Thomas J. Morrissey, S.J.

From Easter Week to Flanders Field: The Diaries and Letters of John Delaney, S.J., 1916–1919. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2015. Pp. 152. Pb, 12.99 euros.

Father Morrissey has done an excellent job of weaving together passages from John Delaney's diaries and letters that bring to life his experiences in Dublin during the Easter Rising of 1916 and as a Roman Catholic chaplain serving with the British Army during the last two years of the First World War, while providing the necessary background information and transitions between passages. The publication of this book, five years after the discovery of the diary in the Jesuit archives in Dublin, is a well-timed and valuable contribution to the celebration of and reflections upon the one hundredth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 2016. As the editor notes, there are other firsthand accounts of the rebellion in Dublin and Father Delaney's observations from April 1916, while informative and interesting reading, are not in and of themselves this book's unique contribution. The juxtaposition of Father Delaney's contacts with civilians and Volunteers (Irish rebels) and British forces during Easter Week in 1916 and his subsequent work as a Roman Catholic chaplain with the British Army are a window into the complicated, multilayered relationship between Ireland and Great Britain that remains very real one hundred years after the failed, yet inspirational rebellion of 1916.

John Delaney in the spring of 1916 was a Jesuit scholastic in his last year of theological studies at Milltown Park before his ordination to the priesthood on July 31, 1916. There were no theology classes during Easter Week and Delaney, whose passage through the city was facilitated by wearing his Roman collar, walked into the city center every day to observe the rebellion and the British military responses at various important places, most notably O'Connell Street and the General Post Office. I have walked these routes myself from the Jesuit center at Milltown Park and found Delaney's diary entries on his encounters with, and the attitudes displayed by, his Protestant, and thereby mostly Unionist, neighbors among his most interesting passages. His impressions of matronly Protestant ladies who brought tea and sandwiches to the British troops as they arrived to suppress the rebellion clearly show, as Morrissey notes, Delaney's nationalist sympathies and the religious and political fault lines in Ireland at that time. His frequently used description of these Unionists as Protestants "of the real sour faced type," for example, was lifted directly out of nationalist, Catholic literature of the day (66). The political and social divide between Irish Catholics and Anglo-Irish Protestants chronicled in his diary entries was a fact of life in 1916. The tensions, in Delaney's life and for

many in Ireland, came into clearer relief when he accepted an appointment as a Roman Catholic chaplain in the British Army during the second half of the First World War.

Delaney, like Catholic chaplains before and after him, served as a priest for the soldiers around him, both fellow Catholics and others. He, like most other Irishmen, was not there fighting for the empire, but because Ireland at the time was part of the United Kingdom and consequently there were many Irishmen in the army as well as English, Welsh, and Scottish Catholics in need of priests. He was able to work with and earn the respect of English Protestant officers at the front lines in France and Belgium despite his objections to the behavior of the British Army in Dublin during and after Easter Week 1916. Delaney was a great exemplar of the military chaplain, then and now, and a model of the goal we use today in the military chaplaincy, viz., he was a priest for the Catholics among his soldiers and a chaplain for all. He cared for and ministered to his men under fire including helping to finish a burial detail during a German bombardment. While his devotion to duty and personal bravery were noted in the citations for his military decorations, it is clear from his letters that he was there to serve the sacramental, spiritual, and human needs of the soldiers, officers, and the French and Belgian civilians who lived on or near the front lines.

Delaney, who had originally joined the Belgian Jesuit province because of his interest in their mission to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), returned to the Jesuit secondary school in Ceylon after his service in the army ended in 1919. His health necessitated his return to Ireland after more than ten years of admirable work as a teacher and administrator, at which point he served with distinction in a number of assignments. Delaney was part of the mission staff of the Irish Jesuit province, on the "mission band" preaching about his experiences in parish churches across the country, a retreat director, and a priest at Saint Francis Xavier Church, Gardiner Street near Belvedere College. He was also able to use his military chaplaincy skills as chaplain to the Dublin Metropolitan Garda Siochána (the Dublin contingent of Ireland's National Police). He died in 1956 and I was saddened to read the account of his obituary, which made no reference to his service as a chaplain in the British Army in the 1917–19 period. Morrissey notes that this was likely due to the nationalist sentiment prevalent in Ireland in the 1950s and the tendency to downplay Irish service in the British military. Father Delaney, however, was a devoted Jesuit priest from a humble Dublin neighborhood and was clearly a nationalist himself. Delaney, like many Irishmen during the period that Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, served in the British military for a variety of reasons. This important chapter within

his exemplary life of service as a Jesuit priest has now received the attention it merits thanks to Morrissey's timely and very readable book.

Daniel Sweeney, S.J.

The University of Scranton

daniel.sweeney@scranton.edu

DOI 10.1163/22141332-00304009-21