

Obituary of Fr. Paul O'Brien, O.Carm.



Fr. Paul at his simple profession in 1975

I first met Paul O'Brien on New Year's Day 1974. He came to Allington Castle, near Maidstone, Kent, which was then run by the Carmelite Friars as a retreat and youth pastoral centre. He was attending a conference open to young men and women interested in the priesthood and religious life. Paul had not long left Downside and was exploring his future and as a result of his meeting with the Carmelite Friars at Allington and his subsequent stay at our Priory in Bamburg, Paul decided to enter the novitiate at Aylesford Priory in the autumn of 1974.

Paul came from a naval background and was born in Hampshire in 1955. His father was to combine a career in the Navy with one in teaching and ended his working life as a deputy head. His mother took a keen interest in local affairs and was a councillor for some years. Paul O'Brien was one of a group of gifted young men who joined the British Province of Carmelites in the mid-1970s. One of his near contemporaries was the present Prior General, Father Joe Chalmers. Paul was a warm and attractive personality; he always had the ability to smile in a reassuring and welcoming way. He had a gift for languages, a flair for music and a love for the visual arts.

After his Profession Paul went to Rome to live at the Carmelite International Study Centre and attended lectures at the Gregorian University. He enjoyed the international flavour of the College and with his gift for languages he was able to relate to his confreres who came from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. After his ordination he spent some time in the Carmelite Priory in Florence. The Priory is better known as the *Carmine* and contains some wonderful paintings by artists like the Carmelite, Fra Lippo Lippi. It was a superb place for someone of Paul's temperament and he was also involved in a new parish on the edge of Florence where he enjoyed working with the young people. On a couple of occasions whilst Paul was in Florence I was able to spend holidays in *Carmine* and found in Paul a helpful guide and mentor to the whole Renaissance experience.

After Florence Paul spent some time working with his Carmelite confreres in New York where he was very much involved in inner city and hospital ministry. When he returned to Britain in the mid-1980s he was seconded for a while to work in the Diocese of Galloway and whilst there he helped people in the aftermath of the Lockerbie disaster. Paul was appointed to our community in Aberystwyth in the early 1990s. That Community looks after a parish

that covers hundreds of square miles with a number of Mass centres, a University Chaplaincy and involvement with schools. Paul was part of the parish team and was also a great friend to St. Padarn's School. However, he continued his interest in art by writing regular articles in the parish magazine and opened up the meaning of the great painters for the parishioners. Visits to Italy were always a great bonus for him.

At the beginning of September he left Aberystwyth for the U.S.A. to begin a sabbatical year. The first part was to have been a renewal course at La Salette Centre at Attleboro, Massachusetts to be followed by a spell at the Carmelite Institute of Spirituality in Washington D.C. Sadly Paul was only a few weeks into his sabbatical when he met a tragic death in a fire at La Salette.

Although he worked in many different countries, Paul was quintessentially an Englishman and whilst he always retained something of the student from the early 70s, he had strong and traditional ideas about many things. He was often teased in Community for his admiration of Mrs. Thatcher, which did not mean he was not a good friend to those in need and he certainly believed in society and community.

Paul's father, Danny O'Brien, died some years ago, but his mother, Molly, still lives in Waterlooville and we are all conscious of her deep sorrow and grief at this time. Paul's funeral will take place at Aylesford Priory as soon as it is possible to arrange.

Wilfrid McGreal, O.Carm