

Rev Prof Enda McDonagh: Remembering Maynooth

27 February 2021

The dignified and intimate Requiem Mass for Prof Enda McDonagh in the College Chapel on 27 February, due to Covid-19 restrictions, denied so many people the opportunity to pay their respects to him and express their gratitude for him as priest and theologian. That over eight thousand people have viewed the funeral Mass on-line is a tribute to how many lives he touched and enriched with his friendship, writings and ministry.

Enda McDonagh was a pioneering theologian. He courageously and not without personal cost ventured out to marginalised people and issues long before they became mainstream. As a young and dynamic lecturer, Enda opened up the widows of Loftus Halls – to borrow a metaphor – here in Maynooth. He taught generations of students to breathe the fresh air of creative, critical and above all compassionate thinking. Enda matured idealistic maybe even naïve young minds to grow to be more discerning, reflective, understanding, and above all more human as priests, disciples, Christians with the complexities of living the Gospel and making moral choices in a contemporary age.

Even though he was a passionate Mayo man and football supporter he was deeply loyal to Maynooth, declining many invitations to lecture in other world renowned academic institutions. In doing so, he enhanced the national and international academic reputation of this College.

The day after we buried Enda in the College cemetery I was amazed to receive in the post, inexplicably, a short handwritten note that he wrote to me after Christmas thanking me for a copy of *We Remember Maynooth*. His last publication, 'Remembering Maynooth' appears in it. Here he recalls his student days, emphasizing the secular dimension of his student life in Maynooth (drama, sport, etc.), if only to stress his favourite title for the priesthood for which he was being prepared: *secular priest*. In his own words: "We were to be priests in the world, discerning the Creator and Saving God in all our activities, and communicating that effectively, or more profoundly, to God's people, all God's people." *all God's people*.

In his ministry and theology was courageously inclusive and outreaching to *all* God's people: women, Travellers, gays, African countries and western communities ravaged by AIDS. He dialogued with non-Catholic, non-Christian and non-believer.

He wrote: "The Word takes flesh not at the centres of power but at the fragile and frayed edges and there reborn." In such places are special places for the Christian presence; because the Gospel is first and foremost addressed to the marginalised – where the mystery of sin, pain, injustice, misery and even where there is contempt for religion and religious thinking. He could fearlessly go to these places because he had the *intellect and integrity* to do so.

As a secular priest he made significant contributions to the world of third level education in Ireland being a member of the Higher Education Authority; Chair of the UCC Governing Authority; twice elected president of the Irish Federation of University Teachers; served for many years on the senate of the National University of Ireland (NUI), where he served for many years.

Maynooth was Enda's home since he came as a student in 1948 apart from a few periods studying or teaching in Rome, Munich and Notre Dame. Here at home, he wore his genius lightly, self-effacing, gracious, refined, good humoured. He loved good company and conversation. He exemplified respect to those who did not share his views or vision. He now takes his place among the great names he often reminisced about at meal time. He will always be remembered in Maynooth.

Finally, Enda was a profoundly cultured priest with a love and appreciation of the secular arts, literature and poetry. He has generously gifted the College his collection of art and sculptures. Like Hopkins, he found the world was charged 'with the grandeur of God'.

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Rev Prof Michael Mullaney

College Chapel, Maynooth, 27 February 2021