

J.M.J.



SALESIAN HOUSE,  
MELCHET COURT,  
SHERFIELD ENGLISH,  
near ROMSEY (Hants.)

*October 1st, 1956.*

*My dear Confrères,*

It is my sad duty to convey to you the news of the death of our beloved

## Father JOSEPH DUNNE

which took place in hospital at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on Saturday, September 1st, 1956, in the 75th year of his age, 50th of profession, and 43rd of priesthood.

Father Dunne was born on February 21st, 1882, at Conssett (Co. Durham) from worthy Catholic parents who gave all their six sons to God in the priesthood. This fact alone speaks volumes for the truly formative environment in which Joseph Dunne grew up to manhood. He went through his elementary schooling at Conssett and later at Jarrow. As a boy he was shy and retiring, but remarkable even then for his prodigious memory. Indeed he never lost any of these boyhood characteristics in after-life. On leaving school he entered the Civil Service and was employed by the Post Office at Newcastle-upon-Tyne until 1904 when, at the age of 22, he was accepted at Battersea as a late vocation to train for the priesthood in our Congregation.

After a year of preliminary studies and teaching at East Hill, Wandsworth, he entered the Novitiate at St. Joseph's, Burwash, Sussex. Brother Alphonsus, as he was called in those years, made his first profession on October 4th, 1906, and remained on at the Novitiate House for a further two years as Novices' Assistant, while also pursuing his philosophical studies. Even in this early period of his religious life, Brother Alphonsus was a model to all in his devotion to the Rule and his exactitude in the performance of the duties enjoined upon him by holy obedience.

In view of his advancing years he was permitted by the Venerable Don Rua, who was then Superior General, to commence the study of Theology immediately after Philosophy. Accordingly he went to Battersea in 1908 as a student of theology, teacher and assistant of artisans. He made his perpetual profession there on September 26th, 1909. In 1911 he was recalled to the Novitiate as Novices' Assistant. He completed his fourth year of theology there, receiving the tonsure and all the minor orders at Mill Hill, London, on September 23rd, 1911, and the subdiaconate at Newcastle-upon-Tyne on December 1st, 1912.

In January, 1913, he was sent to Cape Town as teacher and assistant: an obedience which began for him a long and fruitful period of Salesian work in South Africa. He received the diaconate on May 10th, 1913, and a year later, on May 3rd, 1914, he was raised to the priesthood by the Rt. Rev. John Rooney, D.D., Vicar Apostolic of Cape Town.

He was appointed Catechist of the Salesian Institute at Cape Town in the year after his ordination, and then in 1917 became Prefect of Studies, an office which he held with distinction for some ten years until he was appointed Rector at Lansdowne. A much respected confrère who was closely associated with Father Dunne during those early years in South Africa, writes:

"He took up the duties of the important office of Prefect of Studies in the Salesian School of Vocational Training, Cape Town, with his accustomed zest and devotion. At once it became apparent that he was a man gifted with a clear and accurate mind. He reorganised in an admirable way the whole school life of the boys, in classroom, workshop and recreation. His scheme of things was worked out with patient industry and with such detailed thoroughness, that after the long lapse of forty years since then there has arisen but little need for change in that admirable scheme.

"A severe test of his ability came when the very existence of the Vocational School was threatened under the then new regulations governing the admission and registration of apprentices to the various trades in South Africa. Had these regulations been applied to our School, it would have meant the virtual closing down of our work. A special meeting of the apprenticeship board was convened, and representatives from both workers and employers attended — about twenty in all. Father Dunne and another confrère were deputed to represent the Institute. In the course of the meeting, after many representatives had spoken, it became clear that the Board was intent on applying the new regulations to our School without any modification whatever. In due course the School representatives were given their opportunity to speak, and Father Dunne addressed the meeting. He took the salient points in the arguments of the previous speakers, and replied to them with such clarity and cogency of reasoning, that he literally demolished the arguments of his adversaries and won the day for the existence of our School.

"Father Dunne's catechetical talks on Sunday evenings to the assembled school in the Institute at Cape Town are still remembered with admiration by those who were privileged to hear them. They were indeed real masterpieces of clear and concise exposition of Catholic doctrine and practice.

"The diocesan clergy," continues the same confrère, "held Father Dunne in the highest esteem, and regularly sought his opinion and advice in many matters affecting the public and private affairs of their missions. It was no surprise that at one time when the office of Vicar Apostolic of Cape Town fell vacant, he was one of those considered well fitted to occupy so exalted and responsible a position."

His term of office as Rector at Lansdowne was only a short one; but even in that brief interlude his prudence, wise administration and kindness were much in evidence. He was soon after recalled to Cape Town to be Rector of the Institute. Here wider and increased scope was afforded him for the exercise of his remarkable gifts.

When Father Dunne returned to England in 1933 at the call of obedience, it was universally felt in Cape Town and further afield that his departure left a void that would be no easy matter to fill. His going was looked upon as a serious loss to Salesian work under the Southern Cross. The fruits of his devoted labours and the happy memory of his inspiring example will remain there for many a year to come.

On his return Father Dunne taught theology for two years at the Salesian Missionary College, Shrigley Park, near Macclesfield, which in those early days, besides the young aspirants to the priesthood, housed the students of theology. He was a gifted moral theologian and an acknowledged expert on liturgy. Generations of grateful students bear ample testimony to the breadth of his erudition and his skill and practical good sense in imparting it. He was much sought after as a confessor, for his sure judgment and deeply spiritual outlook made him an unrivalled guide of souls.

In 1935 he was entrusted by the Superiors with the delicate and important mission of supervising the beginnings of Salesian work in Australia as Rector of the newly acquired House of Rupertswood (near Melbourne). After a period of three years there, he again returned to England bearing with him the deep affection and esteem of his confrères and of all who came in contact with him. He taught theology at the newly established theologate, as it then was, at Blaisdon (Gloucestershire) during those early and anxious years of the Second World War, and assumed the Rectorship of Blaisdon during his second year there.

In 1940, when dangerous wartime conditions had made it imperative to transfer the College at Battersea to Cowley (Oxford) — originally the House of Philosophy — Father Dunne was chosen as Rector of this newly constituted college, and filled this difficult office for the remainder of the war with his customary quiet assurance and prudence. When Battersea College returned to London on the cessation of hostilities, Father Dunne went with it and remained as Rector at Battersea for another year.

For the next ten years, until his death, he taught theology in the various Houses in which the Theologate found a home: three years at Shrigley, two at Blaisdon, three at Beckford (Gloucestershire), and finally two at Melchet Court (Hampshire), where the Theologate of the Province is now situated. For many years Father Dunne also served as a member of the Provincial Council.

He was unquestionably one of the best loved and most respected priests in the history of the Anglo-Irish Province. He will long be remembered not only for his intellectual gifts, but also for his utter sincerity and engaging humility. He had a wonderful childlike simplicity and affability of manner, with a brand of humour all his own, that won him a firm place in the affections of all who ever lived with him. Linked with these endearing qualities of heart and mind was a deep and solid piety. Father Dunne was, in the truest sense of the term, a model of priestly and religious virtue. His spirit of obedience was such as to edify and even at times astound. In the last years of his life he was as humble and obedient as a novice, willingly undertaking the duty of preaching at very short notice; or, when the need arose, substituting for someone else without the slightest demur and with the utmost cheerfulness. His punctuality was a byword in the Province. His spirit of poverty was likewise remarkable: scrupulously exact in the handling of money, he would return even the smallest sums to his Superior after a journey without the slightest delay.

He had always enjoyed robust health, and in any case was not the sort of person who easily spoke of his complaints. It was known, however, that his heart was not as sound as formerly, and in the last year or two of his life he began visibly to decline. In August he paid a visit to his brother, a parish priest in West Hartlepool (Co. Durham), and then went to stay with his sister in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He had not been feeling too well during this period, as would appear from sundry references in letters to Melchet Court, although his last letter here on August 29th made no mention of his condition. On Thursday, August 30th, he had a serious heart attack and was taken to hospital in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where he passed peacefully away on Saturday, September 1st, at 1.40 p.m., having devoutly received the last rites of the Church.

He was laid to rest on Wednesday, September 5th, in the cemetery attached to the Novitiate House at Burwash, where so many other pioneer Salesians of his generation have their final resting place.

It could truly be said of Father Joseph Dunne that he was a priest in whom there was no guile, and a model of all that Don Bosco stands for. His passing away from our midst is a distinct loss to our Province. Nowhere is this loss more keenly felt than here at Melchet Court, where he worked so faithfully since its foundation in 1954.

Let us remember the soul of this good humble Salesian who, in imitation of our saintly Founder, laboured unstintingly in the service of his Divine Master. While we draw inspiration and encouragement from his life, let us not forget him, now that he has gone from us and may be in need of our prayers. May he rest in peace!

Of your charity please pray also for the needs of this House and for

Yours fraternally in Christ,

PATRICK McQUAID, S.D.B., *Rector*.

**Data for Necrology:** Father JOSEPH DUNNE, of Consett, England, died at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, in the 75th year of his age, 50th of profession, and 43rd of priesthood. He was a Rector for 15 years.