

## Setting the Record Straight:

### How Did Father Benedict Groeschel Really Feel About Dr. Bill Thetford?

By Scott Perry

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Randall Sullivan is an accomplished journalist, but is he a journalist on a mission? As the author of the book, "The Miracle Detective: An Investigation of Holy Visions," he attempts to present an objective, yet personal look at the Catholic process of miracle-certification, but at certain points in the book one begins to wonder where objectivity might leave off, and where personal preferences might begin. In the book, Sullivan at times makes it clear that he has strong Catholic leanings by describing for example, how the progressively growing skepticism of a certain priest regarding a certain controversial "miracle" appears to him exactly as "the progress of a disease". Unfortunately the line between objectivity and subjectivity in Sullivan's book begins to blur, and in this blurred and grey area, perhaps one or two points of fact may have gotten blurred as well. At least one of these points is Sullivan's recounting of Father Benedict Groeschel's impression of one Dr. William Thetford. Here Sullivan appears to be somewhat confused and perhaps inaccurate, even according to his own source, Father Groeschel himself.

Father Groeschel is an outspoken celebrity of sorts, championing the causes of both the poor and of the Catholic faith, having written numerous articles and books and having appeared on several TV and radio broadcasts. Dr. Thetford was a psychologist in the 1960's and 70's who was involved in the authorship of a controversial book, also about miracles, called "A Course in Miracles". Some have called his book, "THE New Age Bible". Others have called it, "The most dangerous (book) ever published". Thetford's book about miracles has sold into the millions.

As for myself, I have followed the writings of both Groeschel and Thetford over the years, and I feel I have a deep respect for both of these gentlemen. After recently reading Sullivan's quote of Groeschel, where Groeschel supposedly described Thetford as, "*the most sinister person I ever met*", I felt I had to get to the bottom of this seemingly odd quote. I wanted to see for myself whether or not this humble Franciscan priest, who has dedicated his life to helping the poor and other such things, might have actually described one of his former colleagues from the psych department at Columbia University in such a categorically damning way. Up until reading this quote, it had been my assumption that Groeschel and Thetford had been friends of sorts, without any such antipathy between them.

So, I took it upon myself to try to first locate and then contact Father Groeschel, to find out for myself what the bottom line was on this story. Such a judgmental statement supposedly made by Father Groeschel! It just seemed to be a bit too out-of-context for me to easily swallow. As I set out to find my answer, I bore in mind the fact that I was dealing with events from nearly 50 years ago. So many years after the fact, I had no idea if Father Groeschel might even still be with us. Perhaps the radio broadcasts and videos I had heard and seen of him were all old reruns. Fortunately for both myself and for Father Groeschel, as it turns out, he's still very much with us. Although now already in his late 70's, he is still answering questions, and I'm happy to report, *still going strong too!* Perhaps there's more to this serving-the-poor-business than meets the eye, perhaps.... perhaps....

At any rate, here is what Father Groeschel had to say about the supposed quote: “I respect Mr. Sullivan, and I know he was only trying to do good, however I was *appalled* when I read his misquote of myself, supposedly describing William Thetford as ‘*the most sinister person I ever met!*’ Thetford was a ‘good soul’ and a friend of mine. He was perhaps a bit *misguided* in his views of the “Course in Miracles” book, but certainly not a ‘sinister person’. Personally I see his Miracles book as a poorly understood mixture of Christian Science and Catholicism. Now the manner in which Thetford was employed by the CIA for years without telling his friends or his primary employer, may have placed him in an apparently sinister position, but I did *not* feel that it caused my friend Bill to be *sinister* himself. Perhaps it was this CIA business that caused Mr. Sullivan to misquote me. I can’t say. I’m glad someone’s finally contacted me about this so that maybe somehow this record might be set straight.”

Coincidentally enough, Thetford’s miracles-book happens to take a few pot-shots at a few Catholic beliefs, while it selectively supports many others. Meanwhile Sullivan’s own miracles-book takes a uniformly antagonistic view of Thetford and his book. Sullivan’s book continues on, going into great length and detail regarding the many problems that Groeschel has with Thetford’s book. Who knows if Sullivan’s misquote here may have been the result of a mere “slip of the pen,” or could it have been another example of a sort of instinctive or reflexive response on Sullivan’s part towards yet another point of view that he felt might be at some odds to his own Catholic belief system? Thus in reviewing Sullivan’s portrayals of both Thetford and of Thetford’s “miracles-book,” one begins to find it hard to know where Sullivan’s objective journalism may have left off and where his personal opinions may have begun to filter in.

Now wouldn’t the world be a better place if all journalists wrote as Walter Cronkite once said they should, keeping “objective journalism and an opinion column about as far apart as the distance between the Bible and a Playboy magazine.” Thank you Father Groeschel for clarifying your impressions of Bill Thetford with me today. You seem to me to be a great credit to the Catholic faith. Perhaps now the “record can be set straight” on this one.

Note: The paragraph above containing the direct quote from Father Groeschel has been personally reviewed and approved by Father Benedict Groeschel prior to publication by Fearless Books.