



Thomas Patrick Halton

# Nova & Vetera

Patristic Studies in Honor of  
THOMAS PATRICK HALTON



EDITED BY JOHN PETRUCCIONE

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Stella O'Leary

Thomas Patrick Halton was born on February 6, 1925, in the Republic of Ireland, in the small town of Kilnaleck, County Cavan, near the border with Northern Ireland. In the final year of primary school, his teacher, Master Peter Martin, recognizing him as an exceptional student, provided the private coaching in algebra and geometry that culminated in an award of a coveted five-year (1938–1943) scholarship to St. Patrick's College. St. Patrick's was the only boarding secondary school for boys in County Cavan. In his first letter home, Tom, now thirteen years old, reproduced for his mother the Greek alphabet—a harbinger of the scholarly productions to come.

In 1943 Tom entered St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, County Kildare, as a seminarian and an honors student in Ancient Classics. In his first year at Maynooth he was a student of the late Dennis Meehan, then newly appointed. Professor Meehan taught a course in Homer that sparked Tom's interest in Greek literature and archaeology and led in later years to many trips to Greece, the Greek islands, and Troy. In 1987, as editorial director of *The Fathers of the Church*, Tom brought out Dennis Meehan's *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: Three Poems* as volume seventy-five of that series.

In September 1946, Tom received his Bachelor's degree from Maynooth with first-class honors. He discussed with Professor John Hackett, then the director of Honors Greek at Maynooth, the possibility of pursuing a Master's degree in Greek, but Hackett discouraged the idea on the grounds that the "Authorities" might think that this would interfere with his theological studies. The M.A. had to wait for another decade. Tom's studies in theology (1946–50) led to the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology in 1949. During these years he was an editor of the student magazine, *The Silhouette*, and a member of his class's debating team.

After ordination at Maynooth on June 18, 1950, Tom spent a year at University College, Dublin, where he completed a Diploma in Higher Education while teaching full-time at the Catholic University School, Dublin. The next year he returned as diocesan inspector of religious education

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to his native diocese of Kilmore. Then, from 1952 to 1959, he taught Greek, Latin and English at his *alma mater*, St. Patrick's College, Cavan.

During this time he wrote extensively in Irish Catholic journals, including *The Furrow* and *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, on such diverse topics as "Contemporary Song," "The Priest on the Stage," and "The Pax Movement in Poland." He read one of his most publicized pieces, "The Catholic Writer," at the twelfth annual congress of the *Christus Rex* Society. This was reported at length in the *Irish Times*<sup>1</sup> and published in the proceedings of the Congress.<sup>2</sup> In this address to "an exclusively clerical audience" the thirty-two-year-old Halton remarked that some Irish authors seemed to write for the tastes of English and American publishers. It was not the actual contemporary Ireland they portrayed but "an Ireland oversupplied with sex and savagery" for "the English market," and an Ireland "mawkishly masquerading in shillelaghs and shamrocks" for the American.<sup>3</sup> The playwright Sean O'Casey took lively exception in a lengthy letter to the *Irish Times*.<sup>4</sup> A week later, in a letter to Brooks Atkinson, the influential drama critic of the *New York Times*, O'Casey reported, "I had a letter in *The Irish Times* replying to a Catholic teacher in a Cavan College, who had lectured about the Catholic writer and the Censorship; a letter that is provoking yelping letters in the same paper."<sup>5</sup> In these articles of Tom's we recognize a challenging and restless intellect and gain a sense of the Irish literary and social climate of the 1950s.

In 1954 Tom enrolled at University College, Dublin, as an M.A. student in Ancient Classics. Two years later he completed and defended, with first class honors, his dissertation, *Theodoret of Cyrus, On Divine Providence, a Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. At University College he had worked under the urbane and exacting direction of Professor John O'Meara, whose charm contrasted with the Olympian aloofness of many of the Maynooth faculty. Some thirty-five years later Tom edited for The Catholic University of America Press his mentor's *Studies in Augustine and Iriugena* (1992). It was O'Meara who encouraged Tom to proceed to doctoral studies. He suggested The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and kindly wrote supporting letters to the graduate school.

With O'Meara's support, Tom won a doctoral scholarship to CUA, which guaranteed free tuition, room, and board for two years. In Fall 1959,

1. April 26, 1957.

2. *Christus Rex* 11 (1957), pp. 707-18.

3. *Ib.*, pp. 707, 712f.

4. V. D. Krause, *The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1955-1958*, vol. 3 (Washington 1989), pp. 431-33.

5. *Ib.*, p. 436.

he entered the Department of Greek and Latin, which has long devoted particular attention to the early Church Fathers. Toward the end of Tom's first year, Professor Martin R.P. McGuire, his dissertation director, called him into his office and told him that the department was very pleased with his work and would like him to join the faculty as assistant professor. In the following September, Tom began a happy career that has continued to the present through promotion in 1965 to associate and, in 1976, to ordinary professor. From 1974 to 1978 he served as Chairman of the Department, and in 1987 he was appointed the Margaret H. Gardiner Professor of Greek.

When Tom began his career of university teaching, the study of Greek and Latin enjoyed, especially at Catholic institutions, what seemed an unassailable security, even in the undergraduate curriculum. The summer before his arrival, the Department had sponsored a well-attended workshop for Latin teachers—mostly secular and religious clergy—whose proceedings McGuire edited and published under the title *Teaching Latin in the Modern World*. Here McGuire made the pronouncement, "As long as Latin remains the official language of the Church, and, especially, of the Liturgy, Latin must have an essential place in Catholic education."<sup>6</sup> Within a few years, Vatican II and the introduction of the vernacular into the liturgy proved him to be, as he laughingly admitted, "the most discredited prophet of the twentieth century." The ancient languages soon lost the privileged position they had enjoyed at CUA, and Tom, like many other classically educated members of his generation, was to face pedagogical challenges arising from their new, entirely elective, status.

He proved to be a most versatile teacher. For decades his department has relied on him to offer the most varied array of courses: undergraduate and graduate, classical and patristic, in Greek and in Latin, on topics literary, archaeological, historical, and philosophical. In recent years he has introduced undergraduates to Greek prose composition, Roman satire, and Plato. He has conducted graduate courses and seminars on Greek epigraphy, Eusebius of Caesarea, Clement of Alexandria, Hibernian Latin texts, and the theme of virginity in Greek and Latin church authors. For the past ten years, he has had sole responsibility for the graduate pro-seminar, "The Introduction to Classical and Patristic Scholarship." In years past he even taught a course on Greek red-figure pottery! He has directed disser-

6. "Appendix C: A New Pronouncement from Rome on the Study of Latin," *Teaching Latin in the Modern World: The Proceedings of the Workshop on the Teaching of Latin in the Modern World, conducted at The Catholic University of America, June 12 to 23, 1959*, ed. M.R.P. McGuire (Washington 1960), p. 254.

tations dealing with such diverse topics as classical Greek epigraphy, early Christian homiletics, the tradition of the epithalamium in Greek and Roman sources, and medieval Latin hymnody. For many years Tom's unflagging eagerness to develop new fields of interest has much enriched the instructional offerings available to students not only of his own department but also to those in Early Christian Studies, Church History, and Theology.

Tom's scholarly work has ranged widely in Classics and Patristics and the classical tradition in European literature. One glancing through his list of publications (pp. 263–65 below) will find, among others, Homer and Camus, Eusebius and Hegeppus, Clement of Alexandria and the Pre-Socratics, Isidore of Pelusium, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom. He has returned repeatedly to certain fields, authors, and themes: the reception and rejection of classical and pre-classical philosophical notions among the Greek Fathers; the liturgy of the early Church, especially the celebration of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist; early and rhetorically elaborated Greek homilies preached at Easter. In all his work, perhaps most especially in his annotated translation of Theodoret of Cyr's *On Divine Providence* (1988), one admires the combination of an enviable philological expertise with broad theological, scriptural, philosophical, and historical erudition.

As bibliographer Tom has rendered exemplary service to the field of classical studies as a whole. His collaborator in updating Martin McGuire's model *Introduction to Classical Scholarship*, I can testify to the magnitude—and the rewards—of that enterprise. We initiated the project with an application for a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, which we received in 1978. Eight years later Kraus International published our *Classical Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography* (White Plains, New York 1986). It was a daunting task and one that at times we felt would never be completed. In 1993 we were at the University of Montpellier, where Tom was collecting material for his projected bibliographical supplement to the first three volumes of Johannes Quasten's *Patrology*. Here we came across a reference to our book in J. Poucet and J.-M. Hannick's *Introduction aux études classiques*, a French bibliographical guide hitherto unknown to us.<sup>7</sup> Under "Bibliographies générales" we read: "On consultera surtout la bibliographie toute récente de Halton, Th. P., O'Leary, St., *Classical Scholarship. An Annotated Bibliography . . .*: bibliographie annotée . . . extrêmement importante et très précieuse, couvrant

7. *Introduction aux études classiques: Guide bibliographique* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1988).

l'ensemble du domaine; l'accent y est naturellement mis sur les publications en langue anglaise; remarquable instrument de travail, qui pourrait servir de modèle." Delighted with this review, we cut short our research and celebrated with a lavish dinner of Languedoc food and wine.

It is, of course, in the study of Late Antiquity and early Christianity that Tom's service—again as bibliographer, and also as editor and administrator—has been most influential. Scholars and advanced students have long made use of the survey of a decade of publications in Patristics (1970–79) that Tom and Robert Sider brought out in two issues of the *Classical World* (1979). As editor (1983–87) of the series *The Message of the Fathers of the Church*, Tom saw through the Michael Glazier Press of Wilmington, Delaware, twenty volumes of annotated excerpts of translated patristic texts. Each of these is devoted to a single important theme such as the Fathers' exegetical practices, their discussions of the problem of divine providence and human suffering, their views on war and military service, and their social thought. Tom contributed the volume on patristic ecclesiology, *The Church* (1985), and collaborated with Thomas Carroll on *Liturgical Practice in the Fathers* (1987). Since 1983 Tom has served The Catholic University of America Press as the general editor of its internationally known *Fathers of the Church*, the most extensive series of English translations of the works of the Greek, Latin, and Syriac-speaking theologians and historians of early Christianity. So far twenty-five volumes have come out during his tenure. The high quality of the translations, introductions, and explanatory notes in these recent accessions to the series is testimony to his learning and vigilance. In addition, Tom served for five years (1983–87) on the executive committee and as a section editor of the *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum*, an ambitious and indispensable tool of historical bibliography that lists and analyzes ancient, medieval, and renaissance translations and commentaries of classical and patristic works. From 1980 to 1990 he sat on the editorial board of the *Second Century*, the forerunner to *Early Christian Studies*, which is now the journal of the North American Patristics Society. Tom was president of NAPS in 1981–82.

Many have appreciated Tom's scholarly and professional expertise, but many more—both colleagues and friends—have enjoyed the pleasure of his company. Genial and cheerful in conversation, he has always fostered the increase of collegiality in his department and his field. He is a generous host, an accomplished chef, whose guests can tell of the many and elegant courses of a New Year's brunch or a summer dinner, the good wine, abundant Yeats, and hours of convivial laughter.

In 1995, at a banquet in County Cavan, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, Tom was named Cavan Man of the Year. The award was presented by Dermot Gallagher, the Irish Ambassador to the United States, before an international circle of friends, including Richard Riley, the U.S. Secretary of Education, whose own roots go back to County Cavan, and Senator Eugene McCarthy. This volume of essays honoring and celebrating Tom's scholarly achievements also honors and celebrates the heritage and customs of his native Cavan that inspired him. Thomas Halton is pre-eminently a classicist and a patrologist, but his erudition is always spiced with a distinctively Irish wit and charm.

## Scripta



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