

Memories of still more Recent
Irish Dominicans
who passed away between
the years 1950-1960



A volume in commemoration
of the 750th Anniversary
of the Order's Foundation

o a p

Written and compiled

by

RAYMUND M. DOWDALL, O.P., D.C.L.

o a p

Published by:

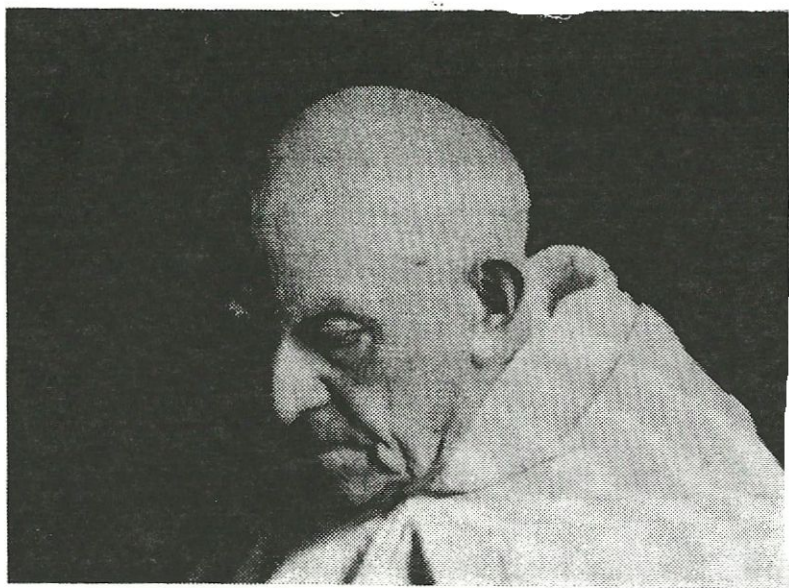
Dominican Publications, St. Saviour's, Dublin 1

FR. PAUL HENRY O'SULLIVAN, O.P., S.T.L., P.G., was born in Tralee on the 7th February, 1871 and he died in Lisbon, Portugal, on the 21st November, 1958.

AT the age of sixteen he entered the Dominican Novitiate at Tallaght when he had completed his primary education in Tralee and his secondary course of studies at Rockwell college.

For the priesthood he studied both in Tallaght and in Rome. After his ordination in Rome, he continued to work at the books until he had secured the Lectorate degree of sacred theology. By this time, according to his own oft-repeated statements, he was a man broken down in health, needing a complete rest and a period of convalescence. To meet this emergency, he was sent to our house of Corpo Santo in Lisbon, Portugal.

From the moment Fr. Paul set foot on the soil of Portugal in the year 1895, he felt an improvement in his



health, and instead of passing a few months on sick leave, he remained for the rest of his life, destined to undertake an apostolate, the like of which is rarely the part of a single priest to accomplish.

At the time of his arrival in the country, religion was at a very low ebb indeed. This was due to the Masonic persecution of the Church which had begun after the civil war of 1834. In his booklet on Salazar, he writes that as a result of those long years of persecution: "Few now went to Church or received the Sacraments. There was little or no catechism or religious instruction of any kind. Sermons were rare and these were generally on the past glories of Portugal. In some Churches books were read instead of sermons. Few Catholic books were published while vile literature was broadcast all over the country."

I shall quote still more from Fr. Paul's booklet since he is the best qualified to introduce us to the state of affairs then prevailing in Portugal: "Things dragged on like this with slight modifications until 1910 when the anti-God Republic was declared to the cry of 'No God and no

religion.' Afonso Costa declared: 'In two generations the Catholic religion will be extinct in Portugal.' It was a dreadful time.

Revolution followed revolution in rapid succession: first made by the monarchists who sought to regain the power they had lost, and later on, by the hostile parties of the republicans themselves.

Corruption was rife. Paper money took the place of gold and silver currency. Both the army and navy lacked absolute necessities. The roads all over the country were in a ruinous condition. Promotions to positions were made more by personal influence than by merit.

In sixteen years there had been over forty administrations and about twenty revolutions.

In 1926 the Army took over the Government by a bloodless revolution led by General G. da Costa who shortly after gave over the administration to General Carmona. He, on his part, invited Salazar to become Minister of Finance.' (Story of a Great Man, by E.D.M.).

While Fr. Paul grieved over these tragic happenings, he mixed among the people, both rich and poor. He soon learned that there were many Catholics in every walk of life who yearned for better days when the Faith would be once more widespread throughout the land. He was attracted by the good manners and courtesy of the Portuguese and often declared that they surpassed other races in these respects. Whatever failings he noticed were always explained away as a result of the political upheavals that for many years had disturbed the equilibrium of Portuguese life.

He never ceased to speak of the past glorious history of Portugal with its mission of christianizing the lands discovered by the daring Portuguese explorers. He referred with deep feeling to their outstanding devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Portugal was indeed for him the "Land of Holy Mary," for nearly all the Cathedrals are dedicated to the Assumption. He looked upon Lisbon as the most beautiful city he had seen in his travels, and he never tired accompanying visitors to its places of interest.

Thus Fr. Paul peered through the darkness that surrounded the nation and beheld the glories of the religious past. Fired by apostolic zeal he knew that there was only one decision to make : to devote his life and all his energies to the work of restoring the Faith in Portugal.

With the co-operation of the other Fathers in Corpo Santo, catechism classes were organised on a larger scale than usual, conferences and retreats were multiplied and much ministry outside the church undertaken : Catechism classes, sermons in English and ministry for the English-speaking residents being always well maintained.

In 1907 Fr. Paul started publishing a monthly magazine which he called "O Rosario" and he succeeded in having it spread all over the country. Emboldened by this first venture, he founded another monthly in the year 1916 and entitled it the "Cruzada do Rosario." These two monthlies are still flourishing and doing great service in keeping the Rosary devotion alive throughout the country. These were his publications of predilection and he used to remark that they prepared in some small way the minds and hearts of good people to accept the message of Our Lady at Fatima about the Rosary.

As Catholic books were practically non-existent in Portugal during those dark days of the persecution, Fr. Paul determined to supply the need. In the year 1922, he established the "Catholic Printing Press" with the help of large sums of money he collected in Ireland together with generous contributions from his friends in Portugal. From this printing press he published four other monthly magazines of Catholic instruction, numerous pamphlets, booklets and books. These latter he issued in English and Portuguese. The output was enormous. For instance : "O Meu Livro de Oracoes" in the course of years had 300,000 sales. "The Holy Name of Jesus" about the same and likewise his life of St. Philomena. He wrote on nearly every spiritual subject : "How to be Happy — How to be Holy," "All About the Angels," "The Divine Office," "The Secret of Confession," "Visits to the Blessed Sacrament," "Read Me or Rue It." He published a very interesting booklet describing the Lisbon Zoo and filled it

with photos which he took while visiting there. All this publication activity was made possible by the many collaborators his magnetic character drew around him. Chief among these must be mentioned the Marquis Rio Major, his life-long friend, who devoted his great talents, energy and time with unflagging zeal to the Apostolate of the Press.

Not only the laity but priests as well have found spiritual consolation from the reading of these booklets. In this connection I append here a letter that appeared recently in one of the English Catholic weeklies :

Dear Sir,—A very fine series of leaflets can be obtained from the Irish Dominicans in Portugal. (Address) : Edicoes Do Corpo Santo 32, Travessa Do Corpo Santo, Lisbon, 2. Portugal. These were written by a holy Irish Dominican, Fr. Paul O'Sullivan (lately dead). They are the best leaflets I have ever come across, for explaining simply, and in an uncomplicated manner, the truths of the Faith. Readers will find the spirit of faith enkindled in their souls, by reading the leaflets written by this worthy priest. It is a pity that Fr. Paul's writings are not more widely known. Perhaps our Catholic publishers (Burns, Oates, C.T.S., Gill and Son, etc.) will get in a stock of them ?

PETER LAVERSUCH

Balham, London, S.W. 12.

Fr. Paul was a salesman for God of the first order. He used to travel through the country at intervals, bringing copies of his publications with him and there were few who could resist the eloquence of his appeals. He had no inhibitions about the value of the work he was doing. He never yielded to shyness when advertising any of his booklets as we learn from the following extracts which he himself wrote : "This is one of the most attractive stories of the saints yet published." "This is truly a beautiful book." "An admirable book of enthralling interest," etc.

At an early period of his life he developed a devotion

to St. Philomena through the reading of the life of St. Cure d'Ars. He wrote her life, made frequent pilgrimages to Mugnano near Naples where her body is preserved, and had her statue erected not only in Corpo Santo but in many churches throughout the world as well. On the 11th of every month, he gathered the devotees of the saint to Corpo Santo for Mass and sermon. During the sermon, he would read the list of the favours granted through her intercession since the last meeting. Many of these favours were indeed remarkable and he often testified publicly that several miraculous cures had been granted.

He had a deep interest in the Dominican Tertiary movement and by his zeal maintained two flourishing Chapters—one for men and the other for women. The members of these Chapters were recruited from all grades of society.

On the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of his priesthood, 14th May, 1954, all his friends gathered around him. After the religious ceremonies in the church, a reception was held in his honour. During this reception the Duchess of Palmela read a letter written by the Prime Minister, Dr. Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, in which the famous Statesman praised Fr. Paul for his ministerial work among the Portuguese, declaring that he had petitioned the President of the State to confer upon him the honour of the Order of Benemerencia. The text of the letters is as follows :

Presidencia do Conselho

Most Rev. Father Paul O'Sullivan,

I am aware that you are celebrating to-day your Diamond Jubilee and that of sixty years of your Priesthood you have passed fifty nine in Portugal.

Many friends will offer their congratulations and good wishes to Your Reverence and I should not wish to show myself indifferent on such a glorious day in your priestly life.

I, therefore, beg to be allowed to greet you with so many others and congratulate you on such a long and holy apostolate which in a very special way benefited my country.

We do not forget that besides this religious apostolate, we also owe you great social benefits. Therefore the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs proposed to the Head of the State the Comenda of the Order of Benemerencia should be granted to you, to which the President of the Republic agreed in consideration of your merits and recognizing the services that you have rendered in Portugal.

You will not take it amiss if I state that acting within my rights, I advocated this concession.

I earnestly pray that Divine Providence will prolong your life for His Divine service and for the benefit of us all.

With my respectful compliments,

I remain with the highest consideration,
veneration and gratitude,

Yours sincerely,

Antonio de Oliveira Salazar

14th May, 1954.

As a director of souls he was much in demand. Nuncios, Bishops, many in high estate as well as the poor sought his advice and administration. Quite a number of those whom he had prepared for their first Holy Communion in the days of the persecutions, remember him with gratitude and they have often expressed this gratitude by generous donations for the upkeep of the printing-press that he founded for the printing and propagating of his many pamphlets and booklets.

His was a strong character that could attract and dominate. Once he had his mind made up on the worth of any scheme for the good of souls, he was inflexible and unyielding. His opinions on various subjects were never half expressed but expounded with the full vigour of his vehement soul. Interiorly he was a very holy man, with the Holy Name ever on his lips and in his heart. His devotion to the Mass was always edifying, for he seemed to have made a resolution to hear every Mass celebrated in our church. Until his health became impaired, he would

leave any occupation to hear the Mass of a visiting priest who had come out of hours.

Since the Irish Dominican college and church of Corpo Santo enjoyed the high patronage of the Royal House of Portugal, there were few contacts with the British Embassy until the declaration of the Republic in 1910, consequent upon the assassination of the King and the Crown Prince. Fr. Paul immediately secured the British protection during the Republican period, both for Corpo Santo and for the school of Bom Sucesso that is staffed by Irish Dominican Sisters. The Province owes a debt of gratitude to the British Crown for that protection, for otherwise, there was every possibility that the two communities would have been expelled as undesirable aliens. In the course of time, when Ireland opened a Legation in Lisbon, these two communities and other Irish interests naturally came under the protection of the Irish Minister.

With the death of Fr. Paul O'Sullivan, there has passed away an outstanding Irish Dominican whose fame has spread far beyond the shores of his beloved Portugal, where he laboured in the vineyard of the Lord for sixty-three years. His wish to die on a feast of our Lady had been granted to him, for it was on the feast of the Presentation that our Lady came to present him to her Divine Son.

* * * *