

HEAVEN, WHERE DWELL THE SAINTS

A Personal Reflection

Unitrinoque Domino
Sit sempiterna gloria,
Qui vitam sine termino
Nobis donet in patria.

On Wednesday, 19th August 2009, from St Michael's parish church in the Sydney suburb of Lane Cove, we buried Marie Flower O'Halloran, relict of prominent Sydney solicitor, Edmund Alfred O'Halloran (Ted O'Halloran Snr) who had died in September 2005. The celebrant at her Requiem Mass was Fr Frank Callanan S.M. and the sermon he preached was almost identical with a talk he had given to young people one Friday evening some 45 years previously. Its subject was *Heaven*.

*

*

My friendship with Marie's son, Ted Jnr (Edmund Anthony O'Halloran), was one of those spontaneous things that occur where two people of like minds meet. In August 1960 my father had brought his large family from Adelaide, South Australia, to Sydney, New South Wales, and at the commencement of the third term of that year I was enrolled at St Aloysius College, Milson's Point, for my penultimate year of secondary schooling. Ted had been at the school from his earliest years. By some act of providence, he and I found ourselves sharing the same free period in the same empty classroom. Though I was supposed to be revising French and he, I think, Latin, we were soon engaged in discussion on the topics that enthralled us, the Second World War and the planes of the Royal Air Force. I left the school at the end of 1961 and we did not meet again for twelve months or so when, again by happy accident, we found ourselves with cars at Loreto Convent, Kirribilli, to transport our respective sisters home. I was invited to the family home in Morven Gardens, Greenwich, and the O'Halloran household became thereafter for me a place of frequent recourse, and Marie an enduring influence.

From her I learned of the great contribution to Catholic thought of the English Dominican, Fr Gerald Vann; of the importance of the Roman senator and philosopher, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boetthius, forerunner of a great line of Catholic laymen; and of his illustrious successor, the English martyr, St Thomas More. In the O'Halloran lounge room I first heard the *Eroica* and perceived the majesty of Beethoven as a composer.

After her marriage, with her new husband overseas with the RAAF, Marie had studied at the *Aquinas Academy* with the former head of the Marist Seminary, Fr Austin Woodbury S.M. The Doc, as he was universally known, had taken doctorates in philosophy and theology from Rome's Angelicum University under the redoubtable Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange O.P. In 1943 he had persuaded the Marist Order to establish an institution to teach St Thomas's philosophy to the Catholic laity, and the *Aquinas Academy* in Gloucester Street behind St Patrick's, Church Hill,

was the result. It was inevitable that young Ted should follow in his mother's footsteps when after leaving school he commenced studies at the Sydney University Law School. I had languished as a clerk in a bank for almost two years, and wasted a year studying economics, before Ted's father prevailed upon me also to study Law. Ted pressed me to join him at the *Academy*.

When I look back on those days in the early 1960s I wonder how we managed to fit so much into our waking hours. We would attend lectures from 8.00 am most weekday mornings in the Law School in Phillip Street before heading off to work, he as law clerk at his father's firm of solicitors, Freehill Hollingdale and Page, I as a clerk with the MLC Assurance Co. We would finish work at about 3.50 pm and return to the Law School for more lectures. When these were complete we would rush across town to the *Academy* for two hours of philosophy, fitting in as best we could some sort of evening repast. This course we followed every term for some four years. The Doc and the teachers formed under his influence, Dr H. G. Pearce, John Ziegler and Geoff Deegan, provided what was the greatest influence upon us after the gift of the Catholic faith, a grasp of the metaphysics and of the mind of St Thomas.

A young Frank Callanan had studied at the Academy on his return from World War II, joined the Marist Fathers and in due course was ordained. Fr Frank was a frequent visitor to the O'Halloran household and persuaded Ted to organise a discussion group for young people who had left school to discuss the great issues of philosophy and theology at the Hunter's Hill home of the Catholic businessman and entrepreneur, Ted Beck.¹ I assisted him each week in urging our peers to attend the Beck home of a Friday evening; and many were the young people who attended to hear St Thomas's teachings expounded, and debate the great issues that will ever confront the human mind.

The first of these meetings was memorable. Fr Frank drew to our attention that the most crucial of the four causes was the *final* cause which causes by being desired. That which is last in execution, the achievement of the end, must yet be first in the agent's intention. Therefore, we should consider first the end towards which all our endeavours should tend—*heaven*. He then recited from memory the prayer in which St Thomas summarises all that we may hope for in the next life.

O God in whom is all consolation, who doth discern in us nothing that is not thine own gift, grant me, when the term of this life is reached,—
the knowledge of the first truth,
the enjoyment of your Divine Majesty.
Give to my body, O Most Generous Giver of rewards—
the beauty of clarity,
the swiftness of agility,
the aptness of subtlety, and

¹ It was from a chance remark of this unusual man—that Hilaire Belloc's essay "On the Mowing of a Field" was the finest essay in the English language—that I owe my realisation of the importance of Belloc to Catholicism.

the strength of impassibility.
Add to these—
the affluence of riches,
the influence of delights,
the confluence of all good things;
that so I may rejoice—
above in your consolations,
below in the pleasantness of the place,
within me in the glory of soul and body,
and about me in the pleasant company of angels and of men.

With you, O Most Merciful Father, may my mind discover the treasures of wisdom,
my desires the winning of all desirable things, my efforts the praise of triumph;
where with you is—
the escaping of all dangers,
the distinction of mansions,
the concord of wills;
where are found—
the amenity of spring,
the lucidity of summer,
the richness of autumn,
and the quiet silence of winter.

Grant me Lord God, life without death, joy without sorrow, where reign
supreme freedom,
free security,
secure tranquility,
tranquil bliss,
blissful eternity,
eternal beatitude,
the vision and praising of Truth yourself, O God. Amen.

That end dominated the thoughts and actions of the many who attended. It moved both Ted and I to try the religious life, he with the Marist Fathers, I with the Dominicans. In this we followed the Callanan advice on the issue of vocation: one should start at the top and work down. We both decided, however, that religious life was not for us and duly graduated and went on to practise as lawyers. Ted married and his wife, Diana, as well as producing three children, studied for and graduated in Medicine.

Sailing had always been a passion of mine and in due course I persuaded Ted of its merits. Later in our lives we sailed dinghies together and, in company with others, cruised the enclosed waters around Sydney when opportunity presented.

In 1988 I attended the rooms of a radiologist for a sound wave scan to determine the aetiology of an inherited heart murmur. A week or so later, Ted rang me to say that he had visited the same specialist, and advised that he would require open heart surgery to correct a mitral valve deficiency within twelve months. It was not to be.

Suddenly, in July the following year, at Mass, he collapsed and died. It was his 45th birthday.

In the remarks she made prior to Marie's requiem Mass, Ted's sister, Anne Grey, told how close Ted had been to his mother, and how deeply his death had affected her.

*

*

We live in a deathly age, an age whose received wisdom it is that there is no God, and that religious believers, and particularly, Catholics, live in a fog of self-deception.² It is an age whose votaries are engaged in a systematic denial of reality, the reality that they are both contingent and dependent. Their insouciance over these great issues resembles nothing so much as that of the inmates of an insane asylum. The logical end of the atheist is suicide: it is no accident that it is the logical end also of the madman.³

But those who in live the real world recognise that they are the beneficiaries of an immense, indeed an infinite, gift. They are at one with the great pianist, Arthur Rubinstein, who even at the age of 90 years could on waking each morning give thanks for his life. But the ultimate realists are they who accept with Cardinal Manning that—

“it is a violation of reason not to believe in the existence of God... that it is a violation of our moral sense not to believe that God has made himself known to man... that the revelation he has given is Christianity; and... that Christianity is Catholicism...”⁴

As Hilaire Belloc lay dying in a room in a Catholic nursing home in Guildford, England, in July 1953, the author John Morton went with Belloc's daughter, Eleanor, and her husband, Reginald Jebb, to benediction in the chapel above. He wrote—

“[W]hen the nuns sang:

*Qui vitam sine termino
Nobis donet in patria.*

I recalled how [Belloc] once wrote that he believed those words not only with all the strength of his emotion but with all the power of his intellect. Always he had returned, in his writing and his talk, to that theme of coming out of exile into our native land.”⁵

Heaven is the end God intends for us; this is why, on the Solemnity of *All Saints*, Holy Mother Church puts before the faithful these words of St Paul—

² Why the world should, in the space of just forty years, have abandoned belief in God and the Son He sent to redeem mankind and have embraced the insanity of atheism I have dealt with elsewhere. Cf. “The Trouble with *Dignitatis Humanae*— III The Devastation in Its Train”, at http://www.superflumina.org/dignitatis_humanae_3.html

³ Cf. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, London, 1908, [The Bodley Head] chapters II and III; my copy, Fontana, 1963, pp. 14-44.

⁴ Henry Edward Cardinal Manning, “The Temporal Mission of the Holy Spirit”, quoted in *Manning and Chesterton*, Sheridan Gilley, The Chesterton Review, vol. xiii, p. 494.

⁵ J. B. Morton, *Hilaire Belloc, A Memoir*, London, 1955, p. 180.

“What you have come to is Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem where the millions of angels have gathered for the festival with the whole Church in which everyone is a ‘first-born son’ and a citizen of heaven. You have come to God Himself, the Supreme Judge, and been placed with the spirits of the saints who have been made perfect; and to Jesus the Mediator who brings a new covenant and a blood for purification which pleads more insistently than that of Abel.”⁶

Our entry into heaven will be like coming home.

*

*

We raised the awning in the Easter rain
And launched our little boat upon the tide;
We motored for we had no heart to ride
The weather rail, or curb a flogging main’
On such a day.

At anchor off the wooded point we ate
And fed the Chestnut Teal there from the boat;
The rain persisted so we let her float,
And spoke of trivial matters and the great
As was our wont.

Later, in the shallows of the bay,
The wretched engine stalled and would not start.
So we watched the Heron practising its art
Before the growing gloom and end of day
Beckoned us home.

Each life is an adventure and a call
To meet reality. Each life’s a little ship
That steers its course through sea surge tide and rip
while trimming to meet whatever winds befall
Its willing sails.

And so, while you and I were profligate
And love on little boats too freely spent,
Our spending was a sign or sacrament.
Now your adventure’s filled, but mine must wait:
And we’ll not sail, nor meet on any strand
Until we greet, in our own native land.⁷

Michael Baker
28th August 2009—*St Augustine*

⁶ *Hebrews* 12: 22-24a Cf. *Office of Readings* for the Solemnity of All Saints.

⁷ First published in *The Chesterton Review*, vol. xvii, no. 1, [February 1991], p. 93.