

## THE SUICIDE OF PETER ROEBUCK

“Wasted hours destroy your life just as surely at the beginning as at the end—only at the end it becomes more obvious.”

Herman Wouk<sup>1</sup>

The death by his own hand of respected journalist and cricketing commentator, Peter Roebuck, in South Africa last week has touched millions. Much has been written of the value of his contributions to radio commentary and cricketing journalism; of the good he did in his life. But of what use to him that good if he chose to abandon it all in an instant? All the philanthropy, charity even, Roebuck may have engaged in was betrayed in a final act of selfishness. For, as Chesterton noted memorably in his *Orthodoxy*, the suicide thinks of only of himself.

“The man who kills a man, kills a man. The man who kills himself, kills all men; as far as he is concerned, he wipes out the world. His act is worse... than any rape or dynamite outrage. For it destroys all buildings: it insults all women. The thief is satisfied with diamonds; but the suicide... cannot be bribed, even by the blazing stones of the Celestial City. The thief compliments the thing he steals, if not the owner of them. But the suicide insults everything on earth by not stealing it. He defiles every flower by refusing to live for its sake. There is not a tiny creature in the cosmos at whom his death is not a sneer. When a man hangs himself on a tree, the leaves might fall off in anger and the birds fly away in fury: for each has received a personal affront...”<sup>2</sup>

St Thomas called time *fluxus ipsius nunc*, the flowing of the very now in which we exist. We never enjoy more than a moment of existence together at any one time. In her liturgy for the dead, the Catholic Church addresses Almighty God as “the God for Whom all men are alive” encapsulating the truth that our life does not end when we die; that the soul of man is immortal and will endure after death in a now which is eternal. Of all the acts a man carries out in the course of his life none is more important than his last, for on it turns his eternal destiny.

Peter Roebuck had a moral problem, one shared by thousands. There is no one who cannot empathise with remarks made (again) by G K Chesterton—

“No man’s really any good till he knows how bad he is, or might be... till his only hope is... to have captured one criminal, and kept him safe and sane under his own hat.”<sup>3</sup>

There is a lesson for us all in Peter Roebuck’s death: St Augustine put it well—

“Our pilgrim life here on earth cannot be without temptation for it is through temptation that we make progress and it is only by being tempted that we come to know ourselves. We cannot win our crown unless we overcome, and we cannot overcome unless we enter the contest and there is no contest unless we have an enemy and the temptations he brings.”<sup>4</sup>

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20<sup>th</sup> November 2011—*Christ the King*

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Wouk, *The Caine Mutiny*, New York, 1951, ch. 6

<sup>2</sup> *Orthodoxy*, London, 1908; my copy Fontana Books, pp. 71-2. For a more considered paper on the topic of suicide see [http://www.superflumina.org/PDF\\_files/suicide.pdf](http://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/suicide.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> ‘The Secret of Father Brown’, *The Father Brown Stories*, London, 1929.

<sup>4</sup> *On Psalm 60, 2-3*: cf. *Office of Readings*, Monday, 1<sup>st</sup> week in Lent