



Fr Francis X Venuta, S.J.
(1931-1994. In Zambia 1957-1960)

1 March 1994

In a quotation from a letter from the USA to his superior in Zambia in November 1960, Fr Frank wrote: 'Already from my boyhood, I grew up with two vocations in mind, I wanted to be either a priest or a doctor. These are vocations that give to one the chance to help others. Therefore in order to start medicine, I took biology as a major for my matriculation. But also there was another obstacle: if I wanted to keep on in the university, it was necessary to join the Communist party. Since I did not agree to that, I got kicked out and landed in a factory. Then I got the chance to escape from Czechoslovakia and I joined the Jesuits'.

He was born in Stupesice, Bohemia, Czechoslovakia on 8 April 1931. He did his secondary school at Brno, first at a minor seminary run by the Jesuits and, when that closed, at the Gymnasium Dr Josefa Rudely. When Fr Frank escaped in 1951, it was the last time he saw his father hale and hearty. His father died of cancer in 1960, aged 59.

After the novitiate, he went to study philosophy to Pullach, Germany, for a year and then to Tullabeg, Ireland, for two years. He then came to Northern Rhodesia to the Lusaka Mission where he spent three years. He was sent to Mpima Minor Seminary in Kabwe to teach science, maths, Latin and civics as well as shouldering all the various other duties that scholastics in regency at secondary schools were involved in. He became very interested in chiLenje, one of the local languages and began to prepare a dictionary of it with the help of teachers and pupils at Mpima. He also spent some time at St Francis, Lusaka, building up a small library. Kasisi Mission held a fascination for him and, after leaving Northern Rhodesia, he constantly enquired about it in his letters.

For theology he was accepted in Weston College MA, in the USA in 1960. Here he was also ordained priest on 15th June 1963. While studying theology, he also continued his study of biology, attending summer school at Fordham University in 1961 and 1962. He wished to continue with these studies after tertianship aiming for a Masters and/or PhD.

He was a good letter writer up to about 1966, writing to Zambia, interested in what was happening on the mission and mentioning his plans for it and what he might be doing on his return. He then got permission to continue with his biological studies in Boston College for a number of years, almost becoming 'a permanent student'. His letter writing stopped around this time.

In 1981 he became a research associate to the Cancer Research Institute of Boston College under Fr W D Sullivan, the PhD director. This continued up to 1983 and was renewed further up to 1994. In a letter from Fr Sullivan we read 'the nature of his work while in the Institute will be assisting me in my work on cancer research as well as continuing his PhD thesis project with Trypanosoma lewisii, a parasitic protozoan causing 'sleeping sickness', and very prevalent in Africa'. For fifteen years (1979-1994) he was with the Cancer Research Institute. In 1982 he was transcribed to the New England Province. He had been with them for so many years from the time he started his theology. He was happy in the Cancer Institute – perhaps his early desire to study medicine and the fact of his father dying of cancer contributed to this. In the community at Boston College he also became sub-minister from 1982 to the time of his death.

Fr Frank had an agreeable personality. He was considered a very pleasant person, so ready to help others that many imposed on him. In fact he was considered to be the best radio repair man and clock fixer in Chestnut Hill, where he lived. He died in Boston on the 1 March 1994.