

Dr. Eugene Carl Bianchi (Gene), beloved husband, friend to many, and theologian died peacefully at home in Athens, Georgia on Sunday, December 18, 2022, at the age of 92. Gene was a gentle, passionate scholar and prolific author who cared equally about our environment as he did about multiple dimensions of spirituality. He touched the hearts and minds of people around the world. He is survived by his wife Margaret Herrman, his nieces Gioia Williams and Susan Fowler, as well as other nieces and grand nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his brother, George Roy Bianchi.

Gene was born in Oakland, CA on May 05, 1930, the son of Natale and Catherine Bianchi. He completed his B.A. and M.A. (cum laude) from Gonzaga University, then his Licentiate in Sacred Theology (cum laude) from Catholic University of Louvain and was ordained a Jesuit. He earned a PhD from Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in 1966. Gene served as a Jesuit of the California Province until 1969 when he resigned to write about institutional reform for most of the rest of his life. He published, lectured and lead hundreds of workshops on Christian theology, on the spirituality of aging, as well as trans-traditional and ecological spirituality.

Gene's teaching career began in 1955 at St. Ignatius High School, San Francisco, CA, continued at the University of Santa Clara, Santa Clara, CA, as an assistant professor of theology and director of Center for the Study of Contemporary Values. He joined the faculty of Emory University's Department of Religion (1966) and retired as an Emeritus Professor in 2008. When not fulfilling his obligations at Emory; he taught at University of San Francisco; Stanford University; California State University, Sacramento, and John Cabot University in Rome, Italy. A legacy, available to all, exists in the 19 published books he authored, co-authored, or served as one of several authors. These writings document many facets of his multi-part journey.

He authored *John XXIII and American Protestants* (1968); *American Catholic Exodus* (1968); *Why Priests Leave* (1969); *Reconciliation: The Function of the Church* (1969); *A Democratic Catholic Church* (1992); *The Religious Experience of Revolutionaries* (1972); *From Machismo to Mutuality* (1976); and *Passionate Uncertainty: Inside the American Jesuits* (2002). These books explore the structural dynamics and explicit as well as implicit values of the Church and Christianity with an eye to expanding awareness as well as potential reforms.

He wrote or contributed to four books about aging: *Aging as a Spiritual Journey* (1982), *On Growing Older: A Personal Guide to Life after Thirty-Five* (1985), and *Elder Wisdom: Crafting Your Own Elderhood* (1994), and *Selving: Linking Work to Spirituality* (2000). In these books, Gene invited readers to embrace aging unrestrained by negative cultural stereotypes. Gene's memoir: *Taking a Long Road Home* (2010), traces a journey from his humble Italian roots to a professional life where he was described as a scholar, teacher, writer, poet, and all-round great guy by his colleagues. This was underscored by Gene's conversations with luminaries at Emory, including President Jimmy Carter, HH the 14th Dalai Lama, and Desmond Tutu.

In later retirement, Gene broke the mold by publishing two novels: *The Bishop of San Francisco* (2005) and *The Children's Crusade* (2009). His most personal voice resonates in his four books of poetry: *Ear to the Ground* (2013), *Chewing Down My Barn* (2014), *The Hum of It All* (2019), and *Interbeing* (2021).

Part of Gene's spirituality was to serve others. He supported *America* magazine in New York, NY (1963-66) as an assistant editor. He also contributed about forty articles and many reviews to periodicals, including *America*, *Catholic World*, *Church History*, *Commonweal*, *Ecumenist*,

National Catholic Reporter, and Incunable (Madrid). He was the founding director of the Emeritus College at Emory University and was awarded the Distinguished Emeritus Award (2005). He helped found the Federation of Christian Ministries, which awarded him their Anthony Soto award (2018) because of his activist role championing civil rights as well as the rights of women. He presided over the Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education (2003-2006) and was a member of American Society of Church History, American Academy of Religion, Religious Education Association, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.

In his own words, Gene wrote: *"A primary task for older people is to divest themselves of reminiscing rather than creating new memories.*

Growth through diminishment, based on a willingness to encounter the inner demons of old age with faith, can lead to authentic joy even amid hardships. Oftentimes this means that we must learn to adjust as obstacles and diminishment become evident. It's good to think of God as our dancing partner as we improvise the new steps of growing older."

Memorial services are planned for this spring in Athens and Oakland. Please look for announcements. For anyone wishing to honor Gene, and in lieu of flowers, Gene would cherish donations to one of these three funds:

the Athens Area Community Foundation to support small nonprofits that help address local poverty. Atten: Sarah McKinney, President, PO Box 1543, Athens, Georgia 30603-1543

Emory University's

- Emeritus College Bianchi-Bugge Award to support projects that promote the public good. Atten Ann Rogers, Director, 825 Houston Mill Road, NE, Ste. 232, Atlanta, Georgia 30329
- Department of Religion's Eugene Bianchi Prize for an undergraduate religion major who demonstrates outstanding service to the community. To give, please follow the link. <https://together.emory.edu/bianchi>