



# The Book Reviewer

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**Tattoos on the Heart : The Power of Boundless Compassion** by Gregory Boyle, S. J.

This is a wonderful book, one to cheer the heart in the midst of so much bad news about distant wars and nearby gang wars with murders, drug dealing, etc. Father Gregory—his “clients” call him G—writes in an amusing and light hearted manner about his ministry in East L.A., the Dolores Mission barrio, with the gangs of outcast boys and girls who sell themselves and drugs, and “do” drugs, drifting and fighting, mostly unemployed and homeless. He finds jobs for those who want them, and has founded Home-

boy Industries: Homeboy Bakery; Homeboy Silkscreening; and for girls, the Homegirl Café, “where women with records, young ladies from rival gangs, waitresses with attitude will gladly take your orders.”

Los Angeles County claims 1,100 gangs with nearly 86,000 members. Many of these come to Fr. G when they are ready to “hang up their gloves.”

It is absolutely spell-binding to feel the amount of empathy and compassion it takes to minister to these lost children,

as only Jesus and those with His help can do. The image of tattoos on the heart is a reminder of the biblical “circumcision of the heart”, as against the literal rite of circumcision. Fr. G offers these young people the opportunity to remove their tattoos, in an effort to make them employable, and less outcast in a larger society which is hostile to gangs. His main goal is to make these souls, who feel useless and worthless, to feel worthwhile, and that they, too, are Somebody.

*Reviewed by Clare Dinno*



*Fr. Gregory Boyle will be speaking at Resurrection Church in Aptos on April 8 at 7:00 pm (book-signing beforehand at 6 pm) and on April 9 at 1:00 pm, followed by a group discussion about how to assist gang-involved youth in our communities.*

**After this Life** by Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R. (Catholicism/Catechesis)

*After This Life: What Catholics Believe About What Happens Next* is a relatively short book but presents the reader with an amazing amount of information. While dealing with the issue of mortality, Fr. Groeschel manages to explain how consoling and uplifting the truths surrounding death, judgment, Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven really are.

During his many years of counseling, Fr. Groeschel became aware of people’s fear and anxiety when confronted

with the subject of mortality and what happens after death. He also realizes that we are presently living in a death-denying society and people can be negatively influenced by this attitude.

Fr. Groeschel often quotes St. Augustine’s beliefs and writings when explaining and discussing the “five mysteries” – death, judgment, Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Each of the mysteries is addressed in separate chapters. He realizes that these concepts are diffi-

cult to understand and he intends in this book to address what we think and feel about them, as we make our way in life toward them. Fr. Groeschel offers us the opportunity to think clearly about our death in order to live fully in God’s grace today.

Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R. is an internationally known lecturer and retreat master. He is also the author of many popular books.

*Reviewed by Pat Dalcher*



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## Clowns of God by Morris West (Fiction)

*The Clowns of God* is the second book in a Vatican Trilogy written by Morris West. The film version of the first book, *The Shoes of the Fisherman*, was reviewed in December.

The setting of *The Clowns of God* is during the late twentieth century, when the U.S. and Russia were perilously close to an all-out nuclear war. There had been a crop failure in Russia, and international terrorist groups were a significant threat for Western Europe and the United States.

The main narrative of the novel revolves around Jean-Marie Barette, the fictionalized Pope during this period of time. While serving as Pope, Jean-Marie experienced a divine vision that the world would soon be destroyed by

war. When he related his vision to others in the Vatican, he encountered strong disbelief. The Vatican hierarchy feared that he was mentally ill, and as a result, he was coerced into resigning his position as Pope and was retired to a monastery. All of this happened two days before his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Jean-Marie did not remain at the monastery for a long period of time. After leaving the monastery, he began using his network of friends and powerful acquaintances around the world to try to stop what he believed was the coming of a nuclear Armageddon. This course of action placed him and his friends in personal danger.

The book is superbly written and a true page-turner.

Morris usually chooses to write about what he is familiar with, and therein lies his strength. His books are researched and developed to the point of making the characters and situations believable. The book will be especially enjoyed by anyone interested in philosophical and spiritual ideas.

Morris West was born in Melbourne in 1916. He was a member of the Christian Brothers but left the order after twelve years. For a while, he remained in Melbourne and worked for radio. He left Australia in 1945 to further his career as a writer. In 1980, he returned and wrote over 30 novels and plays. Several of his novels were converted to film. He died in 1999, while working at his desk.

Reviewed by Pat Dalcher

## Heightened Consciousness by David Granfield (Spirituality)

The premise of this excellent book is that everyone has an innate desire for God and for heightened consciousness. This assumption includes the idea that mysticism is not just for a special few saintly individuals, but for everyone; we are all *capax dei*—capable of knowing God. However, this capability requires the help of the Holy Spirit, and our own cooperation with the Holy Spirit. We know from revelation, and from our own experience, that the Holy Spirit is always present and willing

to come to our assistance, but we, due to many obstacles of genetic disposition, or accidents of environment and events, are not always open to grace. Our openness and understanding is mediated through our physical being, and differentiated by our individuality. Therefore, our capacity for loving attention to God's grace differs from one to another. Everything depends on God, and upon our willingness to love and to receive love.

Fr. Granfield, a Benedictine monk, describes various katephatic (experiencing God through nature and other sensory means) and apophatic (experiencing God through the deprivation of the senses, in silence, fasting, etc.) techniques, but always being led by grace:

*"Leave God to work in you. Let Him do it and do not be upset over whether He is working with nature or above nature, for nature and grace are both His."*

Reviewed by Clare Dinno