



**Fr Patrick O'Brien, S.J.**  
**(1910-1991. In Zambia 1946-1991)**

**21 March 1991**

Before Fr Paddy entered the Society at Emo in 1935, he had already attended university, was a graduate and a solicitor in the family firm. He was born in Nenagh, Co Tipperary, Ireland in 1910 and went to school at Clongowes Wood College. After his novitiate, since he was already a graduate, he went straight to philosophy in Jersey - the French-speaking philosophate in the Channel Islands. He stayed there two years but as World War 2 had broken out, he returned to Tullabeg, Ireland to finish his philosophy. After his theology at Milltown Park he was ordained in 1943.

After tertianship in 1945, he volunteered to come to Northern Rhodesia which he did with Fr Paddy Walsh in 1946. He went to Chikuni to teach until he moved to Lusaka to St Ignatius as parish priest for nine years where he was also chaplain to the hospital and taught at both a primary and secondary school. He alternated with Mgr Wolnik as chaplain to St Francis and Regiment Church.

He taught at Munali Secondary School and Hodgson Trade School and gave spiritual talks to the Dominican Sisters and the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood. For a year he was secretary to Archbishop Kozlowiecki, then he went to the Southern Province as parish priest in Choma for three years and chaplain to the hospital, 1959 to 1961. He acted as education secretary at the Catholic Secretariat in Lusaka for six months in 1962 and teaching again at Munali and Chalimbana where he was also chaplain to the two institutions. From 1969 to 1974 he was secretary to Archbishop Milingo, and from 1974 to 1988 he was secretary to the Papal Pro-Nuncio. All the occupations of parish priest, chaplain, teacher, secretary, fitted into his educational background.

He had an abiding sense of the presence and the majesty of God. He found God in simple daily devotions like the Rosary. He was also fascinated by the wonders of nature and the discoveries of science. In them he found material for prayer. All these things for him were reflections of the wisdom, the power and the love of the Creator. He was a great reader and liked to communicate what he had assimilated in retreats, in sermons and even in conversation. He was a wonderful story teller! He was interested in people, keeping in touch with his many friends, and being ecumenically minded with people of other denominations.

He was always ready to 'uphold his priestly ministry even when it cost'. In his early days in Lusaka, a young man involved in a fatal shooting came to Fr Paddy for advice and counseling. The young man gave himself up to the police and Fr Paddy was put into the witness box and asked to testify that the incriminating weapon, a rifle, had been handed to him by the accused. Fr Paddy refused to give evidence and was committed for contempt of court. A newspaper reported:

"What is described as the most sensational murder trial ever to be held in Northern Rhodesia came to an abrupt end when the magistrate at Lusaka dismissed the case against Lawrence Sullivan, 24, who was charged with the murder of Mrs. Christina Margarita Fuller. The sensation was caused by the persistent refusal of a priest, Fr P J O'Brien, S.J. to take the oath as a witness."

Fr O'Brien maintained that there 'there was a conflict of duties' and, although warned

by the magistrate of the risk he took, said he could not give evidence which might look like a breach of confidence. He insisted that it was for the public good that a man or woman who had done something seriously wrong should feel free to have recourse in confidence to their priest or minister of religion.

A fall, which seriously damaged his hip and other long standing health problems, brought him to Ireland to the Jesuit Nursing Unit in Dublin in 1989. On 21 March 1991 at the age of 80, Fr Paddy died of a heart attack.