

## SEAN FREYNE

Sean Freyne died late on August 5, 2013. He was seventy-eight years old. On that very day Sean's beloved Co. Mayo Football team overwhelmed Donegal in the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) Men's Senior Championship at historic Croke Park in Dublin.

Sean was born in 1935 in Kilkelly, County Mayo, Ireland. His mother taught grammar school in nearby Tooreen. His father died when Sean was four. Sean attended St. Jarlath's College in Tuam and went on to St. Patrick's College in Maynooth, enrolling as a Seminarian in 1953.

Sean excelled in sport, and this remained a lifelong passion and commitment for him. He served on the GAA board, of which he was most proud, helping to shape the vision for the renovated Croke Park and to build the museum that is now on the grounds. He captained Mayo's Minor GAA Team that won the All-Ireland Football Championship in 1953. But in a story that is still told in Mayo, 1953 was the captain Sean's first year in seminary, and the championship game was on Sunday. In a decision that oddly but surely prefigured aspects of his later career, Freyne was not allowed to participate in the championship match by the Fathers. Mayo prevailed then, too, exactly sixty years ago. The story still sets some oldtimers' teeth on edge, but not Sean's. He remained on the GAA board until his death and was a tireless advocate for youth sports and facilities across Ireland.

Sean was ordained to the priesthood in 1960 and was sent to Rome. He was there during Vatican II; in fact, he was writing some recollections of those heady times when he died this week. He left the priesthood, fell in love, and married an

Australian lawyer named Gail Grossman. They were indefatigable companions. She was at his side in their home in Dublin when he died.

As is widely recognized, Sean's work not only focused on Galilee but strove to make Galilee an accessible context for better understanding Jesus and Jesus movements. Prior to 1980, very few works focused on Galilee, especially within New Testament studies. His landmark book in 1980, *Galilee from Alexander to Hadrian*, is rightly considered a watershed in Galilean studies, a work he wrote in part while studying with Prof. Martin Hengel. A wide range of studies followed this *magnum opus*. Freyne focused on the *Jewishness* of Jesus and the complexity of that phrase. He also wrote on the historical Jesus using the historical Galilee as his *scene*. He successfully attempted to place Galilee less on the periphery of the Roman East and viewed more as a place on the move in the early Roman period and after. He lately emphasized the environment of the Galilee as a necessary lens for understanding Galilean life. This aspect of the Galilee is never lost on a visitor coming farther north than the Bet Natopha Valley. Sean's contribution to Galilean studies shaped several generations of scholars. His contribution has and will yet further stand the test of time.

Sean had several academic appointments, but in 1981 he was appointed to the very first chair of Non-Denominational Theology in all of Ireland, at Trinity College, Dublin. It was at Trinity that Sean spent his career and his influence spread. Trinity was hospitable and collegial, an intellectually open and stimulating university where Sean's ideas could, together with extraordinary colleagues, best ruminate and flourish. And Dublin was fast becoming a global center. They grew together. Sean

took the public role of his chair and work very seriously. He was a steady, sober commentator on television or in the *Irish Times* and ready to help folks reason through the thorny issues of the moment.

Sean helped found the Centre for Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies. He was Professor of Theology in the School of Religions and Theology, becoming a Fellow and Emeritus of Trinity upon his retirement. He was also one-time President of the Society for the Study of the New Testament, a member of the Royal Irish Academy, and on the board of the Chester Beatty Library.

As was said earlier this week by one of Ireland's former presidents, Sean's passing was a huge loss for theology and for Ireland. But really it is bigger than even that, for we all lost one of the most gracious and thoughtful scholars and humans we will ever meet.

He is survived by Gail (Grossman) Freyne, his daughters Bridget and Sarah, and his sister Mary Keene.

God love you Sean Freyne and long live Mayo!

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