

# DANIEL MANNIX

Archbishop of Melbourne

By Rev. Bernard O'Conner

## FOREWORD

This is not a biography of Archbishop Mannix. It is a pen portrait, a sketch in black and white. It leaves half his days untouched - his childhood, youth and years of priesthood in Ireland. He was born in Charleville, Co. Cork, Ireland, on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1864. He was twenty-six years of age when he was ordained priest, at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. In his forty-ninth year he was consecrated titular Archbishop of Pharsalus, Co-adjutor to Archbishop Thomas Joseph Carr, Archbishop of Melbourne, Australia. He succeeded to the See of Melbourne on Dr. Carr's death, on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1917.

Our study begins with his arrival in Melbourne on Easter Sunday, 1913. Being a sketch it leaves many things out. Nothing is said, for instance, of his deep reverence for Rome, his personal loyalty to the Holy See. Nothing is said of his relations with other bishops either those of the Australian hierarchy or those who served in Australia as Apostolic Delegates. Little is said of his dealings with the laity. The complex and fascinating question of the development of Catholic Action in Australia, in which he played such a leading role, remains untouched here.

All that are attempted are three brief studies of this great and human complex character: as man, as bishop and as priest. The great task of writing a full and accurate biography depicting "the living breathing human being, his acts, his words, his contribution to the world's story" is left to other and more competent hands.

May success crown their efforts.

BERNARD O'CONNOR.

Melbourne. July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1965.

## 1. THE MAN

In a fascinating and revealing interview on Australian television in November, 1961, when he was already ninety-seven years of age, Archbishop Mannix was asked could he remember what his first impressions and feelings were on his arrival in the country in 1913. In his answer he said that previously he had known little about Australia "except that it was on the wrong side of the equator and too near it." Even though it was April, he found the heat trying in both Perth and Adelaide. He went on to say: "I came to be convinced in my own mind that I could not live in Australia. I could not stand the heat. I did not mention this to anybody else. I did not want to start with a bad impression." He spoke of a lady who had been a child of six or seven on the day of his arrival and was present in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, at his welcome. He recalled the story she told him years afterwards: "She saw me and heard me and evidently had her wits about her for she came to the conclusion which she delivered to her parents when she went home, 'that poor man won't live six months.' But she was a false prophetess, and I was a false prophet. Eventually she told the story to me last year, or the year before, when she was a comparatively old lady. She died last year, and I am living - or half-living - still."

### A Full, Active Life

Until he reached his ninetieth birthday, in March, 1954, Dr. Mannix, as he was most generally called, led a very full and active life. Thus, for almost forty years he had walked every morning from his gracious home, Raheen, in the Melbourne suburb of Kew, to St. Patrick's Cathedral, a distance of some three miles. For most of the time he had made the return trip on foot in the evening, too. As, swinging his walking stick, he strode along the streets of the poorer suburbs en route he made a striking figure. He was some six feet tall, very erect in his carriage, and - as someone once described him - "a consecrated ramrod." His face was strong and ascetic, notable for his deep-set pale grey eyes, high cheek bones and long upper lip. It was framed with a halo of hair, not so long or unkempt as is the fashion of modern youth, but curling over his collar beneath a tall silk hat. A long frock coat reaching to his knees

made him the typical Irish Catholic cleric of the late nineteenth century. On this daily walk he met a whole line of regular “clients”, down-and-outs, to each of whom he gave a shilling or two, sometimes with a word of warning against drinking it too quickly. He had quite a fund of anecdotes about these encounters. But he met others, too. There were the two little boys, for instance, whom he found struggling to reach the door-knocker of one of the small cottages opening on to the footpath. He stopped for a moment watching their efforts. Then he asked: “Can I help?” The reply was: “Yes”. So he knocked for them, and as he did they fled towards a lane close by with the cry: “Now, run like hell!”

The inward journey would bring him to the Cathedral presbytery in time for dinner. He would come down the stairs to the dining room dressed as he was for most of the day, in the long soutane piped with purple and the purple biretta set well back above his broad forehead. At table he was very much relaxed and at ease both with the priests on the Cathedral staff and any guests who may have been with them. He enjoyed their friendly banter and was always ready to provoke it with a leading question or a carefully chosen comment.

### **His Hospitality**

Here we might recall that he was a most hospitable man. Before advancing years brought weariness with them he gave many a pleasant clerical dinner party at Raheen to mark the visit of some distinguished cleric, and used to invite a wide circle of his senior priests to his table. Almost to the end of his days he entertained the Cathedral staff at Christmas dinner at Raheen. On great occasions, among them the consecration of any of the priests of his diocese to the episcopate (several of these were men he had chosen himself to carry the burden of the daily administration of the diocese for him) he was always happy to play host to a dinner for more than two hundred of the clergy both local and visiting. These gatherings were always the more memorable for the clever and witty speech with which he would personally conclude them.

He made a striking figure when he assumed the vestments of his episcopal office, and he moved with impressive dignity. A visiting prelate once said: “He looks like a bishop in a mediaeval window.” When it came to a lesser occasion - the blessing of a school, a presbytery or convent - he usually wore a Maynooth cape over the black soutane, and would simply put a stole around his neck and mark the place in his handbook of pontifical ceremonies with a long tapering finger.

### **His Love of Music**

Another personal trait which was not apparent frequently in his public life was his love for music. This contributed to the practical and charitable arrangements he made, late in 1939, for the “adoption” of the members of the Vienna Boys’ Choir - stranded in Australia by the outbreak of war, by families of the Cathedral and other parishes of the diocese. From this came, soon afterwards, the establishment of the cathedral choir school with its scholarships. Then, years later, his acceptance of the suggestion that the Cathedral might be finally completed with the installation of a great pipe organ to mark the golden jubilee of his episcopate also showed his appreciation of music. Here his special love for Irish music might be mentioned, though, in the days of Ireland’s struggle for freedom during the first World War, he must have been bored beyond measure by the interminable repetition of “Danny Boy” sung at him at the many parish concerts he attended in those times. Some may remember that in 1947 a recital was given in the Melbourne Town Hall by Mrs. Kiernan (Delia Murphy), the wife of the recently appointed Irish Ambassador. At the request of the Archbishop she sang Moore’s “Oft in the Stilly Night”. As one looked at him, an old man over eighty years of age, sitting alone, stately and impassive, one appreciated the significance of the lines:

“When I remember all the friends so link’d together I’ve seen around me fall like leaves in wintry weather: I feel like one who treads alone some banquet hall deserted Whose lights are fled, whose garlands dead, and all but he departed. Sad mem’ry brings the light of other days around me.”

And still his days were far from over, or his work done.

Finally it might be well to recall, on this theme, how he showed his love for Irish music in another way. In the 1920’s and 1930’s he used to spend his annual vacation during February at Queenscliff, Victoria. Every afternoon regularly he would set out to walk along the beach, towards Point Lonsdale, accompanied by the priest who was his

holiday companion. Sometimes as he walked, sometimes as he sat on a low sand-dune, he would sing softly the songs of Ireland he had learned in his youth. He was a most incongruous figure there, on a hot summer afternoon dressed in his long, frock coat but condescending to the climate to the extent that he replaced the tall silk hat with a panama straw, which in latter years gave way to a Mexican sombrero!

### **His Keen Intellect**

Dr. Mannix's early academic career with its success as a post-graduate student in the Dunboyne Establishment at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland, followed by many years on the teaching staff of that great college professing several branches of theology gave ample proof of his exceptional intellectual ability. But he has left little lasting evidence of this in the written word. There are a few articles extant, a couple of short pamphlets, little else beside. We might add the clever prefaces written for other men's books, and his own letters, too. These letters were comparatively few and usually brief, marked by that economy of words and pregnancy of phrase which were characteristic. There were also his speeches, which are now reposing away in newspaper files. These were his great weapon.

His speeches were scarcely ever written, though he spent many hours of consideration in preparing them. Rarely did he have even a note in his hand. The printed versions, though always carefully checked by him, lack the judicial tone, the deliberate utterance, the emphatic gesture which made their delivery so memorable and at times very moving. Two of his sermons were historic - the panegyric preached on his predecessor as Archbishop of Melbourne, the Most Reverend Thomas Carr, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1917, and the occasional sermon at the opening of the Twenty-ninth International Eucharistic Congress, at Sydney, September, 1928. The text of the first is extant. It ranges over the history of the Church in Australia and the special contribution made by the early Irish settlers and first Irish priests and bishops and then reviews the life and work of Archbishop Carr with moving eloquence. As for the latter, all that now remains is the following report in the official record of the proceedings of the Congress:

"The text of His Grace's magnificent discourse was taken from the Canticles (II.11.12): 'The winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land.'

"Its theme was the Eucharist and the Papacy - the Mass and the Vatican. "As there was no manuscript of the sermon available, and no report was entirely satisfactory it is not printed in this volume."

He spoke softly and slowly in conversation. On the public platform or in the pulpit his voice was powerful and clear and it carried with apparently little effort on his part to the limits of the great crowds who gathered to hear him in his heyday. When, later, microphones were placed in front of him they were ignored, or pushed aside. But, as his voice grew weaker with the passing years, he adapted himself to the microphone and used it most effectively. The weak voice which he produced with obvious difficulty in his closing years was but the poor echo of one of his great natural gifts which he had used so well for so long.

### **His Strong Constitution**

He was blessed, too, with a strong constitution and sound health. He remained active and alert both mentally and physically right into old age despite the heavy burden of responsibility he carried. In his eighty-eighth year he suffered a mild stroke, but with care and rest it was a matter of only months until he was once more bearing the full burden of his office and fulfilling a heavy round of public duties. Some five years later he had a fall in his home in which his wrist was broken. This accident was followed by his gradual withdrawal from public activities, though it was not until September, 1959, that he made his last public speech. Maisie Ward (Mrs. Frank Sheed) recorded in her autobiography these impressions of him in these latter days:

"Archbishop Mannix was an extraordinarily impressive figure, already more than ninety, emaciated, almost ethereal, immensely dignified, hardly eating, motionless and long silent with a dry wit occasionally flashing out." (Unfinished Business (Sheed and Ward), p. 884.)

He retained control of the policy and administration of the diocese and exercised it with wisdom until the eve of his death.

## II. THE PASTOR

The appointment, in 1912, of Monsignor Mannix, then President of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland, to the episcopate, as coadjutor Archbishop of Melbourne called for a great sacrifice. As he said himself in his first address in Melbourne: "It is a long way from Ireland to Australia, from Maynooth to Melbourne. And, I may confess the truth, it was a great sorrow and a great wrench for me to turn my face away from my own dear country and from my own kindred. A hundred bonds stronger than steel bound me to the dear old land from which so many of you, like myself, have come."

But he hastened to add, . . . "if the burden of the episcopal office was to be laid upon me, then I am free to confess, with equal sincerity and candour, that the Holy Father could have laid no more pleasing and acceptable command upon me than that to join the priests of the Archdiocese of Melbourne in their loyal and devoted service of their revered Archbishop. No words can express my gratitude for the warmth and loyalty of their welcome. I am proud to be a worker in their ranks, and the years to come will prove how deeply I feel my indebtedness to them."

### **The Education Question**

Immediately he went on to discuss the great problem of his whole episcopate, the Education Question. Despite all his best efforts for the next fifty years it remained unsolved, so far as the Church's claim for recognition by the State of the service done for the State by the Catholic schools of Australia was concerned. Though, at the very end, there was some promise of better days ahead. It was in this context, too, that he made the claim his subsequent activities substantiated: "From this day I claim to be - and as time goes on I hope to justify my claim to be considered - a good Australian, jealous of the interests and of the good name of my adopted country."

Leaving the detailed record of the struggle for justice in the matter of education to the historians, all that will be added here is to state that he was the driving force which brought to quick fruition the plans for the establishment of a Catholic University college associated with the University of Melbourne - Newman College. Briefly we recall that it was his pastoral zeal which induced the other Bishops of the Province of Victoria, in 1923 (and later the Archbishop of Hobart, Tasmania) to join him in the establishment of a regional seminary for the education of diocesan priests at Corpus Christi College, Werribee, and its development in the 1950's by the building of its separate theology house, at Glen Waverley. With the establishment of a second Victorian University at Monash in 1960 he was actively engaged in the planning of yet another Catholic university college there, at the very end of his life. Fittingly this college, when built, is to be called after him - Mannix College. In this matter someone should write the full story of the Archbishop Mannix Travelling Scholarship for post-graduate study overseas. This was founded on funds contributed by the clergy and people on the occasion of the diamond jubilee of his ordination.

At about that time there were moves in another State of the Commonwealth for the establishment of a separate Catholic University. The story went around then that Dr. Mannix made the pungent comment: "Whilst they are planning their university with little hope of success, I am infiltrating the Melbourne University from the top with my scholarship."

### **Controversialist**

In the days of the 1914-1918 war, Dr. Mannix appeared to many to be more of a politician than a priest. In regular - almost weekly - public addresses at Catholic functions he made controversial comments on current events. Naturally, for him, and for the many Catholics from Ireland or of Irish parentage, the question of Irish self-determination under the banner of Sinn Fein loomed large. Then there were the two campaigns associated with the issue of conscription for war service overseas. With the passing of time came other questions - the liquor question, divorce, peace and especially the Communist menace. On all these, and other topics too, he expressed his considered opinion not - as he explained to his television interviewer in 1961 - as a prelate or priest, but as an ordinary Australian citizen using the privilege of free speech in a democratic community. For many years his pronouncements made headline news in the daily press and bore weight in moulding public opinion.

Whilst the Archbishop was clear in his own mind as to his position in such matters, always using a public platform, never once speaking along these lines from the pulpit, neither the press nor the public, not even some of his own flock

always understood it. Consequently there were misunderstandings and mis-interpretations which may have borne harmful consequences at times. For his part he chose to ignore even the possibility of such harm. To him it was axiomatic that “the truth is great and will prevail.” An interesting sidelight on this point was his ultimate reconciliation in the 1940’s with one who had been a devastating critic and a bitter political opponent - the Honourable William Morris Hughes, one time Prime Minister of Australia. Their final friendly meeting followed the Archbishop’s gesture of writing a kind letter of sympathy to Mr. Hughes on the occasion of the death of his only daughter.

### **Accessibility**

For many years Dr. Mannix exercised his pastoral ministry principally in and around his Cathedral church. Nearly every afternoon from Monday to Friday he met and spoke with his priests and people at the Cathedral presbytery. There was no difficulty in getting an appointment. Any priest could see him any afternoon, if the Archbishop was free, by simply going upstairs to the study and knocking at the open door. Such interviews were often necessarily short, but rarely unsatisfactory. If the business or problem required lengthy consideration the Archbishop gave it the full attention of his clear incisive intellect. Always the interviewer felt he was being heard and understood, even though he might not have left with a clear and ready-made decision. Quite often he was thrown back upon his own judgment. If responsibility was involved, it was generally left to him but he felt that he had the sympathetic encouragement and moral support of his Archbishop.

There were more difficult cases, and less pleasant meetings. The bishop, the good pastor had to “convince, entreat, rebuke with perfect patience and doctrine”, as Saint Paul wrote to Timothy. There were instances where the subjects of such episcopal discipline were hurt grievously and went away resentful, but these were far outnumbered and outweighed by the great many more cases in which the subject left conscious that not only had he received a just and fair hearing but that, also, his bishop had treated him with Christian charity and real magnanimity.

There was a strain of intolerance in the Archbishop’s make-up. It was rooted in his background, and it was not altogether a bad thing. At times it did good. One example of this may find a place here. During World War II a Catholic charitable organization planned to establish a rehabilitation centre for street-girls in a select Melbourne suburb. An agitation against this was organized by local interests, to the extent that the local municipal council joined in the protests and sent a delegation to wait on Dr. Mannix at the Cathedral presbytery. This group was received with the barest courtesy, and before they could say much they were treated to a sharp lecture from the Archbishop in the vein of Our Lord’s own comment in similar circumstances: “Let he who is without sin among you, cast the first stone.” And then they were dismissed summarily. The centre was duly opened and carried on its charitable work for years.

### **Pastoral Activity**

For some forty years the Archbishop devoted from four to six hours every Saturday afternoon and evening to the work of the confessional in the Cathedral. For about the same length of time he would celebrate an early Mass there every Sunday at which he would preach a simple homily. On many Sundays he then attended a Communion breakfast, a gathering of some society or group at breakfast in a hall after their own Mass, at which he would have to listen to the “guest speaker” before making his own contribution of a witty and usually brief address. Sometimes such a gathering served as his platform for comments on current events.

In any case he always made it a point to return to the Cathedral for the last morning Mass, the 11 o’clock Mass. Should he arrive before it began he would take his place at a chair in the sanctuary in his black soutane and cloak. Should he be delayed somewhat he would kneel at a priedieu in a side-chapel close to the sanctuary. Then came dinner at one o’clock which, with its conversation and banter, was never of less than one hour’s duration, though we may mention, here, that he never ate much at any time and appeared to have a poor appetite. Soon after dinner the Archbishop would be on the move again - this went on Sunday after Sunday for year after year - to his three o’clock appointment. Sometimes this was the administration of Confirmation in a parish, quite often it was the blessing of a school, or church or extensions to parish buildings, for the diocese was growing constantly under his regime.

Confirmation was administered triennially in the parishes, and after the ceremony there always followed the long

address in the church in which he gave a masterly synopsis of the Catholic faith and Christian life. This address was never less than sixty minutes in duration and as he grew older it lengthened till, at the end, when he was in his eighties, it went on for ninety minutes or more. It was directed not so much at the children confirmed but rather at the adults gathered around them. By this time it would be five o'clock or later, but still the Archbishop's Sunday tasks were not yet ended.

Without a break for rest or refreshment he would be driven immediately away from the afternoon function (he never owned a motor-car, but always hired one) to go around the Catholic hospital of the city to visit primarily any of his clergy who may have been there, but he cheerfully saw any other patients to whom the Sisters cared to take him. Only then did he return to Raheen. For some years he chose to enjoy the company of one of his priests on Sunday evenings, whose role was something akin to being the court jester. In later years this visit was transferred to Monday evenings. In any case the visitor was usually dismissed at about ten o'clock, and the Archbishop was alone, as he chose to live in his great house.

But he was not really alone, nor had he finished his day's tasks. And this leads us on to making a fresh beginning and to the consideration of Dr. Mannix as a priest.

### **111. THE PRIEST**

Despite the wide field of his interests and the burden -of responsibility he bore as the chief pastor of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Dr. Mannix always was conscious of his own priesthood and the personal obligations it entailed.

He was a priests' priest, always at home and at ease with his fellow priests, watchful of their welfare, zealous for their fidelity to Christ. One felt a measure of constraint in his attitude to the laity, a deliberate aloofness except towards small children - but this melted away in clerical company.

#### **A Devoted Priest**

He was a priests' priest in a deeper sense. His spirituality, his prayer, his charity, his love of the Church, indeed his whole demeanour were the living embodiment of all that the Church asks of those chosen as "Christ's servants and stewards of God's mysteries." On one occasion, at a clerical conference he said that no one would ever know the secrets of his soul, his method of prayer, his approach to Christ. But his actions spoke when his tongue was still. The Holy Mass was the heart and centre of his life. There was a careful reverence in his celebration of the Holy Sacrifice which expressed profound personal devotion. Every word of the Latin was enunciated clearly and deliberately. Every gesture had a grace and dignity which spoke of his interior recollection and attention. In his middle years it would take him thirty-five to forty minutes to celebrate. As he grew older, this time lengthened and his reverence grew more profound. Though in the closing years of his long life he was physically unable to offer Mass daily, he never gave up the will to do so. On his better days he would celebrate without assistance. Only once did he ask for help, not long before his death, and this was, it proved, his last Mass. On the days when he was unable to go to the altar himself he had Mass offered by a chaplain in the private chapel close to his bedroom. From his bed he followed the Mass closely and received Holy Communion with great devotion, right up to the day before his death.

As long as he was able he read his breviary (the priest's daily prayer) with care and attention, and he had a devotion to the Rosary. To the very end he kept his breviary and his beads close to him. In addition, he spent considerable time in the evening at prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. One estimate is that when on vacation, and so giving opportunity for observation to the priests about him, he would spend as much as five hours of the day in prayer.

#### **In Retreat**

For many years at the annual retreats for the clergy of the diocese he would attend and listen attentively to the lectures, not just for one week, but for their repetition on a second, third or even fourth week, as the increasing number of his priests required. There he would be found at the end of each day kneeling, saying his rosary before the Blessed Sacrament and humbly making the Stations of the Cross.

Following the coming of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers to St. Francis' Church in the city, the Archbishop made it a regular practice to go to their Monastery for confession every Saturday afternoon at 3 o'clock. Afterwards he would enter the Church and spend a considerable time there, kneeling humbly in prayer among his people. Then he would return to St. Patrick's to hear confessions himself, as we have already seen, for hours.

### **Spirit of Poverty**

He showed his spirit of Christian charity on many occasions and in many ways. He gave innumerable charitable gifts both in money and in kind. Many types of people appealed to him for assistance. Every request received his personal attention. At times he sought verification of a claim through the local clergy. Once he decided that a case was deserving he would be liberal in the alms he would send or the provision he would make for the needs to be met. He made generous donations to many public appeals. He had a spirit of poverty. . Thus, as he asked his secretary, on one occasion for the bag of shillings and two-shilling pieces he used to carry for the "clients" he met on his daily walk, he remarked: "I haven't a penny of my own in the world." After fifty years as Archbishop his estate consisted of two watches and a clock.

On occasions his patience must have been gravely tried, but rarely did he show any reaction by word or gesture. He made no demands for his personal comfort or consideration, but accepted the situation as he found it. Thus the story is told of his complete imperturbability when, on the way to the pageant at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, in November, 1934, during the Melbourne Centenary celebrations, his car overturned. He climbed out, moved over to the footpath and stood there immobile until another car was sent for him. He then continued his journey and fulfilled his engagement as if nothing had happened.

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As the years sped by the Archbishop seemed to stand aloof and apart from the rush of time. He read widely and constantly. Through the constant stream of visitors from every walk of life he received at Raheen from 1960 onward he maintained his wide interest and influence in both ecclesiastical and political circles. Though his body grew infirm and he rarely moved out of his bedroom in the last year of his life his mind was alert and his wit keen.

Already plans were being made for the celebration of his hundredth birthday. But in the early afternoon of November 5<sup>th</sup> he collapsed and the church's anointing of the sick was administered. Following alternate periods of coma and semi-consciousness he died peacefully in his own bed on the following day, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1963, being aged ninety-nine years and nine months.

His body lay in state in St. Patrick's Cathedral from the following Friday until the next Tuesday. In that time more than 200,000 filed past the bier in a final tribute of respect and affection from the people of Melbourne whom he had served so long.

A vast congregation of bishops, priests and people, representative of the whole nation filled the Cathedral for the final obsequies. His remains were buried in the Cathedral crypt and lie beneath the transept pavement in a grave as yet unmarked.

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