



Province of Mary, Help of Christians, Australia.

Oakleigh,
Easter 1973

Dear Confreres,

It was surely fitting that a devoted son of our Congregation should be called to meet his Creator, fortified with the special graces of one of the Blessed Mother's own days. Late in the afternoon of the 7th October, 1972, the feast of the Holy Rosary, Father John Neale gave back his soul to God.

John Henry Neale was born in London on 12th June, 1916, the eldest of three children and the only son. His family came to Australia when John was still very young and he completed his schooling in this country. Apart from his family the religious training of the Irish Christian Brothers at St. Kilda, Victoria, was the major influence in forming this devout young man.

After secondary studies John entered the Public Service and worked in various departments for some five years. During this time he was prominent in the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and, as an activity of his own branch he was one of the founders of a Catholic Scout Troop in his own parish that has given to the Church its share of vocations. Perhaps it was in this particular way that he first came to have contact with the Salesians. The Patron of the First Brighton Scouts was St. John Bosco.

In 1941 John Neale was one of the four young men who made up the first novitiate in Australia. This was at Sunbury, Victoria, under the spiritual direction of Fr. Joseph Ciantar to whose memory this Province owes so much.

At this time, and with the restriction on overseas travel due to World War II, Philosophy was done also at Sunbury. The cleric John Neale began his active work even here as assistant to a small group of aspirants, and later, novices. Quite naturally this became the pattern of his tirocinium adding the work of assistant bursar when his talent for book-keeping and office administration soon became apparent. He was called on to do an extra year in this capacity in our then new house in Adelaide while arrangements were being made for the theological studies in Italy.

For theology Father went first to Bollengo where he made his final profession in 1948, and then to Aptos, California — mother Province of Salesian work in Australia. There he was ordained priest on the 30th May, 1953.

It should be said that he never found his studies easy. He was never really robust in health and he felt keenly climatic and other differences of locale. His fellow students remarked on his courage in the face of all difficulties.

On his return to Australia there followed periods of duty, mainly as Bursar in Sunbury and Glenorchy. In this latter house he was appointed Rector in 1957. Then after three years he was called on to undertake the dual role of Rector-Parish Priest in Adelaide.

Periods as Bursar at Sunbury and the then House of Training, Oakleigh, followed until in 1968 he was appointed Provincial Economer. This role was a most important one especially during those developing years for this young Province. Father Neale's administrative ability and his very genius for method and exactitude in office procedure were of tremendous service to all. Not only were his own files kept in meticulous order but he was of great help to individual houses.

The cancer that eventually took him from us first became apparent in 1969. It was thought that an operation then and some twelve months later drastic radium treatment had halted the disease. By January 1972 he was fighting for the energy to keep up his work and in spite of dedicated medical care his strength ebbed, until in the last few months of his life with reluctance he had to allow others to carry out his duties to the Province. He followed the preparations for the Special Provincial Chapter with the greatest interest and it was a bitter blow to him when he found he could not take an active part. Nevertheless he visited the Chapter in its first

session and edified all members by his obvious concern.

It was his constant anxiety that he should not be in any way a nuisance to his confreres because of his health. It was surely a reward for his dedicated life to the Congregation that he did not have to be hospitalised right until the end. It was during the weeks of gradual deterioration that preceded this that we at the Provincial House were so edified by the devotion to their sick confrere of the theological students resident here. His influence in its own turn is evidenced by their remembrances of him:

“His conversation was always about Salesian events or about the news of the world as it applied to social welfare and children in particular.”

“When I think about Father Neale it is always his warmth, gentleness and ability to communicate that I recall. In company he was rather quiet and seemed to find it difficult to ‘get into’ the conversation. However with individuals he positively bubbled.”

“He had his moments of fear and anxiety, particularly towards the end — he found swallowing his tablets especially dangerous — but he fought against this with great courage. His prevailing mood, in spite of all, was one of interest and concern for things outside his own sick room.”

“I think if it is a fair analysis I loved Fr. Neale because he was openly human. He never hid a fault, a stubborn streak or his relentless love for the Congregation. He accepted himself for what he was without ever relaxing in the task of growing nearer to Christ.”

After months of being mainly confined to his room the end came with a blessed speed. He had offered Holy Mass a few days before — as he had done each Sunday and frequently on week-days whatever it cost him to sit up at his sick-room altar.

He was scarcely forty-eight hours in hospital. It was truly the reward of a committed life. He was fully conscious to receive the Last Sacraments and then gently lapsed into a coma. Some confreres were able to say the prayers of the dying for him and recite the Rosary for his departing soul.

Even after his death more and more of his activities came to light. The summer previously he had spent time at our holiday camp, Dromana. Acquaintances struck up there with boys attending were developed through correspondence from his sick bed. Again and again as financial and other business problems have developed we have had cause to admire his orderly ways which have made things so much easier for others to take up his work.

It is hard to imagine that the affairs of his soul were not in even better order. Nevertheless we in this Province have a duty of charity to pray for Father John Neale and we ask those who knew him elsewhere to join us. Pray for his mother failing in old age. Pray for his two sisters who with their own families mourn a fond brother.

And please pray for this Province that the dedicated work of Father John Neale will be fostered and developed to the glory of God in this country consecrated to Don Bosco's Madonna.

On behalf of the Provincial Community,
Terry Jennings S.D.B.

DATES FOR THE NECROLOGY

Father John NEALE, born in London the 12th June, 1916; died at Melbourne, Australia the 7th October, 1972 at 56 years of age and 19 of priesthood.
