



Fr Robert Kelly, S.J.
(1921-2005. In Zambia 1951-2005)

8 March 2005

Fr Bob (as he was always called) Kelly was born in Tullamore in the midlands of Ireland on 13 July 1925. He attended the Christian Brothers School in Tullamore until he finished his secondary education. He then entered the Jesuits at Emo Park in 1943. Two of his younger brothers later joined him. He followed the normal course of studies in the Society but for regency he went to Northern Rhodesia in 1951 with Fr Joe Conway. They were the first of the Irish scholastics to go there. He began by learning chiTonga and then taught at Canisius Secondary School. Even then he had a flair for writing and he produced a stencilled codex called *Tonga without Tears*, the first of a number of his publications.

Whatever Fr Bob did, he put his heart and soul into it. After his ordination to the priesthood in 1957 in Dublin, Ireland, and his tertianship, he returned to Northern Rhodesia in 1959 to Canisius Secondary School where he taught for ten years and was Spiritual Father to the boys as well. With his degree in English he was a very clear teacher. Apart from teaching, he developed the school canteen, donning the cap of a busy shopkeeper, organized the films (cinema) for the boys, ordering them from Southern Rhodesia, and worrying if they were delayed in coming. In order to help the boys follow the films Fr Bob would write a long, detailed preview for them. When the school annuals began to appear, he would be prowling around with his camera! Whatever was going on in the school, Fr Bob would be there. He mixed well with the boys and had their confidence and trust.

He moved from Canisius to St Edmund's Secondary School in Mazabuka, again teaching and being Spiritual Father for nine years bringing him up to 1978. As with Canisius he was so involved with the school that he even cheered for St Edmund's when they were playing football against Canisius!

The Pioneer Total Abstinence Association (PTAA) is an association to help others by voluntarily giving up all alcoholic drink. Fr Bob himself became a full Pioneer just before he entered the Society in 1943. As the Association had begun in the Southern Province and was beginning to spread, the Episcopal Conference appointed him as National Director, a post he held for over twenty years. He ended his formal teaching after twenty one years and he moved to Lusaka. Again his thoroughness brought him around the country promoting the Association, giving talks, retreats, organizing rallies. He had to contend at times with Pioneer centers trying to introduce new rules such as: 'we want a uniform, we must wear the badge over the heart only, smokers cannot be Pioneers'!

He became parish priest at St Ignatius Church in Lusaka for four years and then moved to Kitwe from 1989 to 1991. School retreats and retreats for religious were a big feature in his life. He was a very spiritual man, a man of prayer and a very good preacher. So many people have been helped by him as he was a man of compassion. Move here: He had a good sense of humor, liked a good game of cards in his earlier days and was endowed with a practical, realistic outlook on life.

Normally one would not associate Fr Bob with singing but he produced a booklet of charismatic hymns, *Songs of Praise* which went into five editions. As director of PTAA, he produced a Handbook for the Association which was also translated into chiNyanja as well as a popular booklet *A Christian solution to a national problem*.

Apart from Pioneer material, Fr Bob wrote ten books over the years: *Planted in Love; Calming the Storm; Stories New and Old; Hidden with Christ; With Unveiled Faces; A Joy so Glorious; Fan into Flame; Be Still and Know; In Love with God; HIV/AIDS a Response.*

He moved from Kitwe to St Ignatius in Lusaka again in 1995 helping out in the parish with pastoral work. His health began to deteriorate in 2004 and he moved to Chula House, the Jesuit Nursing Home. He died peacefully at 06.55 on the morning of Tuesday 8 March 2005. As his body lay in the chapel at Chula House before he was taken to the Ambassador Funeral Home, a beautiful butterfly was seen hovering over Fr Bob's body.