

Billias. . . . He first introduced me to Fisher Ames, and while I have cursed him on that score, in the end I must acknowledge my thanks for that too.'

He was born Richard Carney Higgins in Worcester on November 23, 1937, the son of the late Kenneth P. Higgins and Mary Waugh Higgins, and died on January 21, 1998, of pneumonia. Elected to membership in the Society on October 21, 1970, he attended the Society's 1973 annual meeting.

George Athan Billias

BERNARD JOSEPH FLANAGAN

The Most Reverend Bernard J. Flanagan, the first bishop of the Roman Catholic diocese of Norwich, Connecticut, and second bishop of Worcester, Massachusetts, died at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center on January 28, 1998, after a long illness.

Born in Proctor, Vermont, on March 31, 1908, Bernard Flanagan graduated from The College of the Holy Cross in 1928 and, upon graduation, pursued ecclesiastical studies at the North American College in Rome. He was ordained a priest in Rome on December 8, 1931. Following eight years of pastoral work in the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont, the then Father Flanagan enrolled at the Catholic University of America, where he earned a Doctor of Canon Law degree in 1943. He then returned to the Diocese of Burlington, serving as chancellor and secretary to the Bishop until 1953, when he was named bishop of the newly created Diocese of Norwich. In August 1959 he became the second bishop of Worcester and was installed by Richard Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston, in St. Paul's Cathedral on September 24, 1959.

Described by Cardinal Cushing on that occasion as 'strong and sturdy in character, kind and sympathetic in his dealings with his brother priests, understanding and tolerant in his relations with

those of other faiths, prudent and far-sighted,' Bishop Flanagan wisely guided the Diocese of Worcester through the tumultuous days of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent years of implementing its many decrees. He often spoke of his participation in this historic Council as 'the most important in my life.' With the closure of the Council, Bishop Flanagan quickly became widely known for his implementation of church renewal, his ecumenical involvement, and his activism on peace and justice issues.

While attending the Council sessions from 1962 to 1965, Bishop Flanagan wrote regular articles entitled 'Letters from Rome' for publication in the diocesan newspaper, *The Catholic Free Press*, and on his return to Worcester he quickly and effectively set about implementing the Council decrees in the areas of liturgy, ecumenism, the training and education of clergy, and greater lay participation in the parishes. Councils and committees were established throughout the Diocese of Worcester providing opportunities for dialogue with all segments of the local community.

Bishop Flanagan soon became known locally and nationally for his ecumenical involvement. A charter member of the Ecumenical Affairs Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and one of the first bishops appointed to the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, he was also the first president of the New England Consultation of Church Leaders. After his retirement in 1983, he was named by his successor to head the Worcester County Ecumenical Council, and under his leadership the Diocese of Worcester established a covenant in 1971 with the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, a first in New England between these two denominations. In acknowledgment of his commitment to ecumenism, Bishop Flanagan was named the 1974 recipient of the annual Ecumenical Award of the Worcester County Ecumenical Council 'for excellence and diligence in advancing the unity and mission of the Churches of Christ in our community.'

Bishop Flanagan was an early opponent of nuclear weapons, publicly opposed restoration of the death penalty, and urged

amnesty for conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War. In March 1972, speaking on behalf of the U.S. bishops before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee in Washington, D.C., he voiced the bishops' concern that the Vietnam conflict was tearing the nation apart, and asked that those who could not serve in good conscience not be judged harshly for their decision. Locally, in his letters in *The Catholic Free Press*, in radio interviews, and in lectures and conferences in Worcester area churches, he calmly and eloquently spoke out against the proliferation of nuclear arms in the United States, and cogently argued that the 'just war theory' could not be applied to nuclear war.

A truly good and gentle man who loved and served his people with pastoral dedication and profound wisdom, Bishop Flanagan was instrumental in the development and advance of new court procedures for use by marriage courts—some of which eventually made their way into general church law, thereby simplifying annulment procedures for Catholics worldwide. His involvement in social justice matters and his outreach to the poor in Worcester County were clearly evidenced each year in his work on behalf of the Bishop's Fund for Charity and Education and in his personal presence at the Bishop's Thanksgiving and Christmas Dinners, where his fatherly kindness and ready smile warmed the hearts of his appreciative guests.

The recipient of honorary degrees from a number of institutions of higher education in the New England region, Bishop Flanagan was a member of the American Antiquarian Society (since October 1976), the Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus, the Knights of Malta, and the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. It has been said that his virtues were as solid as the granite of his hometown in Proctor.

John E. Brooks, S.J.

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