

## ***OCCASIONAL SERMONS AND PAPERS***

### ***A. Sermon preached by Dr T. Boland on the Centenary of Archbishop Duhig's priestly ordination, September 1996, at St Stephen's Cathedral***

19-9-96

'How marvellous are the designs of Divine Providence: God has literally taken a poor boy from the land and placed him among the most important of his people'.

These are the words of St John Bosco about his own ordination to the priesthood. They might well have been spoken by James Duhig on 19 September 1896, when he was ordained to the priesthood in the Basilica of St John Lateran in Rome. The Lateran had seen major events in the life of the Church since the time of the Emperor Constantine to John XXIII's convocation of the Second Vatican Council in 1960. The ordination of this lonely Irish-Australian young man may not rank with these events for the Universal Church; but it was an augury of greatness for James Duhig and for the Church of Queensland which he came to incarnate.

Like St John Bosco he was a poor farmer's son, early deprived of the father's care; the hard-working member of a hard-working family, whose sacrifices made possible his difficult path to the priesthood. From there, native talent, natural charm and the grace of God led to an episcopate of sixty years in Queensland, fifty in Brisbane.

There were many things for which he was famous. People called him 'James the Builder', and build he did, day in and day out, year in and year out - till Brisbane became studded with his churches, schools institutions of charity and learning. Yet his great talent was as a preacher, an art he taught himself carefully, zealously, successfully. If he were addressing you today, it would not be from this lectern. Before the liturgical changes of Vatican II, he climbed heavily, dangerously into the high pulpit, dominant dais over there - that he made into the most distinguished pulpit in Australia.

From there he was invited all over Australia - and beyond - to enrich with his eloquence great occasions of the day. His distinctive voice recorded much of the history of Australia and those who heard him never forgot his words. People vied with each other to imitate the unique timbre of his speech. It was not Irish; it was

not simply Australian; it was Duhig; and it gave unique significance to the simple wisdom of what he said.

Yet, it was not the great occasions that were the principal field for the seed of the Word; nor was it the prophetic, oracular pronouncements he uttered on innumerable occasions about the city and State he loved. His greatest use of his talent was in proclaiming the Gospel. This is a discovery that surprised me as I researched his life. Sunday by Sunday he preached here on the Gospel. We think that after Vatican II we re-invented the ancient homily. James Duhig was of an earlier age and he opened the Gospel to his hearers with a simplicity that matched his eloquence. He knew the scriptures of both testaments better than his critics who know the principles of interpretation better; but not the texts, the words, the Word. Jesus Christ spoke through him.

All through Queensland one found people who heard him. They travelled by tram from distant suburbs to hear him; but it went further than this cathedral and this city. He was always alert to try new techniques, and so he became the first great radio preacher. The medium carried his voice far beyond Brisbane, and in provincial towns, distant farms, on, at least one occasion, in a mining camp, the Gospel came through the ether on his voice.

The late Monsignor John English knew him better than most. His own intellectual brilliance far outshone that of his archbishop. His own great eloquence was of a classical style, more grand than that of Duhig. But he listened carefully to his archbishop when he spoke. He made affectionate jokes about the man, but he recognised the God-given talent. Recently the secretary of the Brisbane Catholic Historical Society, Mr Paul Martin, reminded us that Monsignor English once styled Archbishop Duhig, the 'Watchman of the Gospel' for Brisbane.

The prophet Ezekiel was told to be the watchman of Israel. He scanned the horizon for any threat to the people entrusted to his care. He sounded the warning while danger was still far off. James Duhig, under the new law of the Gospel, stood on the spiritual ramparts of the new Israel, and he discerned the good and the ill in our community. He sounded the hours of day and night to his people.

He left us a noble heritage. He often reflected on how we would treat it. His voice still re-echoes from these walls. It tells us to be alert, to be loyal, to be men and women of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which he preached.

*The Society expresses its appreciation to Fr Clement Hodge, Administrator of St Stephen's Cathedral for organising this celebration and for his support of the Society's activities as Administrator of the Cathedral.*

## **B Archbishop Patrick Mary O'Donnell**

Dr Tom Boland 2-2-97

Today's scripture is about God's House. This is God's House, and we reverence it as such. Here we meet God. We talk to Him and He talks to us. We can converse anywhere, but he assigns special places to meet, particularly for the engagements where Jesus Christ has for us His assignations where we meet Him in His sacraments. Over the door of a church I knew as a child, were written the words: 'Awe-inspiring is this place. It is the House of God and the Gate of Heaven'. When Jewish eldest boys were born, their parents presented them to God in His Temple. So Joseph and Mary got out their travelling gear and journeyed to Jerusalem to present Jesus to His - and our- Father.

They might well have argued, as some do today, that they did not need a troublesome trip to a fixed place to present Him to God. God is everywhere, after all. We can worship Him under His expanding sky. And they already knew that their boy was a special gift from God. He was God's already. But they did not. They knew that the Temple was God's house, where God's work is properly done. They worshipped where God called them.

We remember especially here today one who worshipped - and led in worship - in this temple for many years. He was Patrick Mary O'Donnell, Archbishop of Pelusium and Coadjutor Archbishop of Brisbane 1949-1965; then Archbishop of Brisbane 1965-1973. In his years as coadjutor he had the pastoral care of St Patrick's, the Valley, and he regularly celebrated the Eucharist in this church. His personality filled its space. The Eucharist, the Holy Mass as he called it, filled his life. He approached it, grave, reverent, worshipful, and he communicated that spirit to others. It is right that we remember him here today.

He was born just one hundred years ago today, in Ireland at Fetard, Co. Tipperary, the youngest of the sixteen children of Thomas O'Donnell and Johanna Sheehan. He never lost his Irish intonation, and his background gave him many ties to the land he left early in God's service. He came to love Australia, and after his retirement he was encouraged to return to Fetard. Though he loved to visit there, he decided to remain in Australia. His pastoral heart was inseparable from the places where he had served. His roots were in Ireland but his branches were in Australia.

Early in life he became aware of a vocation to the priesthood. He saw in it the sacred role of the sacramental link between Christ and His people. This too, he regarded with awe. Anyone who saw him confer the sacrament of ordination knew that. He communicated the sense of mystery, whereby Christ manifested His presence to His people in places, in rites, in persons. He was quite unassuming about his own person. He would refer to himself in all kinds of company as 'Pat', but he revered the function that was his.

He studied at the Urban College of Propaganda Fide in Rome, where he developed an understanding of the universal Church. A fellow student was Norman Thomas Gilroy, with whom as Cardinal Gilroy he shared the ministry for Australia. He was ordained priest in the Basilica of St John Lateran on 15 April 1922. Anyone who saw the recent film, 'Michael Collins', will know that 1922 was a most distressful year for Ireland. Patrick O'Donnell returned to his homeland at its most distressful. He was present in Dublin at the funeral of Arthur Griffiths, the President of the Free State. He asked a friend, who was the tall handsome, distinguished-looking prelate talking to Michael Collins. He was told it was an Australian Archbishop called James Duhig. O'Donnell was in Dublin on his way to Australia, but he had no notion how closely his life would be tied to that of James Duhig.

He was in fact going to the diocese of Sale in eastern Victoria, then a country diocese, little stirred by the great events of the day. He served in the cathedral as curate and later as Administrator, and in the country parishes of Leongatha and Warragul. For eight years he was Vicar General before he came to Brisbane in 1949. In the country parishes with their slower rhythms, he found time to study Canon Law. Though without a doctorate in the subject, he qualified himself for his position by his own labour.

Another more directly pastoral interest he developed. He was always a noted raconteur. Few could extract the last degree of humour from a situation so well as Patrick Mary O'Donnell. His stories ran through English, Italian and Latin. He never lost his love for Italy or the Italians, nor his relish for the intricacies of their language and their customs. His stories, Australian, Irish or Italian, ranged over all types, all situations from the farm to the Vatican. One thing only they lacked: there was no touch of malice in them. His humour was a love humour. He noticed people, he empathised with them, he had that compassion the author of the Letter to the Hebrews said was the necessary quality even of the great High Priest. It was a manifestation of his pastoral care.

In Brisbane he was very much under the shadow of Archbishop Duhig. To his great credit he never resented this but did his share of the pastoral care assigned to him. He found what he could do to serve the people of Australia. Especially he engaged in the mission of migration. With the assistance of Father Tom Carroll, here with us today, he negotiated with governments, arranged pastoral support and was available to newcomers in this strange land. His love for Italians was extended to many other nationalities, and not just in Brisbane.

The greatest event in his episcopate was to be present at the Second Vatican Council 1962-65. Like many of the participants he went to Rome with a narrow, canonical view of its purpose; but like his peers he was caught up in the mighty outpouring of the Spirit, the overwhelming tide of pastoral concern. He understood that the Church was changing. In fact, he feared what he understood. To my mind his greatest service to the Church was in coping with his fears. He was able to initiate - or allow others to initiate - the great landslide of liturgical adaptation and the increased participation of the laity in the Church. Always a good chairman, he presided over the tumultuous sixties and early seventies, able to discern the movements of the Spirit in all that clamour.

When he was seventy-five in 1972 he was able to tender his resignation, as Church regulations now required, with no hesitation. He had no illusions about his own importance. He was happy to retire to his historic home in Hendra, Glengariff, and in the old phrase, make his soul ready to meet his God. Still genial, hospitable, interested in everything, he followed the progress of the Council in the Church. He waited patiently for God's call and answered quietly when it came 2 November 1980. Pope Paul VI wrote to him when he retired: 'You have been a man of dignity and kindness. You have been unshakeable in faith, calm in prosperity, firm and active in adversity.' It was a well-merited tribute.

We do well to remember Patrick Mary O'Donnell here at the altar. Here he regularly met his Lord. With all the faithful departed he worships with us still. He left us an example of rock-solid faith, of confident hope in difficulty, of Christian care for all. It is now over thirty years since the great Council he attended, closed its sessions. We are in a kind of purgatorial time that follows always the belated efforts to assimilate sudden and sweeping change. He foresaw it all but remained steadfast, confident. We should draw confidence from his memory.

## C. *All Hallows Missionary College Dublin*

### *The Sesqui-Centenary of the Arrival of The First Ordinands in Australia, 1997*

Paul Martin 5-12-97

This year marks the sesquicentenary of the arrival of the first priests ordained from All Hallows College, Dublin, to Australia. The College was founded in 1842; the first All Hallows priests to serve in the Brisbane diocese, arrived during the episcopate of James Quinn.

Previously in our 'Proceedings' (Feb. 1995), we have noted the person of John English, scholar, orator and pastor, the centenary of whose birth fell in June of this year. He is perhaps the most distinguished of the All Hallows graduates who have served in this diocese.

The period of their service was all but closed by 1962, the time of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. John English died at Clayfield in April 1968; his contemporary in the All Hallows ordination class of 1922, Denis O'Rourke, died at Hamilton in July 1975. I can recall only one All Hallows graduate who came to Brisbane since 1960 and still remains here. There are many other worthy All Hallows priests, such as Monsignor David Dee (d. 1964), Fr David Hawe of the Rockhampton diocese, but for many years a philosopher at Banyo Seminary (d. 1976) and the colourful James McDermot of the 1921 class. However, let us focus on two All Hallows graduates who served in the parish of Hamilton.

I knew Denis O'Rourke, third parish priest of Hamilton, reasonably well. In answer to my enquiries about theology he would not infrequently quote verbatim from Latin manuals of theology he had learnt (by memory) in the halls of All Hallows forty years earlier. In later life his reading matter was largely devotional and concerned priestly spirituality in the works of writers such as the Abbot Marmion OSB and the Abbot Boylan OCSO. He spent several hours each day in prayer. Speaking of his predecessor, and fellow All Hallows man, Fr Michael Stapleton, the second pastor of Hamilton, the centenary of whose ordination fell in June of this year, O'Rourke told me, 'He gave me a great love of the Mass.'

He believed firmly that 'priests must say their prayers' and that they should do 'what the Church wants' and not follow their own theological nostrums. (No doubt he was formed in this attitude at Mt Melleray Cistercian Abbey, which he attended prior to going to All Hallows in 1918.)

Denis spoke to me about the loneliness and isolation of his life far from Ireland, his 'home'. The priest brother had died prematurely in Brisbane early in the 1930s - he had a brother now retired, in the archdiocese of Sydney (Dermot of Strathfield), but it was not until 1958-59 that he had a trip 'home' - this was to be the first of three such trips for him over forty years - Ireland was 'home'.

In this regard his short-term classmate of All Hallows, Patrick Mary O'Donnell, fared much better making approximately thirteen visits 'home' between 1947-77, some of which were connected with official business, such as his attendance at the four sessions of the Second Vatican council.

How typical are John English and Denis O'Rourke of those clerics who suffered the isolation of this diocese and country for the sake of the Gospel! In recalling this anniversary as 1997 class, I hope that they and their work will be a focus for further consideration in the rich history of this diocese.

Paul Martin is a graduate of the University of Queensland, McAuley College and the Brisbane College of Theology. A student of history and humanities he continues to read in these areas at the U. of Q. and the Brisbane College of Theology.