



Br Christopher Murray, S.J.
(1912-2008. In Zambia 1963-1979)

9 January 2008

Brother Christopher Murray, known to his fellow Jesuits as Christy, but always to his family as Kit, was born on 29 February 1912. He was always ready for a joke or wisecrack about the fact that he had a birthday only once every four years and so was still only in his 23rd year when he went to Cherryfield at the age of 90! During that long life he was to live in close proximity to some of the great drama of the 20th century both in Ireland and in Europe. He was born about six weeks before the Titanic floundered in the Atlantic, and two years before World War 1 broke out. He was too young to join his elder brothers and sisters who walked a mile down North Circular Road from their Aughrim Street home, to say the Rosary outside Mountjoy Jail, as Kevin Barry was being hanged. As a boy he saw Michael Collins walk past the Christian Brothers' School beside the Black Church at the head of the funeral cortege of Arthur Griffith. A short week later he saw Collins' own funeral pass the same spot on its way to Glasnevin Cemetery.

He did his early schooling at the Christian Brothers School in St. Mary's Place and got a two year scholarship to Bolton College of Technology but only stayed for one year. He worked for seven years apprenticed to a French polisher of furniture. He was an official in the Trade Unions. Those who knew him will not be surprised to know that he led at least two strikes! At the age of 27 he entered the novitiate (1937) having made, what he said, was a 'mature decision'. Later his mother said she was surprised at the decision but she saw no problem once he made his mind up.

Shortly after he ended his novitiate, he was posted to Rome in 1940. While en route he had barely passed through Paris when it fell to the Germans. The day he arrived was the time Mussolini declared war. As long as he stayed in the house he was technically in the Vatican City, but if he walked out the front door he was in Italy! It was a difficult time since on arrival he was asked to type a letter in Latin. He had no idea of Latin and never typed in his life! However he soon mastered the necessary skills with his usual intelligence and determination. While he was in Rome the food shortages became desperately severe. The situation took such a toll on his health that he was on a milk diet for a whole year after the war ended. One thing that upset him very much afterwards was the suggestion that Pope Pius XII had abandoned the Jews to their fate during the war. He himself had run messages on behalf of the Holy Father to Jewish families in hiding around the city, bringing them food and other supplies. He rarely traveled twice by the same route lest he was under surveillance. Christy worked with Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, the legendary "Vatican Pimpernel" who did so much for the Jews and whose life was portrayed by Gregory Peck in a major feature film. He did two stints at Rome 1940-1946 in the secretariat of the English Assistant and 1961-1963 at the Mission Secretariat.

Back in Ireland he did various jobs in the Crescent both in the Church and the community from 1946 to 1958, before being appointed secretary to the Provincial 1958

to 1960. He also worked as secretary to the editor of *The Madonna* from Manresa House in 1960/1961.

While in Rome he volunteered for the Zambian mission and became secretary to Bishop Corboy, whom he had known as a novice, for seven years (1963-1970) in the heady years of post-independence. At the end of his life it was these years with Bishop Corboy that always came to his mind. He then was bursar at Canisius Secondary School from 1970 to 1979.

He returned to Ireland in 1979 and worked from Milltown Park in the Messenger Office up to 1984 from where he went to Gardiner Street where he spent his remaining years (1984-2002) before he went to the Nursing Unit of Cherryfield. His work always included looking after the finances and the sacristy.

Christy was gifted with a high IQ as was evident in his ease in dealing with figures and accounts. He was widely read and well informed. This led to his holding a very definite position on a variety of matters. In any discussion it was not long before this was made clear with the words 'the facts of the matter are'. Naturally this ensured lively and occasionally heated discussions on a variety of topics. An inveterate walker, he must have known every street in Dublin. Until he was into his 90s he did a four mile walk every Wednesday up and down the North Circular Road to visit Stephanie, his youngest sister, still living in the family home. She herself categorized him as a "man of will". It was noticed that his pace slacken towards the end until he had to give it up.