

## In Exile - Marking an Anniversary

Forty years ago in November of 1982, I began writing this column while a doctoral student in Belgium. I chose to call it “In Exile” for two reasons. Superficially, I chose this title because I was living in Europe, far from much of what I considered as home. While I was not pretending to be Robert Browning, writing Home-Thoughts, From Abroad, I did take an amateur’s delight in the small parallel. For much more significant reasons, I chose this title because all of us live our lives in exile. We live our lives (as St. Paul says) seeing “as through a glass, darkly.” We live in our separate riddles, partially separated from God, each other, and even from ourselves. We experience some love, some community, some peace, but never these in their fullness. Our individual existence places a certain barrier between us and full community. We live, truly, as in a riddle. God, who is omnipresent, cannot be physically sensed; others, who are as real as we, are always partially distanced and unreal; and we, in the end, are fundamentally a mystery even to ourselves.



In that sense, all of us are far from home, in exile, longing to know more fully and to be known more fully, distanced from so much. And, while on this pilgrimage, our perspectives are only partial; our vision, even at best, that of the “foreigner,” one out of the mainstream, who does not fully see nor understand.

From this exiled perspective, I have for forty years offered my reflections. The column has taken a variety of forms. As Margaret Atwood once said: “What touches you is what you touch!” I have touched on a whole lot of things; but all of them, in their own fashion, were in one way or another trying to untangle the riddle, to end the exile, to help to get a pilgrim home!

Initially, the column ran in only one newspaper, the Western Catholic Reporter. In 1987, the Green Bay Compass picked it up, and one year later the Portland Sentinel began to publish it. In 1990, the column got a major break. It was picked up by the Catholic Herald in London, England, a national paper in the United Kingdom that, at the time, was privately owned by Otto Herschan who also owned

the Irish Catholic, a national paper in Ireland, and the Scottish Catholic Observer, a national paper in Scotland. With that, the column now had a home in six newspapers in five countries, nationally in three of them. Moreover, with lax copyright laws in Asia that are not as rigorous, nor as enforced, as here and, soon, a number of dioceses in Asia began to pirate the column and publish it.

The early 1990s brought more breakthroughs for the column: The Catholic Register and the Prairie Messenger, both national papers in Canada, picked up the column in 1992. To my mind, that was circulation enough. However, after the publication of The Holy Longing in the USA in 1999, the column's circulation exploded. Within three years, it was being carried by more than sixty newspapers in more than ten countries. That has since grown to more than eighty papers. Since 2008, the column has also been published in both Spanish and Vietnamese and is finding a readership in Vietnam, in Mexico, and in parts of Latin America.

I owe a debt of gratitude to a lot of people but need to single out several to thank specially. First, a deep thanks to the Western Catholic Reporter (in Edmonton, Canada) and its then editor, Glenn Argan. It was the first newspaper and Glenn Argan was the first editor to take a chance on me, an unknown prairie boy with little in the way of sophisticated credentials or contacts. Because of this, through all these forty years, I have always coded the column as WCR because, before anyone else, I was writing it for the Western Catholic Reporter. Today, each week, when it is emailed to some eighty plus newspapers, it goes out under the coded label "WCR". I suspect none of the editors receiving it know what that means, but now you know.

A special thanks to Delia Smith for taking the column to the Catholic Herald in London and to Otto Herschan its then owner and publisher. From 1990 until his death, Otto made sure that any newspaper he published had my column in it. As well, deep thanks to JoAnne Chrones, my tireless Executive Secretary for these past 28 years, to Kay Legried, who pitched the column to various newspapers, and to Doug Mitchell who lays a critical, proofreading eye, to every column.

Truth be told, when I first began writing this column, I was probably more solicitous about bringing a column to birth than about helping bring God's kingdom to birth. Our motivation is perennially in need of purification. I hope that I have matured in this area during these forty years and my biggest thank you of all goes out to you, the reader.

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