



Salesian Provincial Office,
Box 80,
Oakleigh, Vic., 3166,
Australia.

February 1, 1979

Dear Confreres,

On the night separating 1978 from 1979 **JOHN WILLIAM O'DAY** passed to his reward, a victim of a heart attack, in his room at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome. He was in his fifty-third year, thirty-third year of profession and twenty-fifth of his priesthood.

John was born in Coburg (Victoria, Australia) on the 26th February 1926. He lost his father when he was twelve years old so it was left to his fine Christian mother to guide him through the difficult years of adolescence. He was educated by the Mercy Sisters at Coburg and the Jesuits at St Patrick's College, East Melbourne.

At the end of his secondary education, John expressed the desire to become a Salesian priest. He spent several months at the Don Bosco Boys' Club at Brunswick and from there was accepted for the 1945-46 novitiate at Sunbury, to be formed by that human dynamo, Fr Joseph Ciantar. After philosophy at Sunbury, he did his practical training at Oakleigh and Brooklyn Park. Perpetual vows were taken at Sunbury in 1951 and then to the Crocetta (Turin) for theology crowned with his ordination in the Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians in 1954.

Returning to Australia, Fr John O'Day was stationed for one year at Oakleigh as Catechist and Prefect of Studies and then from 1957 and 1962 at Glenorchy (Tasmania) first as Catechist, then as Confessor.

John had often expressed the wish to work in India but it was not until 1963 that his wish was granted. He was stationed first at the Theological House at

Shillong as Prefect of Studies and Professor of Dogma and Church History, then two years at the Bengal Mission in Assam and finally in the parish of Wodala (Bombay).

He returned to Australia in 1970 and spent the remaining years of his life either as a Tutor to our students of theology or in further studies in Rome to equip himself better for this task. He was in Rome preparing his thesis for a doctorate in theology when the Lord called him to Himself.

John's death was a sudden and unexpected one but certainly not an unprovided one. This way of passing to the Lord was a subject of frequent meditation as evidenced by his letters to confreres in Australia over the past few months of his life. As proof of this is a comment he made when he heard of the death by drowning of a member of this Province who had recently gone to Paraguay to work in the Missions there — the fulfillment of many years of longing to do just that: "Your news about Bernard Paplin was quite shattering. One never knows the time nor the hour generally speaking. But at least he accomplished his ambition to go to South America and work there as a missionary. The Lord seems not to be so interested in the time span but rather the going or not. May the same Lord give him his just reward which He most certainly will". In another letter he remarks that his work as assisting in a big hospital in Melbourne had taught him to be ready for death at any time.

Perhaps the outstanding trait of Fr O'Day was his uprightness, his great love for the Lord and his lifelong search to know Christ and pass on that knowledge to others. As a confrere remarked to me in a letter: "He believed in the mission of Christ to all mankind and wanted to explore it as intelligently and deeply as he could."

Nothing seems to better sum up the moral figure of our confrere John as two judgements: one a reference from his teacher when he applied to be a Salesian in 1944 and the other the words of farewell delivered over his tomb in 1979 by a companion of both Crocetta and the UPS.

"John O'Day has asked me to write a line concerning his character.

"He came to us (St Patrick's College, East Melbourne) four or five years ago, intending even then to be a candidate for the priesthood. He has clearly kept this purpose before him all along.

"Of his morals I can speak only in the highest terms. He is recognized among his mates as a singularly upright and virtuous boy, spiritual in outlook, spiritual in external occupations. He has always been most earnest in his studies . . . I can recommend him to your care and interest with perfect confidence in his integrity".

And then the farewell at the graveside by Fr Joseph Heriban, a companion of many years.

“John, my dearest brother in Don Bosco and the priesthood!

“Before your mortal remains are laid to rest in this grave where you lie in expectation of the resurrection of the just, accept these words of thanks and of farewell that I address to you in the name of all your confreres, your friends and all who love you, especially in the name of the Community of St John Bosco of which you were a member throughout these last years conceded to you.

“Your sudden passing has caused us deep sorrow because we have lost in you a generous and good confrere, one abounding in charity which you tried to translate into action by numerous little deeds of delicate service, with that beautiful humility and simplicity of a child. Your life amongst us, as your death, went almost unnoticed: you lived a hidden life, dedicated to your work of research, in the hope that the degree you were working for might make you more useful in your distant home-country, Australia, in your work for the welfare and formation of young Salesians . . . The tiring work on your thesis, your anxious desire to bring it to a happy conclusion, meant making many, many sacrifices . . .

“You were not granted the joy of obtaining from men your degree in theology but we are convinced that you have already received from the Lord the reward of “a good and faithful servant” in heaven.

“Dearest John, we thank you for your kindness and charity, for your friendship towards all, for your example of hard work and your sense of duty, your gentle sense of humour, for your example of tenaciousness and spirit of courage that refused to give way even when confronted with untold difficulties . . . We admire in a special way the attitude shown to this community only fully realized after your death. You suffered much and deeply, but in silence, without the greater part of your companions realizing it. For your reserved character and especially for your not wishing to be the cause of suffering for others and being prepared to carry your daily Cross on your own . . . Even in your death you were thoughtful, just as if you did not wish to cast a cloud over your confreres’ joy in celebrating the new year which you may not have seen . . . Thanks for your example of self-denial and thoughtfulness for the needs of others! And pardon us if, because of a complex of circumstances we could not either realize or suspect the true state of your health and be by your side in the last moments of your earthly existence . . .

“‘Although dead he still speaks to us’. Your death, John, has been for us all a salutary warning and a proof of the absolute truth of the words of Christ: “Hold yourself in readiness because the Son of man will come at the hour you least suspect”. We want to humbly accept this warning from you, John, given to us with your death.

“John, with these words of thanks we also formulate our good-bye in the name of all who love you, especially in the name of your dear ones so far away, who were not able to accompany you to this final resting-place on this earth. We pray for them that the Lord will comfort them, will console them in their sorrow and give them the strength to accept this testing from your hands in a spirit of faith in the hope of seeing him once more in the Communion of Saints.

“John, accept this heartfelt fond farewell with the assurance of a constant remembrance of you in the Sacrifice of the Mass and in our prayers. Also, remember us, still wandering in this valley of tears, so that one day we will meet again in the Father’s House.”

Fr O’Day was buried in the Salesian plot in the cemetery of Genzano after a Concelebrated Requiem, the main concelebrant was our Regional Superior, Fr George Williams, assisted by many priests including Fr Bernard Tohill, Fr Rasmussen (Provincial of the San Francisco Province) and our own Fr Frank Moloney, who also preached the panegyric.

This Province would like to thank the Rector and Community of St John Bosco at the UPS for their brotherly concern for our dear departed. It is on these occasions that we realize the consolation of belonging to a big family of brothers.

In Christ,

Wallace L. Cornell SDB Provincial

DIREZIONE GENERALE OPERE DON BOSCO	
- 7. APR. 1979	
CONCL.	S

For the Necrology:

JOHN WILLIAM O’DAY, born at Coburg (Victoria, Australia) on the 26th February 1926, passed to his reward at the UPS (Rome) the 1st January 1979, 52 years of age, 32 of profession and 24 of priesthood.