



Fr John Counihan, S.J.
(1916-2001. In Zambia 1956-2001)

7 March 2001

Fr John was a man for whom decisions came before sentiment and who rarely changed his mind once he had made it up. This was the basis of the affectionately critical nickname given to him by some scholastics and others, namely "Dr No" because of his "no" to many requests. After finishing as provincial, he returned to Charles Lwanga TTC to lecture in education. One evening at table, a member of the community said to him, "John, you are right. You seem to know everything". John replied, 'They do not call me" "Dr. Know" for nothing'!

He was born in Ennis, in Co Clare, Ireland, into a large family. He went to Clongowes Wood College for his secondary education and left laden with academic prizes. He attended University College in Dublin to study classics and after an M A won a traveling scholarship in ancient classics which brought him to Leipzig University in Germany. His academic habits served him well in studying the scriptures which would be his favorite spare time occupation for the rest of his life. Later a Greek New Testament and a Tonga dictionary helped him prepare Sunday homilies.

At the age of 26, he entered the Society at Emo in 1942. After the customary study of philosophy and theology, he was ordained priest in Milltown Park in 1951. He went to teach Latin and Greek at Belvedere College in 1953, but three years later found him in Zambia. He learnt chiTonga after arrival and then moved to Canisius Secondary School until the newly built Teacher Training College across the river was opened. Then he went there to be the first principal, 1959 to 1964.

He then went to Monze as education secretary for the diocese and Bishop's secretary. However the unification of the two Missions of Chikuni and Lusaka brought about the creation of the vice-province of Zambia with John as first provincial, 1969 to 1976. It was no easy task to get the different nationalities of Jesuits to think of themselves as one province. He organized an international novitiate for Eastern Africa, built Luwisha House near the university for future scholastic undergraduates and encouraged the recruitment of young Zambians into the Society which for a long time had been inhibited by the necessary policy of building up the local clergy. In 1975, the province began working on the Copperbelt. He was duly gratified at the end of his term of office when Fr Mertens, the Assistant for Africa, said to him, "You have done a good job, you have set up a Jesuit province".

After being provincial, he returned south again to the Monze diocese to the staff of Charles Lwanga TTC from 1978 to 1984, and then to Kizito Pastoral Centre, 1985 to 1998, to help in the formation of local religious.

A colleague paid the following tribute to him: "I recall some of John's characteristics. Such an intelligent man can hardly have been blind to the difficult spots in the characters of some of his confrères. Yet, I never heard him speak negatively of another. His tendency was to idealize them. Even if he was firm to the point of inflexibility in his decisions, he was unfailingly courteous, considerate and kind to others. You could always count on him being in a good humor. He did not wear his prayer life on his sleeve, yet he was everything that is implied in the term, 'a good religious'. Without

being overly pious he clearly gave priority to his spiritual life, took an Ignatian view of life's details and sought God in everything".

In 1999, John retired to Chula House in Lusaka, the infirmary for Jesuits, where he died peacefully on 7th March 2001.