



Fr Richard Cremins, S.J.

(1922-2012. In Zambia/Malawi 1957-2007)

21 February 2012

Fr Richard (Dick) Cremins was raised in Dublin during the post-independence and post-civil war years. He attended the Holy Ghost Fathers' Blackrock College and then proceeded to do undergraduate studies at University College Dublin (UCD). Afterwards he began legal studies, spending one year at King's Inn, passing his first bar exam with first class honours. Dick discontinued his legal studies to join the Society in 1943. He followed the usual course of studies in Ireland doing regency at Belvedere and Mungret Colleges. After theology at Milltown Park he was ordained a priest in 1955.

Dick arrived in Northern Rhodesia in September 1957. On completion of a period learning chiTonga, his first assignment was as Manager of Schools. In 1959 he was appointed as Principal of Canisius College. A very significant development during the four-and-a-half years of Dick's tenure as Principal of Canisius was the commencement of 6th Form (A-level).

In 1964 he was appointed parish priest of the town of Monze and subsequently as chaplain to the Lay Apostolate Movement in the newly established Diocese of Monze. That same year, Northern Rhodesia's colonial status ended when it became the independent country of Zambia. Dick identified wholeheartedly with the new State and, as soon as it was possible for him to do so, adopted Zambian citizenship, even though this necessitated renouncing his status as a citizen of Ireland. He worked indefatigably for six years as parish priest of Monze town and for five years as promoter of the lay apostolate throughout the diocese.

In 1977 he was transferred to Lusaka and to take up an appointment, on behalf of the Zambia Episcopal Conference, as national chaplain for the lay apostolate and secretary for development. For the next seven years he spent the greater part of his time educating and training the laity, mobilising and energising lay groups, and advocating on their behalf. His constant concern was to ensure that Vatican II's vision of the role of the laity became a reality, energetically adopted and practised, not only by the ordained ministry of the Church and by members of the Society, but also by lay-persons themselves.

Dick's experience and reflections during this time brought into sharper focus for him the importance of the family. He became knowledgeable on the medical and social aspects of natural family planning and was soon recognised as a national and international authority in this area. His views did not always find acceptance with others, but this did not diminish their respect for his integrity, the consistency of his approach, and his manifest commitment to bettering the condition of women. His involvement in the area of natural family planning became more all-consuming when in 1983 he was appointed as Director of Zambia's Family Life Movement.

In 1993 Dick was sent to Lilongwe in Malawi to set up a Jesuit residence there. Since a number of Jesuits were already working in the Malawian seminaries, Malawi was now recognised as part of the Zambian province, but there was no specifically Jesuit residence there. He was responsible for the purchase and rehabilitation of the present residence of Our Lady of the Way, more usually known as 9/99, the official address. Dick continued the family apostolate he had animated so well in Lusaka, and set up an official NGO called FAMLl, supported by overseas aid.

In Lilongwe in 2007, Dick experienced a massive stroke that ultimately led to his return to Ireland and admission to Cherryfield, the Irish Province's nursing home for infirm Jesuits. But his approach to his transformed conditions was not one of self-pity. Instead, with characteristic determination and enormous courage, he succeeded in teaching himself to speak with some sort of clarity and in making himself mobile with the aid of a "walker" that had been designed according to his specifications, for a person whose right hand was crippled.

Dick put his hard-won computer skills to good use in these final years. From the darkness that must have enshrouded his own life, he regularly sent warm and supportive messages to colleagues who, like himself, were experiencing the cloud of unknowing. But even more, despite his limitations, he continued to press for the betterment of women, loyal adherence to the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* and ever greater involvement in the official Church on the part of “outstanding lay Catholics who are to be found as leaders in every walk of life.”

Throughout his long and very full life, Dick Cremins emerged as a gentle person, kind and peaceful, who lived his life joyfully in the service of others and in pursuit of the highest ideals. At times, people could be upset by his sabre-sharp remarks or forthright statement of his views. But behind these there always lay his fearlessness in challenging accepted points of wisdom, his passion to see the Kingdom of God as envisaged by Jesus realised among us, his zeal for the genuine development of all peoples, his razor sharp mind and his powerful sense of humour with its love of irony, laughter and the joy of people.

Years ago, Dick was characterised as being shaped like a paschal candle – tall, thin and luminous. But his moral stature far surpassed his physical tallness. Dick died in Cherryfield Lodge on 21 February 2012.