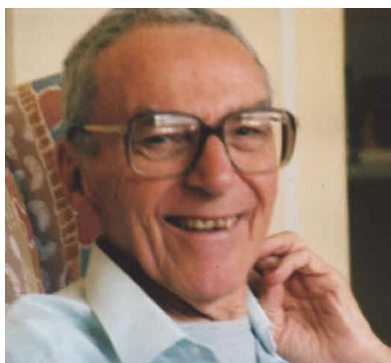


22 March

## Fr KENNETH SPENCE

1 March 1925 – 22 March 2002



Ken was a Londoner and his school was evacuated to Frome in Somerset (SW England) during the war. After school he worked in a library for a while until he joined the Royal Navy and was part of the Normandy landings in 1944. In 1945, he was received into the Church but continued in the navy until he was demobbed in 1946. His last year was spent on an ‘amenities’ ship which meant a *quasi*-home leave ship for service men far from home. He toured the Pacific enjoying its ‘amenities’ which included, a concert hall, theatre, library and so forth. He was in charge of the library.

Back home he joined Osterley, the late vocations house near London Heathrow, and learnt Latin and all about the Catholic Church. He joined the novitiate at Harlaxton in 1950, did his philosophy in Germany and was ordained in 1960. His ability to talk - and talk – was by then well established and it was an expression of his enthusiasm and affection for people. Jock Earle, an exact contemporary, found him delightful and infuriating, ‘cocksure and indecisive’.

The present writer knew him as headmaster of St Ignatius College in the late 1960s where he would constantly remind – and, I fear, irritate – the students that they were to be ‘men for others’. A school strike erupted in 1968 for reasons external to the school but Ken floundered in trying to handle it. The students turned against him as he was seen to favour some and come on heavy on others.

He must have been hurt that he was soon moved out but he never spoke of it, at least to me. He became Archdiocesan Education Secretary and put a relatively minor post on the map. His door was always open and he was always welcoming. As Brian MacGarry observed, he had a way of listening to you while he was talking. He did 90% of the talking but you went away feeling you had been heard.

He became provincial shortly after Independence and brought enthusiasm and idealism to the office. But he did much talking about a province plan and took six years to write it. I fear that by the time his successor looked at it the ground had already shifted. His later years were spent at Marymount Mission, Mount Pleasant Parish (‘I have never been so busy’), the Cathedral and as socius to the novice master in Lusaka. He was known for his kindness and concern for the poor and ‘down and outs’ and one of them wrote a tribute that found its way into Letters and Notices. Ken died at Richartz House after some painful months fighting cancer.



**Fr Kenneth Spence, S.J.**  
**(1925-2002. In Zambia 1990-1993)**

**22 March 2002**

Ken Spence was a Londoner, born 1 March 1925. He did his secondary education at the Coopers' Company School with wartime evacuation to Frome in Somerset. After school he became a librarian in Hampstead and then volunteered for the Royal Navy being discharged in 1946. His wartime experience included working on landing crafts during the D-Day landings on the Normandy beaches, as well as working in the library of 'rest & relaxation' ship for the troops who could not get back to more secure bases. After the war he returned to librarianship in Hampstead and then in St Pancras. He had been received into the Church in 1945 while still in the Navy and in 1948 went to Osterley from which he entered the Society at Harlaxton Manor. He was sent to Pullach, Germany for his philosophy with the final year back in Roehampton. After two years of regency at St. Michael's, Leeds teaching, he went for theology at Heythrop and was ordained in 1960. He did his tertianship at St Beuno's and was then assigned to the Salisbury Mission for which he had prepared himself assiduously from his time in Heythrop onwards.

Fr Jock Earle says of him: "He was a natural apostle, who combined enthusiasm for the task with affection for the people and a gift for communicating". "I first knew Ken" writes David Harold-Barry "as a headmaster in a hurry at St Ignatius Chishawasha in 1966. He was enthusiastic about the school which at that time was defying the Smith regime by starting a sixth form. Ken felt, rightly, that some of the future leaders of Zimbabwe were under our care for few enough years. He wanted to stamp them with ideal of service and his homilies were peppered with exhortations to work 'for others' even before Father Arrupe wrote so memorably on that theme. Somehow Ken was not a success and had to be replaced after a couple of years. Gradually there were grumbles and then the great strike took place. In 1968 the Government had executed a number of freedom fighters they had caught even, though they had been given a pardon from the Queen. Many schools went on strike to protest at this.

He became the Archbishop's Education Secretary and made a life-size job out of a relatively unimportant post. In many ways he flourished in that work. He was a great talker and he liked to air his views but you did feel that you were part of the conversation for Ken did listen even if you actually spoke for only ten per cent of the time. Many hard up and unemployed people, as well as students, would come away encouraged, feeling that they had someone who cared for them, someone who was a friend. He particularly took under his wing a group of ex-combatants, when peace finally come in 1980, doing all that he could to get them started again in life.

He then became provincial and approached the Province with his usual enthusiasm, idealism, friendliness and care. His term of office (1982-1988) was a time of building up the Province from its English and German origins and preparing it for the coming of many local vocations. He was very conscientious and caring of individuals and always brought his London sense of humor to bear on things. Once I had accumulated a large number of points – fourteen in fact – about which I wished to speak to him. His immediate response was, 'Even God could only think of ten!'

His later years as pastor at Marymount, Mount Pleasant and the Cathedral and his time as socius to the novice director in Lusaka (1990-1993) were mellow years. If he

had any regrets he was well able to rise above them. All who knew him in his last years, especially when the cancer took hold of him, can vouch for his kindness, wit and hopefulness. He was a man who had a zest for life and inspired others with it.