

24 May

Fr BERTOLD BECK

21 November 1919 – 24 May 2004



Born in Breslau, Germany, in 1919, Bertold Beck was educated in St Matthias State High School there. He entered the Society of Jesus on 20 April 1938 in Mitteltesse. In 1940, he was drafted into the Air Force as a medic but was released the following year due to Hitler's order to remove all Jesuits from the armed forces. So he went back to philosophy at Pullach undisturbed until the end of the war when he was caught up in the turmoil.

He continued his studies and was ordained in 1948 and went on to do a doctorate under Karl Rahner on the *Consciousness of Grace*. He then tried to get a licence to teach in East Germany but was turned down by the Communist authorities. He went to New Mexico for a short while before moving to Santo Domingo. He became friends with the First Secretary of the embassy there, Klaus von Amsberg, who later married the Dutch Queen, and it seems Bertold developed a penchant for the world of the aristocracy. But he found the climate hard and moved to Chicago but then soon moved back to South America to Sao Paulo and San Salvador.

It was then, 1968, when he responded to a call to teach exegesis at Chishawasha Seminary. He was also known, while there for baking bread and brewing beer! But after four years he had to move on as, in his own words, the rector (who would have been John Berrell) only wanted English and Irish staff! Bertold moved to South Africa where he taught at Hammanskraal seminary until the growingly assertive students held a strike against white teachers. He went to Paraguay for a while before settling back in Germany at St Georgen, near Frankfurt, where he helped with languages for which he had a passion. He could speak or read around twelve! One issue that made him restless, especially in Latin America, was the lack of books in the libraries. As a result, he collected a great number in his time. But a succession of illnesses was catching up with him and in 2000 he retired to a nursing home in Münster. His patience was tried there and, seemingly, that of his carers! He was valued by his friends and relatives for his cheerfulness and quiet humour.