



Fr John McAuley, S.J.

(1923-2012. In Zambia 1969-2006)

2 January 2012

Fr. John McAuley spent 66 of his 89 years in the Society as a brother from 1946 to 1986 and as a priest from 1986 to his death on 2 January 2012. He was a true Jesuit in whom there was no guile. Integrity, determination to pursue a spiritual life as he understood it, and zeal for the apostolate characterized him all through life. No obstacle or difficulty could deter him from making these qualities manifest. At times his strength of purpose seemed daunting, but to John this was his way of finding God and showing how much God loves us. One of his great strengths was his total dedication to whatever he was missioned to. However, this came over at times as a rigidity in his teaching and preaching.

John took his first vows on 8th September 1948. Before entering the novitiate he had completed two years of a science degree at Glasgow University but he never revealed this to his fellow novices. He was a private man, one who enjoyed companionship but did not depend on it.

After a few years in charge of the dining room in Tullabeg and secretary to the Rector in Clongowes, John moved to Rome where he spent several years as receptionist at the Curia. Because of his reticence in speaking about himself, we do not know much about John's life during this period. But the few things we do know are very striking. He was outstanding for the generosity of his hospitality to Irish Jesuits who happened to be passing through Rome, going out of his way to ensure that they were able to visit church and historical sites.

During this period, John succeeded in doing what Hitler had been unable to do – he stopped General Montgomery in his tracks! What happened was this. One day, when John was receptionist at the Curia, a fine looking man came in and said he wanted to see the General. John asked to see his ID, but the visitor said he was not carrying one. John retorted that in that case he could not admit him, to which the visitor replied that he had an appointment with the General. John looked at the day's documents detailing appointments and said he had no information on that, but the man insisted. So John asked him his name and then rang the General to tell him that a man called Montgomery was at the desk, saying he had an appointment - "send him in at once" was the reply, "I am waiting for him, he is also a General".

But stopping high-ranking generals and the humdrum duties of receptionist at the Curia, did not give John sufficient outlet for his apostolic zeal. And so it was that he undertook part-time studies at the Gregorian University, a move that would accelerate his transition to the priesthood in later life. The same zeal led to his being assigned in 1969 to the newly established Zambian Province where, after some time spent in learning a local language, he served as a secondary school teacher, first at Canisius

Secondary School, and then for several years at the government school in Namwala. In addition to his teaching duties, John also served as chaplain at Namwala Secondary School, a ministry that gave him much scope for his apostolic zeal.

From Namwala, John was assigned to the government training college for secondary teachers, Nkrumah College in Kabwe, where he lectured in religious studies and served as chaplain. It was while he was in Kabwe that John's desire to be ordained as a priest came very strongly to the fore, leading to studies at the Bellarmino in Rome in 1985 - 1986 and ordination in June 1986, at the age of 63, by Saint John Paul II. On his return to Zambia, John was again posted to Kabwe, where he served in the parish and lectured and was chaplain at Nkrumah College. He also took on a heavy load of formation work for young religious. For a time he lectured at the national seminary in Mpima, but is probably better remembered for his catechetical work with postulants and novices for the Sisters of Charity and for the Holy Family Sisters.

Although physically very wiry, John always suffered from bad eyesight, attributable in great measure to his being an albino. This prevented him from ever driving a car on any of his apostolic journeys. Instead he undertook these on a Honda 110 motor-cycle. An image of John endures, sitting very straight-backed on his Honda, looking straight ahead and 'put-putting' along miles of tarred and dirt roads. But the Honda eventually became John's undoing, leading to serious accidents as he hit unseen potholes or had brushes with passing cars. One of these accidents necessitated his return to Ireland in 2002 to recover from his injuries. When he returned to Zambia two years later, the Provincial felt obliged to refuse his request that he could ride his Honda again.

Undaunted, John set about his work in formation again with young religious, but the injuries he had previously sustained had weakened him so badly that it was again necessary for him to return to Ireland, this time in 2006. At first he was assigned to Milltown Park, but a year later it became necessary for him to transfer to the Jesuit Nursing Home, Cherryfield Lodge. He settled in well and was content. He greatly enjoyed visits from members of his family who came from Scotland a few times each year to spend some time with him. But his condition steadily deteriorated; he was confined to a wheelchair; his eyesight failed almost completely; and his hearing became quite poor. But he always remained patient and now seemed more than ever concentrated on his new apostolate, to pray for the Church and the Society. He died in Cherryfield Lodge on 2 January 2012