



Fr Arthur Clarke, S.J.
(1916-1995. In Zambia 1957-1995)

8 March 1995

After leaving school at Clongowes Wood College in 1933, Arthur worked for about five years in the Hibernian Bank. Later he enjoyed recalling his days as an oarsman in a crew of eight, racing on the river Liffey in Dublin.

Arthur took as his model and ideal his Master of Juniors, Fr Charles O'Connor Don, whose motto, 'faithful always and everywhere' Arthur took as his own. He was noticeable for his observance of rules, regularity at prayer, simple faith, thoroughness in his work – even polishing the floor of his room. He was outstanding for his charity, especially towards those in trouble or unwell. These traits remained with him all his life. One who lived with Arthur said that he had a characteristic blend of the ridiculous with a stern sense of duty.

When he finished tertianship, Arthur became socius to the Master of Novices for about two years and then became Minister at Clongowes Wood College for two years. The job of Minister seemed to have followed him in all the houses he was posted to.

1958 saw him in Zambia, in Chivuna where he studied chiTonga and acted as Minister. He was transferred to Chikuni, again as Minister, but after two years became Rector there. In the role of rector, as in the rest of his life, Arthur never once showed the slightest trace of malice, vindictiveness or favoritism. During his six years as rector, he was blessed with such outstanding heads of Canisius as Dick Cremins and Michael J Kelly. Arthur's vision for Canisius as a leading secondary school was influenced by his experience of Clongowes Wood College in Ireland. First, he wanted a proper house for the community. Though the actual building was the responsibility of Fr McCarron and Br Pat McElduff, the siting and design of the spacious community house are largely Arthur's. Then came the expansion of Canisius with better quality classrooms and dormitories, a fitting dining room and kitchen. Arthur was deeply involved too in the design of the college chapel.

From 1967 to 1973 he was at Namwala Government Secondary School as teacher and later as Deputy Head. Arthur reveled in giving himself to the demands made on him: teaching, conscientious correction of assignments, availability to students, and counselor to his fellow teachers. Becoming Deputy gave him the extra load of maintaining discipline and setting high standards of behavior and work among the students. This seems to have been one of the happiest times of Arthur's life in Zambia and every indication was that he had excellent relations with the staff and pupils, due no doubt to his inherent kindness and generosity. He actually wore himself out and was then transferred to the smaller Mukasa minor seminary in Choma in 1974.

However, in 1974, he went on long leave to Ireland where he was exposed to new styles of living the religious life and nuanced modifications of traditional ways of expressing Catholic doctrine. Arthur became confused and deeply upset, as his simple faith had ever delighted in accepting the traditional textbook expression of the Catholic faith which he had learnt in theology. So he held on grimly to his convictions for the rest of his life, as he continued to think and preach in scholastic categories. He found Mukasa too small for him after the vastness of Namwala and was moved after two

years. His eight years (1976–1984) at Charles Lwanga T.T.C. gave him fresh scope for his zeal and energies. He enjoyed being in a large community house which he kept spotlessly clean, during his years as Minister. His lecturers were meticulously prepared and all assignments corrected. He was tireless in supervising teaching practice. He worked hard to build up the morale of a small group of Catholic pupils at Rusangu Secondary School.

In the end he wore himself out again and was transferred to St Ignatius in Lusaka as assistant in the parish (1984-1990). He was especially devoted to hearing confessions and generous in answering calls on his time. When Fr Max Prokoph began to fail, Arthur was as assiduous as ever in helping him. Ascetical in his own life, stern towards those for whom he felt responsibility, Arthur was surprisingly indulgent towards the various strays and 'inadequates' who quickly detected in him 'an easy touch' and flocked around St Ignatius.

He was moved to the infirmary at John Chula House as his mind began to fail, even though his body was strong and healthy. It was painful to see him slowly losing touch with the outside world as Alzheimer's took its inevitable toll. At the end, Arthur died quite suddenly. It was discovered that he had widespread cancer of which he never complained. He was never one to vacillate or waffle and when the time came he took his leave of life as he had lived it, with dispatch and no nonsense.