Advance praise for *A Man Called Mark*

"Bishop Mark Dyer was a gentle, affirming, caring human being with an inbuilt moral compass pointing in the direction of Ubuntu. His appreciation of our interdependence, that we are made for each other—God-carriers all, none superior, none inferior, and none more or less entitled—inevitably placed him on the righteous side of church discussions on contentious issues; the side of the disregarded, marginalized, ostracized, and oppressed."

—Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

"If you ever had the pleasure of speaking with Mark Dyer, Tom Linthicum's book will allow you to relive it. Here is the same clarity and generosity. Here complex issues are made easier to understand. And here is the same low-keyed sparkle that made Bishop Dyer simultaneously charismatic and unassuming. In both tone and content, *A Man Called Mark* is an experience of the man."

—Jim Naughton, Canticle Communications

"One of the best ways to read history is to read biography. And this book is the perfect example. Through the remarkable life of Bishop Mark Dyer, the reader learns about the history of the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Communion, twentieth-century Ecumenism, and the challenges of theological education. Beautifully written, this book invites one into a remarkable world of faith, hope, and love."

—The Very Rev. Ian Markham, President and
Dean of Virginia Theological Seminary

"Mark Dyer was very much a gift to the church at home and abroad. His theological reflection was deeply rooted in his faith and bore witness to the words of Evagrius: 'A theologian is one who prays.' As a bishop, Mark was a pastor after the manner of the abbot in the Rule of St. Benedict—able to listen to different voices with care,

compassion, and discernment. *A Man Called Mark* allows those of us who knew him to know him, perhaps, more fully, and for others to meet this wise and seasoned man of the Spirit for the first time."

—The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold, XXV
Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church

"For someone who only knew Mark at the end of his life, this book opened my eyes to how influential he was in the broader church. Tom Linthicum masterfully captures the captivating and Spirit-filled relationships and stories of Bishop Mark Dyer's holy life."

—The Rev. Christopher Miller, rector of Immanuel
Episcopal Church in Mechanicsville, Maryland

"A beautiful and inspiring story of beloved Bishop Mark Dyer, a true witness in the 'cloud of witnesses.' This book brilliantly illuminates how his life lived in deep faith continues to radiate through those who knew him, who were taught and mentored by him, and especially those who shared a part of his journey and had the privilege to pray with him. A must read; the theological values and principles he developed and taught are vital to the continued transformation of the church today."

—The Very Rev. Robyn Szoke-Coolidge, Dean, Stevenson
School for Ministry, Diocese of Central Pennsylvania

A Man Called Mark

THE BIOGRAPHY OF BISHOP MARK DYER

Tom Linthicum

Foreword by *Rowan Williams*

CHURCH PUBLISHING INCORPORATED

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CHAPTER 1

"You Are Irish Catholic"

> As I look at my faith and the oppression our family had to go through during the Herbert Hoover days and what the church did, that was very moving to me.[1] —Mark Dyer

Times were tough—very tough indeed—when James Michael Dyer Jr. entered the world on June 7, 1930, in Manchester, New Hampshire.

It was the first year of the Great Depression. The stock market had crashed the previous October, and the country was reeling from the hammer blows of an imploding economy. Unemployment lines stretched endlessly, banks were failing, savings were decimated. Manchester, a mill town founded in 1846 on the banks of the Merrimack River fifty miles north of Boston, was hit especially hard. Its decline had begun in the 1920s as its mills, which once included the largest cotton textile mill complex in the world, began to falter.

The world as Manchester had known it ended on Christmas Eve, 1935, when the last mill closed and filed for bankruptcy. At one time its owner had employed seventeen thousand people and was the chief

source of income for half of Manchester's families.[2] Stunned by their city's economic collapse, Manchester's nearly seventy-seven thousand residents did whatever they could to get by.

In the household of the Dyer family, an Irish clan rooted in the Roman Catholic Church, traditional values of family, faith, and work reigned supreme. That included the illegal making and selling of whiskey since Prohibition was the law of the land. Everyone pitched in, even the new baby. It was a story—confirmed by his younger sister, Pat Cashin—that Dyer always took great relish in telling. "My grandfather made it in the cellar," he said, referring to the forbidden brew. "Then he would make the deliveries in the baby carriage, which he had modified with a place for the bottles underneath, and I was the baby in that carriage."[3] And so the carriage bounced along the streets of Manchester, with the youngest Dyer nestled atop the bottles, providing a very legitimate cover for a very illegitimate operation. The first stop was always the residence of the monsignor, who would get a complimentary bottle. There was also a free bottle for the cop on the beat—a good Irishman, of course.

As Dyer grew up during these times of great hardship, he saw firsthand how the Catholic Church ministered to its parishioners not just on Sundays but every day, helping people survive and giving them hope. "The monsignor always knew who was working and who wasn't, which families were struggling the most, and he would send over money or food when it was most needed," Dyer recalled many years later. "It was a social welfare system, it was run by the church, and it worked."[4]

It was a lesson Dyer never forgot. It provided the foundation for his lifelong commitment to social justice and his belief in the church's calling to serve the poor. For Jimmy Dyer, as he was called by his family (Mark was the name he would later take as a young monk), life in Manchester, even in times of deprivation, was a rich tapestry of family, church, and the Irish community.

His father, James M. Dyer, worked as a baker by day and made bread at St. Patrick's Orphanage for Girls at night. "On Friday night he would make what the children would like on Saturday morning, and he would bake cookies," said Pat. "He would make all kinds of cakes for people, and he never asked for any money. He was a good man."[5]

Anna Mahoney Dyer raised Jimmy and Pat, cared for her husband's ailing parents, and took in sewing work to help meet expenses. The four Dyers, along with James Dyer's parents, Anna's mother, and other family members, shared a rambling, three-story house at 352 Cedar Street, in the Irish and Greek quarter of the inner city's east side. "There was no money but there were good times," said Pat. "Grandfather Dyer went to church every morning at 7, and Grandmother was in her rocking chair, saying her rosary. At 6:30, [Jimmy and I] would fire up the oil furnace. Then we would have oatmeal, toast, and orange juice, and leave for school.

"For fun after dinner, sometimes we would sit on the front steps. Other times, we would listen to jazz and do the jitterbug. On weekends, if we were lucky, we would go to the movies and watch cowboy movies on Saturday afternoons but never on Sunday. Sunday was Mass at 9 or 10:30 and then breakfast and a big dinner—roast beef, fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and vegetables—at 1."[6]

Every year when the circus came to town, nobody in Manchester was more excited than Jimmy Dyer. He would jump out of bed between 3 and 4 in the morning to watch the elephants lumber from their railroad cars to the circus venue; he was convinced that this was the greatest form of free entertainment known to man.

No matter how tight things were, Agnes Mahoney (Anna's mother) managed to scrape together enough money every year to rent a cottage for a two-week family vacation at Hampton Beach, located on southeast New Hampshire's eighteen-mile sliver of craggy Atlantic coastline. Those memorable trips kindled Dyer's lifelong love affair with the sea.

The family's Irish roots ran deep. Grandparents on both sides were born in Ireland. Years later while he was studying in Belgium, Dyer would visit the family farm in the village of Farranfore, near Killarney in County Kerry, before it became an airport. Anna Dyer treasured her Irish heritage so much that when she died in 1995, the local funeral home flew the Irish flag in her honor.

The Irish-American Club, a tired, one-room affair with a bar, some worn chairs, and a sagging floor, was not far from the home on Cedar Street. Dyer's father would go there regularly on Fridays and Saturdays, and as Jimmy grew older, he would meet his friends there as well.

Although Jimmy developed a taste for beer when he came of age, Anna Dyer was a confirmed teetotaler and a member of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association of the Sacred Heart, founded in Dublin in 1898. Dyer told a friend years later that on one occasion, fearful that an Irish wake in her home was getting out of hand, his mother emptied all of the whiskey bottles into the sink, bringing the gathering to an abrupt halt.

The Catholic Church was also a defining influence in Dyer's life. "Grandmother would say to us, 'You are Irish Catholic,' " Pat recalled, as if the two were woven seamlessly together. During Dyer's early years, they were.[7] His family attended St. Anne's Church, a bastion of Irish Catholicism, where he was baptized on June 21, 1930. The Dyers attended church every Sunday, and young Jimmy became an altar boy and attended Catholic schools.

Tragedy struck the Dyer family when Jimmy was fifteen. Born with only one kidney, his father was stricken at home one evening in January 1946 with a terrible stomachache. He was taken to the hospital, where doctors discovered a virulent infection in his remaining kidney that they were powerless to stop. He died that night at the age of thirty-nine.

More than half a century later, Mark told his wife, Amy, whom he married in 2004, about his memories from that traumatic time: "I

learned so much about my father that I didn't know as I wandered from room to room at the wake. The women were in the kitchen, saying how kind and caring my father had been, telling about his care for the nuns and doing their baking after he finished his work. The men were in the parlor telling funny stories about him, always with a good Irish punch line. One story stayed with me, about how my grandmother would always call my father downstairs to break up fights between my uncles and how he was the one who looked after my Uncle Matthew when he'd had too much to drink. I learned a lot about my father that night."[8]

His father's death was a crushing blow to Jimmy Dyer. Always a good student, his grades plummeted and his mother had to intercede with his teachers. In time, Dyer regained his emotional equilibrium and his grades returned to normal. But the life he had known was over. Young Jimmy Dyer was now the man of the house.

Despite the Catholic Church's central role in Dyer's life, there was never any talk in those years of his becoming a priest. Many years later, he said that if he had given much thought to a future vocation at that point in his life, he probably would have said he wanted to be a firefighter or a policeman because that's what most Irishmen did in Manchester.

"[Our mother] didn't want him to be a priest and she didn't want me to be a nun," said Pat. "She thought he would have to go far away."[9]

It turned out that he did go far away, but it wasn't the church that took him there. It was the church that brought him back.