes the previous 12), with successive rough drafts stapled to the final version of each poem. His masterpiece "The Blind Children" went through

Poems on our Lady: (photocopy of 24 typed poems on our Lady written over the course of 25 yrs., sent to (his married sister) "Leslie" on Christmas '72. He writes concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary: "She is out of fashion these days, but then so also is clear water and clean air...". Includes 5 poems written in Beirut (1957-58) and one on the renewal of his vows before "Dominic's Tomb" in Bologna, June 1958).

Blue folder with fastener (selection of 29 of his poems which Tom read at B.C in 1980 "before leaving for Africa").

Very large folder "Poetry Collection" (clippings / typed / hand-written copies of his favorite poems. Some 150 - 200 poems -of other authors- which Tom treasured, many of them quoted in his manuscript "Poetry and Preaching".)

### BOOKS OF POETRY

Among his personal effects found by the brethren after his death was a fine collection of *some 40 books and booklets constituting a small library of English-language poetry*, including three or four on East African poetry. Some of the authors were personal friends of his, others were his heroes [Jessica Powers OCD among them], and other books were his favorite collections (these last ones held together with scotch-tape and well annotated!). There are books about poetry-writing, anthologies of single authors, and anthologies of multiple poets. The Novitiate Library has inherited them all, and the ones that were taped have been bound to assure their preservation. Together with similar books left by Kieran Healy, they now constitute a very respectable English poetry collection in the friars' library in Kisumu.

## PERSONAL “JOURNAL”

Fr. Tom kept a journal full of his deeply personal impressions of local, national and international events, liturgical texts, books or magazines read, conversations he had, dreams, spiritual resolutions, doubts, enthusiastic plans, and discernment on major steps in his life...

There are a total of 10 volumes, dating from 1955-56; his trip to Europe in 1958 (but nothing on Beirut 1957-58!), 1962, and then more or less continuous from 1963 through 1985 when he left Lesotho to move to Welkom, Orange Free State. He filled another (11<sup>th</sup>) notebook with his personal reflections there and perhaps his first years in Kenya, but a note at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> volume states that “that notebook was stolen in Rome, Aug. of ‘93”. It is an irreparable loss for the purposes of this biographical sketch.<sup>114</sup> In my opinion his personal journal is the surest route of documental access to Tom’s personality, his inner struggles and joys, and his impressions of a world of things. Many of the volumes have a rather detailed index in order to locate specific themes more easily; the indices also permit one to follow at a glance the ebb and flow of his life and thought.

## CORRESPONDENCE

Letters Tom received (and kept)

Among Tom’s papers were many piles of letters from his relatives, brethren and friends, grouped into various packets with rubber bands. The letters he received were stored for several years, and on the envelopes Tom would write in his own inimitable scrawl the sender’s name (if not visible on the envelope), any donations included, his

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<sup>114</sup> Did that irreplaceable personal loss discourage him from continuing to keep a journal? Or did he continue, his latest volume (covering the years in Kenya) finding its way to either the Provincial or Vicariate archives or

own response (“ans’d”), and sometimes phrases such as “50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary”, “lost her mother”, probably to remind himself of important events in their lives for his future correspondence.

The letters I found came from all corners of the USA (and a few from Canada), many from South Africa, and others from Ireland, England, Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, New Zealand and Japan: well over 200 letters (perhaps 150 different correspondents): many written to families (his own relatives and many others), BC classmates, alumnae of Trinity College, friends, parishioners from S. Africa, sisters, cloistered nuns, priest friends, Dominican friars and former friars, seminarians he’d taught, former workers, and at least one evangelical minister. Some of Tom’s correspondence relationships endured over half a century!

There is also among his papers an old taped-up *address book* (an archivist’s treasure!), with his family’s and Dominican friars’ and sisters’ birthdays noted inside the front cover. But there is also the other side of those epistolary relationships, which are the letters which Tom composed.

#### Letters Tom sent

First and foremost were his *circular letters* (*newsletters*), crafted with a poet’s flair, most of them strictly one-page letters full of his own particular experiences and perspective on things, ending with a plug for donations to the Mission Office, for those who wished to contribute to his missionary work, and leaving space for more personal remarks which he added by hand. They seem to cover most of his years in Africa; I do not know if he began the practice prior to his work in South Africa.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> He seems not to have kept an original copy of them; the only ones that figure among the papers left at his death are some copies of the Dec. 2001

I also discovered among his papers (which had been summarily gone through in the confusing days after his death and then left untouched in boxes for 2+ yrs), some 18 *aerogrammes* written by Tom but never sent out, probably because he was badly beaten and then died before he could either finish the list or mail the aerogrammes. They constitute the last messages of TH to a few of his relatives and friends (the beautifully illustrated African aerograms were another trademark of Tom's letter-writing), and they were posted to their respective destinees with a cover letter (explaining the two and a half year delay in sending them out)!

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they were all that there were; I maintained a heartfelt but infrequent (once-or-twice-yearly) correspondence with my former novice master when I was in Peru and he in Africa. I may have missed a few, or begun to correspond too late for the first ones... One of his faithful Trinity College alumnae correspondents, Mrs. Mary Heidhues (née Mary Fran Somers), kindly sent me photocopies of those in her possession: 18 of them from Aug 1988 to Dec 2001. The first one of these offers an *apologia* for the typically onerous writing style of "newsletters", and so it may be among his first. However his Christmas 1988 (2<sup>nd</sup>) newsletter says "Once again I send a Christmas circular together with a quickly scrawled personal greeting"; therefore he must have begun the practice earlier. A later one

PUBLISHED WORKS<sup>116</sup>

## Books:

- 1957: *Aristotelian Influence in Thomistic Wisdom*. CUA Press, Washington DC.
- 1966: *In Face of Anguish*. Sheed and Ward, New York. 212pp. With four or five chapters on the mystery / problem of evil, and then again as many on diverse aspects of “Christian light upon” (*not* “solution to”) the same. Very broad focus.<sup>117</sup>
- 1969: *Our Lady*, Translation and Critical Notes, *Summa Theologiae* of Aquinas, III<sup>a</sup> 27-30, (= Vol 51). McGraw-Hill. New York.

Tom wrote in his journal in mid-summer 1967:

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<sup>116</sup> At some point (about 1973, later updated) Tom wrote up (and kept a copy of) his “*Curriculum Vitae*”. In 1984 every brother in the Province who had published works was asked to notify the Provincial archivist of their *personal* “*bibliography*”, so Tom drew up an updated one. This the nucleus of the present bibliography..

<sup>117</sup> The following quote is from his own preface to the work [p. vii]:

A friend who read this manuscript told me I should offer the reader a road map. “I lost you on a couple of turns,” he said. Here, then, is the map.

The evil in the world seems to contradict the goodness, even the existence, of God. That is the problem. But evil is more than a problem; it is a mystery. I have not intended to solve that mystery, but rather to put over against it the mystery of Jesus Christ who suffered, died, and rose again from the dead. Christ won out over evil. His light shines on still in the darkness.

The first part of the book has to deal with the elements of darkness: in general (Chapter 1); pain and suffering in creation itself (Chapter 2); man’s freedom (Chapter 3); which implies his power to turn against God (Chapter 4). The next part turns to the elements of light: how personal suffering can be good and how God brings good from evil (Chapter 5); how Christ is the supreme “good from evil” (Chapter 6); how glory joy is hidden in sadness (Chapter 7); how glory awaits the patience and love of this world (Chapter 8); and

“I have been up here and at the House of Studies working on Vol 51 of the Gilby Summa, tedious work. But fascinating because on Our Lady.”<sup>118</sup>

And when it finally came out [May 22, 1969]:

My translation of the Summa III q 27-30 “Our Lady” came in the other day. It was good to see it... the professional look that McGraw-Hill has given to the series. I am prouder of it than of *In Face of Anguish* since so much work went into it. For a while I couldn’t keep my eyes off it. I thought it was like having a baby – and it is. And my feeling about gazing at it, is that it is all right – not just vanity – since it would be normal to expect a mother to want to watch and take pride in her baby!<sup>119</sup>

1972: *Consequences of Charity*, Translation and Critical Notes, *Summa Theologiae* of Aquinas II<sup>a</sup>II<sup>ae</sup>, 34-36 (= Vol 35). McGraw-Hill. New York.

20?? Tom’s sudden death meant that 2 *manuscripts* he had / was preparing for publication on the topic of Dominican spirituality (*Formed by the Word*) and the use of poetry in preaching (*Preaching and Poetry*), never saw the light of day. Might they be published now, posthumously?<sup>120</sup> Both are in the latter stages of manuscript revision.

#### Articles:

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<sup>118</sup> Personal Journal, Jan-Nov 1967, p. 70

<sup>119</sup> Personal Journal, Feb 1968 - Aug 1969, p.

<sup>120</sup> The original and a copy of the second manuscript were delivered to the Provincial Office in New York, and I was told there is a negotiation going on with someone in the English Dept. of Providence College, who may be willing to edit its introduction as a primer on the topic (omitting the extensive quotes of poetry for which he hoped to receive copyright permission, according to the recommendation of a possible publisher). Similarly, his earlier work, *Formed by the Word*, remains unpublished, and is perhaps the more valuable of the two, in view of Dominican formation. Although admittedly ‘dated’ and culturally located in U.S.

- 1959: "Our Lady in Speculative and Biblical Theology" *The Thomist Reader*, (1959).
- 1960: "Saint Thomas and the Aristotelian Metaphysics" *The New Scholasticism*, 34:4 (Oct 1960).
- Early 1960's: "Adam, theol. of", "Eve, theol. of", "Progress" in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*.
- 1976: article on Franciskus Stratmann in *Doctrine and Life* v. 26, no. 6 (June 1976), 408-428. [largely reproduced in his 1986 article in *Grace and Truth* (cf. below) and in chapter 17 of *Formed by the Word* (134-43).]
- 1980: "St. Dominic's failure" *Spirituality Today*, 32:3 (Sept. 1980).
- 1981: "Theological Background for Dominican Spiritual Direction" *Spirituality Today* 33:1 (March 1981) 34-42  
"A Spirit of Contemplative Prayer" *Grace and Truth*, 2:2 (June 1981).
- 1982: "Truth" *Dominican Ashram* 1:1 (March 1982).
- 1983: "The Waves Overwhelm Me" *Dominican Ashram* 2:4 (Dec. 1983).
- 1984: "Corporate Witness" *Grace and Truth*, 5:1 (Mar 1984).
- 1986: "Prophet of Peace" *Grace and Truth*, 7:2 (Sept. 1986).  
[Concerning F. Stratmann OP]  
"Honest Thinking and Obedience in Cardinal Newman" *One in Christ*, 22:3 (Oct 1986) 234-40.

### **Popular Journals: articles, reviews and poems**

"About 200 articles, reviews, and poems have appeared in *Ave Maria*, *Commonweal*, *Doctrine and Life*, *Dominicana*, *Dominican Ashram*, *Dominican Educational Bulletin*, *Dominican Justice Studies*, *Grace and Truth*, *Holy Name Journal*, *One in Christ*, *Sign*, *Spirituality Today*, *The Torch*."<sup>121</sup>

### **Book Reviews:**

Over the years Tom reviewed numerous books for diverse philosophical, theological and religious journals such as *The Thomist*, *The New Scholasticism*, *Theological Studies*, and *The Southern Cross*, especially books of poetry, theological essays and Christian biography.

### **Poetry:**<sup>122</sup>

Tom wrote a letter to “Phil” [Smith OP, then Prov. Archivist?] in April 1984, giving the list of his poetry that had up to that time been *published*.

“Several poems “Moea O Halalelang”, “Sunday Morning After Mass”, “Prayer for Peace”, “Semongkong” have appeared in Grace and Truth recently”, and “The Blind Girls” and “Pietà” in Dominican Ashram (“the last was accepted anyway, and should be out by the time you print this”). I publish under the name “Thomas Heath, O.P.” (no initial).”

In 1980, Tom was invited to read publicly at Boston College a selection of 29 of his poems “before leaving for Africa.” Perhaps in that same year a book of his poems was published, according to the Dominican House of Studies’ library catalog, however I was unable to locate a copy in the shelves. The electronic catalog of the work gave no date: *Proud refrain and other poems*.<sup>123</sup> His poem *Proud refrain* was written in his senior year at B.C., and speaks of a soldier’s fond memories of college days on naval duty in the war.

<sup>122</sup> See however, in the previous pages, a much fuller listing of his (largely

- Anxiety, Anguish 5-6, 12-14, 20, 24-25, 31, 33, 36, 41, 44, 99
- Apartheid 50-51, 54-58
- Articles / books he read and was formed by: 8-10, 12-14, 22-23, 26, 34-35, 37, 44, 61, 81, 95
- Articles / books he wrote 24-25, 34-36, 39, 40-41, 49, 64, 99-102
- Blessed Virgin Mary 9, 13, 31-32, 35, 85, 99-100
- Eucharist 27-30, 56-57, 66, 79, 80, 83-84
- Franciscan Sisters of St. Anna 61, 69, 78-92
- Heath family:
- His father 5, 14-15
  - His mother 5, 45
  - His brothers 6, 8-9, 11, 36, 46-47, 55, 67
  - His sisters 8, 23, 25, 68
- Ill health 59-60, 67-74
- Lourdes 9, 18-19, 54,
- (News)letters he wrote: 55, 59, 61, 65, 68-72, 97-98
- Novice master / assistant 41-46, 74
- Parish ministry 53-58
- Peace & justice work 37-40, 50, 55-56
- Personal Journal 17, 21, 35n-36, 40n, 42n, 60, 81, 96
- Poetry 6-8, 11-12, 17, 50-51, 55-58, 64, 76, 79, 91, 94-95, 100, 102
- Preaching ministry 40, 52, 57-58, 62, 64, 82-83
- Rwandan genocide 63-64
- Stratmann, Fr. Franziskus 38-40, 101
- Teaching ministry 15-17, 22, 24, 29-30, 35-36, 40-41, 50, 61, 64, 68
- Thérèse of Lisieux, St. 10, 12-14, 34, 48,
- Vicar Provincial 58-61