

Tribute to Fr. Donald W.T. Grant, O.Carm.

REFLECTIONS ON THE DEATH OF MY FRIEND – 18th JULY 1997

My friend and brother, Donald, is being buried today in his beloved Glenlivet, Scotland, a place where he felt so at home. Searching for home seemed to be a central theme of Donald's life. To those of us who loved him, his quest often appeared as a frantic, restless and endless pursuit, but for Donald it was a journey towards freedom and meaning. As hard as we may have tried, easing that journey or lessening the burden he carried was so difficult and often frustrating. Now that pilgrimage is at an end and I pray with all my heart that he receives the fullness of peace that he so richly deserves!

Ever since hearing of his death, I have had mixed feelings. I feel grateful for his presence in my life and happy that he is at peace. The physical, psychological and spiritual torment that plagued him for so long is now over. But I also feel so sad. I feel an emptiness in the pit of my stomach and tears well up at the surface of my eyes because Donald is no longer with us! That reality is so stark and bitter! Despite his endearing frailty, Donald was a loyal friend and a cherished brother. And I will miss him very much!

Donald was a gifted man. Keen intellect, facility with language and deep sensibility were hallmarks of his life. People loved to be with him because he was so easy and very attentive. He was such a nice person who had great compassion and empathy for people. Personally, I found great strength in his presence and often felt comforted and consoled by him as we shared our stories and our struggles. He was so understanding and encouraging, so in tune. It was just easy to talk and he with Donald. Nothing was either too insignificant or too great. He was so accepting and so understanding.

Donald was comfortable with all kinds of people, the mighty as well as the little ones. And people responded to him and were drawn to him like a magnet. Who but Donald would have so many friends from all parts of this globe and was able to speak their language both literally and figuratively?

But, unfortunately, these very strengths which he was able to share so generously with me and so many others were somehow missing when Donald looked to himself. "Perfection is the enemy of the good" was an expression I often shared with him. Donald was so aware of his imperfections and of the imperfect world that he lived in and so pained by it. But he was also so blind to his own goodness. I guess that is a common story for many of us. But for Donald this seemed so true. The same acceptance and sensitivity he easily shared with others he was unable to extend to himself. Donald who could so easily appreciate the goodness and beauty in others was blind to what was so obvious to us, his own beauty and goodness!

Donald expected so much of himself and the institutions he belonged to - his Order and his Church. Like Donald they are beautifully human. But, sadly, as good as they are, all too often they seem more human than beautiful. Donald had great hopes and expectations of what could be. But this vision and sensitivity were also a source of his pain. Disappointment and hurt were not foreign to his experience. But neither were forgiveness and understanding.

The search for roots was also so important for Donald. His work on his family history, his journeys round the world, his own inner pilgrimage were evidence again of this personal and spiritual quest. He longed so much to be at home, to be deeply rooted and connected with

what was meaningful and important. He has now arrived at that destination which ironically is where it all began.

Donald's story began in Scotland and now seemingly ends there. But our faith helps us to know that this same story also began in God and continues there. The search for home and roots is now over. The unanswered questions, the pain and the turmoil, the suffering and the death are all now transformed. Like all of us Donald received his share of the Cross. He struggled with it, but ultimately accepted it and died to it. He has earned the Resurrection!

With Donald now at rest and alive in God, I rejoice. My sadness is a tribute to our friendship. I praise God for the gift that he was to me and for the many good times that we shared. I find comfort in my faith in Christ's Risen Life and for the promise that this belief holds out to me. Yet despite this consolation, the void remains as a reminder of my special and dear friend, Donald, whom I loved and will miss very much. I praise God for the gift of his life! May he rest in peace!

Gary O'Brien, O.Carm