

A Note from Gethsemane, California

During the early part of summer last year I fulfilled one of my dreams—to travel on the Pacific Rim from Vancouver in the north via Washington, Oregon and California State to Mexico. This was a journey of some 7,800 km round trip much of it spent on the Californian Coast line, Salinas, Big Sur, Monterey, San Francisco on and down to the border. The road back cut inland and out of LA into Death Valley, up the interior, over the top of the Sierra Nevada round Lake Tahoe, up west to Portland then north east following the mighty river Columbia past Mt Adams into the Northern Cascade Mountains, leaving me with a last minute dash back to Vancouver for the flight home.

I did not travel alone but with a good friend from Theological college days. We spent a good deal of time planning the trip, agreeing to meet some folks along the way. (Robert Inchausti was one of them.) We were travelling light, and camping when were unable to bum a bed. We read poetry (mostly Ginsberg's *Howl*) Kerouac's *On the Road*; listening to jazz and rock and roll—and wild preacher men giving the gospel on the radio air-waves. The trip was all that it was meant to be and much, much more.

On this particular day we were on our way to the Abbey of Our Lady of the Redwoods—our reason for going was that Thomas Merton had visited this Abbey, in fact he set off from this place to the far east, his final journey. A travelling companion of Tom's bought a painting of Christ by the artist Jamini Roy; it was a painting Merton wanted to buy but couldn't afford. It was presented to the community of Our Lady of the Redwoods by Dr Chakravarty, Merton's companion during the autumn of 1968.

This a short extract from my own journal written on that day,
5 July 2000:

Hurled the 4X4 down the small back road, through woods which 'towered like Cathedrals' to quote Tom Merton ~ Gt. Redwoods all around. My companion Angus unsure of the speed I maintained as I am pulled by the excitement of meeting.

Beyond is something more than a frontier across which we must travel; if this journey is to be more than one long drive down the US West Coast. This is the moment ~ one that neither of us will have again. We are propelled and called towards the Abbey ~ my companion urges me to go slower ~ but I feel it! And I feel Him

beyond us calling, calling. I am familiar with these roads and this vehicle it seems in this moment that I have known them all my life, I have never been here before. It is as if I were born, destined for this moment ~ I am fully present to myself and Him ~ as if driving to the beyond ~ right through 'The Church' ~ through this ancient garden. I'm striving for God ~ I'm called ~ set apart to be here at this time. This is my time, here in this place. This is spiritual.

I muse at my impatience to be there!!! I want to express the otherness to which I am being drawn. I feel solitude and holiness, although accompanied now by a reluctant passenger. I know our welcome will be only short, we are not really welcome; interlopers, just some more disciples looking for reflections of Tom; even so the meeting will have meaning.

We arrive on time "Sanctus" Holy, Holy, Holy is God. Bread and Wine are set before us, and an invitation to come in from a sister. Bread and Wine are set before us Sanctus. God calls ~ we can do no more than respond in awe at His call to see through and go beyond.

Later Reflection:

I remember now sitting in the Chapel at Our Lady of the Redwoods. It was a hot dusty day, and late in the afternoon. We had driven hard to get there, and battled even harder to get an invitation. Two Anglican Priests.

We looked for a short while at the picture, asked our questions, then moved around the grounds shooting camera film, reading passages from An Asian Journal and then onwards to another Merton Rendezvous down on the coast line.

This encounter was one of many moments that could be defined as spiritual on the road, when Christ met with me, with us almost in secret. Maybe all God's children should carry a translucent cross!

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