

TOM CHETWYND (1938 – 2012)

THE death of Tom Chetwynd marks the end of one of the more remarkable careers of that talented post-war generation of Gregorians who made their mark in so many ways upon the social and literary life of London and beyond from the early 60s. In Tom's case that contribution was overlaid by his art, his meditation and his deeply spiritual philosophy.

Unusually he had converted to Catholicism as a schoolboy and retained a lifelong absorption by the intellectual and theological challenges of Christianity in all its manifestations, especially the phenomenon of contemplative and mystical prayer. In his book *Zen and the Kingdom of Heaven*, in which he tells the story of how Zen Buddhism led him to discover the largely forgotten Christian tradition of pure contemplative prayer and how it can revitalize the rich traditions of prayer and meditation practiced in early Christianity, he wrote: 'Only by purifying the heart – the depths of the feeling-mind and the seat of passion – can we free ourselves from our particular egoistic reactions to which we are tethered by long conditioning. The storm of the ego is always on the surface but in the depths of the mind there is unlimited peace.'

Born in 1938 in London, Tom, aged eight, was surprisingly enrolled at Worth, then the tied Preparatory School for Downside, although neither of his parents was Catholic nor even specifically Christian – probably on the recommendation of his father's friend, Dom Julian Stonor. Always a potential scholar, he sailed through prep school and the Common Entrance Exam, coming on to Downside in September 1951.

Ever amiable and popular with his peers, and with more than average success in athletic sports, Tom's career at Downside was nonetheless one of mixed fortune. He was earmarked early on as potential university award material by Dom Wilfrid Passmore, his Head Master, and doubtless subjected to the pressures reserved for high-fliers at that time. Teenage rebelliousness kicked in and he found school life increasingly irksome. At his own request he left a term early, in July 1955, thereby missing the Oxbridge exams. Just after he left, it emerged that he was the author of a satirical article in *The Rook*, an underground school magazine of irregular publication, which prompted a furious row with Dom Wilfrid and may even have cost him a place at Wadham.

But all was not lost. Like so many Gregorians, he had formed lifelong friendships with both contemporaries and monks, most notably Dom Aelred Watkin and Dom Sebastian Moore. Even with Dom Wilfrid, he worked hard to mend broken fences and exchanged many letters asking and receiving advice as he toyed with the rival prospects of joining the army or making his way in journalism. He embarked on a hitchhiking trip around Europe which, together with a vivid waking dream, provided much of the material for his first semi-autobiographical novel, *Rushing Nowhere*, published in 1958 when he was 22. When his National Service was completed, he started working on local newspapers and after a whirlwind romance, married H el ene de Bosmelet, whose young brother, Robert, had just entered Downside.

An intense period of exploring his own unconscious resulted in novels *The Copper Cow* (1962) and *The Purple Pansy* (1966). Tom then turned his attention to dreams and produced his *Dictionary for Dreamers* (1972), which has enabled many to discover the value and significance of their own dreams. With the success of the dictionary, he was able to concentrate on the wider significance of symbolism as a whole and was instrumental in achieving greater understanding of its value and meaning as used by dreams, the imagination and the soul. His three volume work: *The Language of the Unconscious, A Dictionary of Symbols* and *A Dictionary of Sacred Myth* were compiled largely from this research.

His interest in religion and Christianity motivated Tom to study theology at Heythrop, partly with a view to the permanent diaconate – though he never proceeded to this ministry.

Having first encountered Zen Buddhism at school, he later began to find that its discipline of meditation could illuminate and fortify his Christian practice.

Tom died at home on 28th April, 2012 and is survived by his wife, three daughters and six grandchildren. There is a memorial website at www.tomchetwynd.com. Perhaps the last word should go to Dom Sebastian, now 95, who wrote, on hearing of his death:

Tom Chetwynd is one of my tenderest memories. I was teaching in the school when his novel, *Rushing Nowhere*, came out, and I got hold of him and we talked... Later he was drawn, deeper and deeper, into what came to be called The Light of Asia... Now I see Tom as prophetic. The harmony between Christianity and Buddhism is accepted by all who care.