

JOSEPH A. MUNITIZ SJ (1931–2022)

Charalambos Dendrinou

It is with profound grief that we announce the passing away of our much loved teacher, mentor, colleague and friend Father Joseph A. Munitiz, S. J., who departed peacefully early in the morning on Saturday, 16 July 2022 at the Corpus Christi Jesuit Community in Boscombe. There he was receiving care for the last three weeks, following his hospitalisation in the Royal Free Hospital in London for complications with his blood circulation. Despite the excellent care and follow up medication he received, his condition deteriorated over the last week. He was 91 years of age.

FATHER JOE, AS HE WAS KNOWN to his Jesuit brothers and his many devoted students, colleagues and friends, was a remarkable person: a great scholar, an affectionate teacher, a paternal figure for many of us who benefitted from his scholarship, his guidance, his wisdom, his humility, and his immense and sweet kindness. His death leaves us with a sense of great and irreplaceable loss.

His love for Byzantine literature, history and spirituality is reflected in his long and distinguished intellectual and academic life, the fruits of which we enjoy through his many publications. To build a mosaic of his personality, life and work we follow his journey in the world through his own eyes, as reflected in his 'Autobiographical tesserae', which he graciously composed at the invitation of colleagues and friends for a *Festschrift* presented to him a few years ago, to which we shall return.

Born of Spanish Basque parents in Cardiff in 1931, his earliest vivid memories were marked by the incendiary bombs that fell during the Second World War on the sacristy of his local church of Our Lady of the Angels. 'It was winter time', he remembered, 'and by the following morning the water thrown to put out the flames had become a sheet of ice'. His father, a ship-chandler, died when Joe was nine years old, and his mother, a professional singer at one time, died three years later, leaving him and his two siblings, Marie and Arthur, to be raised by their aunt. Even after they moved to

Crosby in Liverpool, where Joe attended St Mary's College, a day-school run by the Irish Christian brothers, Joe maintained his links with Spain; in 1947 he was sent with his brother to the Colegio Santa Maria, a boarding school in Vitoria for a year.

Spain also introduced him to Greek, the language destined to become his passion and focus of his professional occupation. In the beginning he was self-taught, though he was offered some assistance under the Jesuit scholar Domingo Mayor at the Junior Seminary of Comillas, Cantabria, where Greek and Latin were taught exclusively for one year thanks to the initiative of Father Pedraz, who promoted the value of their study. It was the course he organized that 'began to open my eyes to the beauty of language', Joe later remarked.

Meanwhile, he was increasingly feeling his vocation. 'More and more I knew that I would be happy only with the choice of a life dedicated to the service of Christ'. [His family greeted his desire to become a Jesuit.](#) The Society of Jesus provided him with a long and thorough academic training, which included classics. Following the novitiate at Harlaxton (1950) he took First Vows and made a year's juniorate at Manresa in Roehampton before he moved to Heythrop in Oxfordshire, where he was introduced to philosophical thinkers, among whom Hume captured his attention. Subsequently, he returned to Manresa for a third year in philosophy (1955), followed by a year in pedagogical studies (1956).

His awareness of the importance of editing texts may originate from the teacher and scholar he admired most, Christopher Devlin. But 'it was the Greats course at Oxford that really opened my eyes to critical thought', he stressed. Though he felt that his Latin and even more his Greek, was not up to Oxford standards, the extraordinary kindness and support he received from his tutors, including Iris Murdoch, encouraged him to persist. Despite his efforts, he finished with a 'second' in his final exams, to his great disappointment.

In the 1950s there was a demand for teachers of classics in Jesuit schools. Following a year of regency at Stonyhurst teaching Latin, at his own request he was sent by the Provincial to Spain, where he spent his four years of theology, after which he made his tertianship at Saint Beuno's under Paul Kennedy. Back in Comillas

he found himself at an isolated, beautiful building overlooking the Bay of Biscay with an awesome view of the mountain range Picos de Europa, which he enjoyed trekking and climbing. There he acquired his first pastoral experience with the families of the villagers on the mountain and their hard life. He was ordained in 1965, **at the time of the** Second Vatican Council, which inaugurated extensive reforms in the Roman Catholic Church and theology. Spain, then isolated by ecclesiastical and state censorship, with a few exceptions remained unaffected. In those years he **became** acquainted with the writings of the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner.

Meanwhile, Father Joseph Gill, the eminent historian of the Council of Florence, then Rector of the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, was looking for new staff, and Father Joseph was sent by his Provincial Superior to study there for a licentiate in oriental theology, with the intention to join their teaching staff. This would prove instrumental for his future career. There he attended the lectures of the great scholar of oriental spirituality Irenée Hausherr, who encouraged him to explore the works of the Byzantine Saint Symeon the New Theologian. With this in mind, He went to Paris in 1969, where he met the Jesuit scholar Joseph Paramelle, an expert on Saint Symeon, who was working at the Greek section of the Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes, at the eminent Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), under abbé Marcel Richard. It was during a discussion among them that abbé Richard presented a volume with photographs of a Greek manuscript from Mount Athos. It was **he first saw manuscript images of the *Treasury* (*Thesaurus*) attributed to an otherwise unknown author by the name Theognostos ('Known to God'). 'That was the real start of my career', he remarked later.**

During his research, while comparing **two** manuscripts in the Library of the Benaki Museum in Athens with the same text in another manuscript, he discovered a different reading concerning the number of years that had passed since the death of Christ. The Benaki manuscript **one that** stated the exact number of years **that had passed since the death of Christ**, instead of giving a round number as the other **did**, thus allowing Father Joe to place Theognostos in the thirteenth century, a century earlier that was commonly believed. 'It was one of those "eureka" moments', he would recall, 'that make a scholar's life worthwhile. It may also open a window on what has been the work of my life'. By delving into Byzantium, he saw a Church 'blessed with a spirituality of extraordinary richness'. For him it was not only the Orthodox

liturgical life but above all ‘the texts that spoke so eloquently of contact with God’.

In 1976 Father Joseph completed his critical edition of *Theognostos*, which he submitted as his DLitt. at the University of Paris. Wishing to proceed with his work and at the same time learn modern Greek and experience Greek culture, he spent a year in Athens, Thessaloniki and the island of Syros, which has a large Catholic community, where he served as assistant priest, and even performed a baptism in Greek, a memory he treasured.

Following the completion of his studies he joined the editorial team of the Greek Series of the *Corpus Christianorum* in Louvain (Leuven). The director of CCSG, Maurice Geerard, asked Father Joe to see through the press the *Questions and Answers (Erotapokriseis)* of Anastasios Sinaita, an important guide of sixth-century Byzantine spirituality he had begun editing. As in the case of the *Thesaurus*, the *Erotapokriseis*, too, revealed popular beliefs rather than speculative and systematic theology. Both were published by Father Joe in CCSG, vol. 5 (1979) and vol. 59 (2006), respectively. **The texts he published there** ‘represent many years of work’, he remarked, ‘but my heart was in that patient collation of manuscripts, where fascinating problems are hidden that need solving. Those who have experienced the joy of editorial work are aware of the constant surprises it affords’. He later reflected on this in an inaugural lecture given to the Spanish Society of Byzantine Studies, under the title ‘The Importance of the Secondary’, pointing out that ‘it is in the detail that a scholar finds his or her quarry: the marginal note, the unexpected variant that can change everything’.

While working on the *Thesaurus* he encountered a short synopsis on the Church Councils, and discovered that it was one of several, which he explored in the context of mnemonic teaching aids and catechetical texts in Byzantium. His office work in Louvain consisted of copy-editing the work of other scholars. In this respect his model was Jacques Noret, ‘probably the most exacting scholar’ he had ever met. For psychological support he turned to Albert Van Roey. Among other eminent colleagues he befriended were Pauline Allen in Australia and Luk van Rompay at Duke in the States, Françoise Petit and Werner Verbeke.

During his stay in the Flemish Jesuit theologate, while working on *Theognostos* he came across the autobiography of his contemporary Nikephoros Blemmydes, written in a highly rhetorical style hard to penetrate. Armed with determination he launched himself to produce a new edition, to replace the old one by Heisenberg, and a translation which would make the text accessible to students. On his return to London in 1983, where he joined the administrative staff of Heythrop College and undertook the editorship of *The*

Heythrop Journal, he discovered that Julian Chrysostomides and Athanasios Angelou of Royal Holloway College, were launching a postgraduate reading seminar to study the text of Blemmydes, unaware that he had just completed a new edition, subsequently published in CCSG, vol. 13 (1984). 'A very happy and fruitful collaboration ensued', he recalled. The University of London Postgraduate Working Seminar on Editing Byzantine Texts has continued its work without interruption to the present, testifying to the legacy of its founders. On completion of the translation of Blemmydes, published in the series *Études et documents*, fasc. 48, *Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense* (1988), at the suggestion of the art historian Christopher Walter, one of the eminent Assumptionist scholars who had helped Father Joe during his doctoral research along with Jean Darrouzès, Albert Failler, and the supervisor of his thesis Jean Gouillard, the seminar undertook to produce a critical edition and annotated translation of a letter on the veneration of the holy images addressed by three of the Eastern Patriarchs to the iconoclast Emperor Theophilus (812-842). Over the next decade, the seminar met on a weekly basis at the Warburg Institute and the Institute of Historical Research of the University of London, initiating MA and research students to the painstaking and rewarding editorial work. Veterans of the seminar include Chrysa Alvanou-Nandris, Elena Angelides, John Davis, Jonathan Harris, Eirene Harvalia-Crook, Katrina Kavan, Maria Kouli, Diana Maynard, Andreas Meitanis, Andreas Pelendrides, Marios Pilavakis and Ruth Webb. The final edited version of the text was read and approved by members of the seminar during a happy and memorable week spent on the pistachio farm of Athanasios Angelou on the island of Aegina in summer 1995, before it was published, together with other related texts, by Pophryogenitus two years later.

In 1989, Father Joseph was appointed Master of Campion Hall, Oxford, where his administrative and pastoral duties to the community of young Jesuits took priority. Nevertheless, he found time to devote himself to translations of texts, this time related to the Society of Jesus, which culminated into a translation of a collection of *The Personal Writings of St Ignatius* which appeared in Penguin Classics (1996). On retiring from Campion Hall (1998) he spent his first ever sabbatical year in the Jesuit theologate in Granada and a small Jesuit house in Cambridge. Accepted at St Edmund's College as Visiting Scholar he continued his work, with the help of Alexander Eaglestone, on the *Memoriale* of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara, a close friend of St Ignatius.

In 1999 he was appointed socius to the novice-master at Manresa in Birmingham, very close to the University of Birmingham, where he was warmly received by the flourishing community of Byzantinists at the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman

and Modern Greek Studies. He treasured his close relationship with colleagues there, who invited him to participate in their ongoing projects including Mary Cunningham, who prepared an online translation of Sylvester Syropoulos' fascinating account of the Byzantine delegation at the Council of Florence (1438-1439), and Ruth Macrides and Dimiter Angelov, who edited the important fourteenth-century text on court procedure by Pseudo-Kodinos, subsequently published by Routledge (2013). Father Joe received an honorary doctorate from the University of Birmingham in 2004. From his days in Birmingham, he cherished his association with the Jesuit Volunteer Communities, which confirmed his faith in today's youth, who still find inspiration in institutional religion. In 2010, he moved back to Campion Hall as Assistant Superior and was later appointed Emeritus Fellow and Librarian. There he continued his translation projects, producing a host of articles on spirituality originally written in Spanish or French.

In 2017, he moved back to London where he spent his last years, first in the London Jesuit Centre in Mount Street and finally at the Corpus Christi Jesuit Community in Boscombe. Until the deterioration of his health in May 2021, he was active, keeping in touch with colleagues, former students and friends, continuing his translations of Ignatian and Jesuit spiritual works, assisting the editorial board of the *The Way* and taking part in the local parish and religious life of the community. He always enjoyed a walk and he made frequent visits to the National Gallery, the Royal Academy and the Wallace Collection.

It was in the latter among his other favourite places where we met for light lunch on a Saturday last March. After sharing fond memories and thoughts on present and future scholarly projects, we toured the beautiful collection. I vividly remember when we stood across Velázquez's *The Lady with a Fan*. 'This happens to be my favourite picture in the Gallery', he said, 'It is its captivating simplicity'. And as Father Joe taught us through his example, there is greatness in simplicity.

In recognition and appreciation of his major contribution to Byzantine studies and for bringing greater understanding between the Greek East and the Latin West, a *Festschrift* was published by Brepols in 2019, under the title *The Literary Legacy of Byzantium: Editions, Translations, and Studies in Honour of Joseph A. Munitiz S.J.*, edited by Bram Roosen and Peter Van Deun in the series

ByzantioS: Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization, vol. 15, which includes a full list of the honorand's publications. In his 'Autobiographical tesserae' that adorns the volume, and on which this tribute is mainly based, Father Joe reflected on his life and work:

I feel that if my life has been of any use, it is due to the publications I have been able to give to the world As the end comes in sight, I realize that books cannot be taken with me, though I am glad to have produced some to leave behind me. There is so much for which I am grateful! Byzantine studies have brought me above all such wonderful friendships. I have constantly met scholars, some of outstanding calibre, who were generous with me, and I can honestly say that, although not so gifted, I have tried to follow their example. People may think that life in a library is very shut in; they may not be aware that libraries with Greek manuscripts are often very far apart and in beautiful sites. My studies have taken me round the world, even to Beijing, thanks to my generous friend, Dr Lap Chuen Tsang (author of a key work on 'the sublime'). Again, my life in Campion Hall and responsibility for its art collection opened my eyes to a world of beauty of which I was woefully ignorant.

To close, the words that come to mind are those I quoted in Birmingham when receiving my honorary degree. They come from the Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins and I feel they apply to my own life as a Jesuit Byzantinist:

These things, these things were here and but the
beholder
Wanting: which two when they once meet,
The heart rears wings, bold and bolder
And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under
his feet.

We offer our gratitude and our prayers to Father Joseph A. Munitiz, S. J. and our deepest condolences to his family, his Jesuit brothers, his devoted carers and his close friends. For some of us his death signals the end of an era. We shall always remember him with profound love, affection, gratitude, respect, and admiration.

A funeral mass for the repose of his soul will take place on Thursday, 4 August 2022 at 2.30pm at Farm Street Church, 114 Mount Street, Mayfair, London W1K 3AH, to be followed by a reception. The mass will also be livestreamed on the Farm Street website: <https://www.farmstreet.org.uk/livestream>. Burial will take place at 11.00am on Friday 5th August at the Merton and Sutton Cemetery, Garth Road, Morden, SM4 4NW.

We pray that God receives his gentle soul in peace and eternal light.

Αίωvία του ή μνήμη !

Charalambos Dendrinos is senior lecturer in Byzantine literature and Greek palaeography, and director of the Hellenic Institute at Royal Holloway, University of London.