



Daniel Mannix

A much examined life

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Archbishop Daniel Mannix, after his arrival in Melbourne.

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For anyone born subsequent to the lifetime of Archbishop Daniel Mannix, he may loom as a somewhat monumental figure. But once you begin to learn more about him, Archbishop Mannix's extraordinary life and career draws you in. You can start to appreciate just why Archbishop Mannix was such a powerful presence for so long in the lives of generations of Melburnian, Victorian, and Australian Catholics, and non-Catholics also, as well as having a major impact overseas due to his interest in Irish affairs.

Even his most critically minded biographer, James Griffin, acknowledges that 'no personality in Australian history is more worthy of the epithet *charismatic* than Daniel Mannix'. It was not just what Archbishop Mannix set out to do that matters, but the way

he went about doing what he did. To borrow the phrase used by Michael Gilchrist, a biographer more readily appreciative than Griffin of his subject's virtues, what characterised Archbishop Mannix most particularly was his wit and wisdom.

The sheer number of full-length biographies, the first of which appeared not long after his arrival in Australia, indicates the importance of Archbishop Mannix, and biographies continue to be written half a century after his death. Griffin's biography has just been published, and one of Australia's leading biographers, Brenda Niall, currently is working on a new life of Archbishop Mannix.

It has been observed by Cardinal George Pell that no other figure in Australian history has inspired as many biographies

as Daniel Mannix, with the sole exception of another Irish-Australian, Ned Kelly.

For his part, Archbishop Mannix is widely recognised as the best-known and most influential churchman in Australian history. He may well be the only archbishop ever arrested on the high seas by the British Navy, as occurred in 1920 when Archbishop Mannix was detained on the orders of British prime minister David Lloyd George, who dispatched a warship to prevent him from landing in Ireland. In those volatile and markedly sectarian times, Archbishop Mannix, being Irish, Catholic and outspoken, was accused of disloyalty to the Empire.

In reflecting upon who Archbishop Mannix was and why he matters, it

is necessary to consider the public leadership he provided in Australia during World War I and also the Cold War. The stand he took against conscription and the later resistance to the threat of communism may have been attacked vociferously by his adversaries, yet history, I believe, shows Archbishop Mannix to have been right all along.

His determined and principled opposition to attempts to impede the reasonable exercise of individual conscience and the encroachment of the secular state upon religious and other freedoms is a touchstone for us today. It is significant that while Archbishop Mannix resisted the spread of communism, he rejected a move by the Menzies government to outlaw the Communist Party of Australia.

At the same time as he engaged in events of the day, Archbishop Mannix remained far-sighted. His patient advocacy for state financial aid to non-government schools eventually was accepted by prime minister Robert Menzies as central to the Australian education system, a policy that in our time has attracted bipartisan support. In higher education, Archbishop Mannix encouraged the full participation of Catholics within the then expanding public university sector as a natural progression towards Catholics taking their rightful place in public and professional life.

He was very much a public figure; as Brenda Niall observes, the inner man remains elusive. Archbishop Mannix has a strong presence in Australian culture, inspiring several plays and appearing (in fictional guise) in at least one well-known novel. He is also the subject of a number of portraits painted by prominent artists.

When aged in his 90s, Archbishop Mannix granted one of the very first in-depth interviews to be broadcast on Australian television, an event regarded as a landmark in the history of the media. It is also great television that features, among much else, Archbishop Mannix displaying his eloquence, humility, keenness of mind and strength of spirit.

Archbishop Mannix not only made history; he is someone about whom many people, both within and outside the Church, still feel strongly. It testifies to his enduring importance and influence that the mere fact of his arrival in Australia a century ago should be the occasion of an official celebration. How many other migrants to this country would have their arrival marked by a major conference convened at a state library?

My own interest in Archbishop Mannix was awakened some years ago when I joined the residential college at Monash University named after him, the establishment of which,

according to B.A. Santamaria—yet another Mannix biographer—was one of the last things on the mind of Archbishop Mannix before he died, aged 99.

Apart from anything else, I find it inspiring to think that someone who had attained such a great age could continue to be so active, forward-thinking and effective in his approach. Archbishop Mannix did not arrive in Australia until he was in his 40s, yet he accomplished enough to fill more than one lifetime. ❏

For details of the upcoming conference, Daniel Mannix: His Legacy, see Events, page 33.



PICTURE BY FIONA BASILE

The Mannix years

Daniel Mannix was born in Ireland on 4 March 1864. He was ordained at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, in 1890, and appointed its president in 1903. In 1912, he was consecrated a bishop and appointed Coadjutor Archbishop of Melbourne, arriving in Melbourne in 1913 to take up the position. He became the third archbishop of Melbourne in 1917. He held the position for the next 46 years, a time of immense social change and growth for the Archdiocese of Melbourne and Australian society. Archbishop Mannix died on 6 November 1963.

Throughout this year, which marks a century since Mannix's arrival in Melbourne, and 50 years since his death, *Kairos Catholic Journal* will feature articles about Archbishop Mannix and his enormous contribution to the Archdiocese and beyond.

Statue of Archbishop Daniel Mannix, by Nigel Boonhem, in the grounds of St Patrick's Cathedral.