

26 March

## Fr FRANCIS McKEOWN

11 June 1914 – 26 March 2002



Frank McKeown already has his 'Little Life' comprehensively written up in the then Zambia/Malawi Province list, *Companions in Mission*, but we could add a few words that recall what Paddy Moloney said at his funeral, which this writer does not think had taken place at the time.

Paddy emphasised that Frank was a man of the Church – an 'ecclesiastic' in the primitive sense (before clericalism!). Frank's whole life received a new orientation after a Sabbatical he had in Paris in 1966/7, when he came off as

rector of the Regional Seminary. He took the opportunity to avail himself of the best tutors whose researches in biblical, patristic and Ignatian spirituality were spawned around the time of the Council. It was a wonderful reparation for the last 27 years of his life which he spent in religious formation.

He came to love Newman, Paddy told us, who anticipated much of the thinking behind Vatican II in scripture, tradition, papal primacy in context, the laity and dialogue.

Paddy ended by quoting a piece of paper Frank left behind – he seems never to have published anything - where he quotes Meister Eckhart; 'All that matters is this, that Jesus be born in us, that he grows in us without hindrance. That he become in each of us all that he wishes to be, with the help and through the action of the Holy Spirit.'



**Fr Francis McKeown, S.J.**  
**(1914-2002. In Zambia 1969-1979)**

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Frank McKeown was a Scot, born in Stirlingshire and educated, first at the primary school in Bannockburn and, then at St Aloysius, Glasgow. He joined the novitiate at Roehampton in 1931 and then went to Heythrop for philosophy and then to Campion Hall, Oxford to read Greats in 1937. In 1941 he was sent to St George's, Salisbury (Harare) for regency and four years later back to Heythrop for theology. Ordination came in 1947 followed by tertianship at St Beuno's.

He returned to St George's where he taught for five years and spent some time editing the school magazine. He was stationed at Mtoko from 1955-1958 when he was appointed rector and prefect of studies at the national seminary at Chishawasha while also teaching theology and liturgy. In his term of office, he greatly expanded the buildings as well as developed the living standards of the seminarians and upgraded the staff while still continuing to use the scholasticism of the Latin manuals.

In his own judgment, the sabbatical of 1966-1967 in Paris gave a new orientation to his whole life and apostolate. It was the post-Conciliar age of the Church. Frank's whole life was a pursuit of intellectual and spiritual excellence and now during this time in Paris he sought and availed himself of the best tutors in biblical, patristic and Ignatian spirituality as well as a grounding in Freudian psychoanalysis. All this was a wonderful preparation for the rest of his life's apostolate: the nine years as Jesuit novice master and the subsequent 27 years of spiritual formation, direction and retreats in several countries of Southern Africa. He was always up to date in his theological and spiritual reading, and always happy to discuss these.

In 1966 he was appointed master of novices at Mazoe and continued in the job when the novitiate was transferred to Lusaka in 1969 and launched a generation of young African Jesuits into the Society from Eastern and Southern Africa until 1978. He set up a small but fine library in the novitiate for the staff, reflecting his own interests in the latest in new writing in theology and spirituality. He was in charge of the Pastoral Centre in Monze for a couple of years before he returned to Zimbabwe in 1979.

His work now was mainly in the spiritual ministry of retreats, but he was also involved in Marriage Encounter and he gave time to the Marriage Tribunal, the Nunciature, to Wadzanai and helped two religious congregations in the revision of their constitutions. He was closely associated with the Little Children of Our Blessed Lady (LCBL) as well as with the Gweru Sisters of the Child Jesus. The Presentation Sisters were always grateful to him for his services to Wadzanai, as well as the Sisters at St. Anne's. During these years he lived at Prestage House (1980-1990) and in Canisius House from 1990 to his death.

As an only child he had few family contacts in Britain and so preferred to spend his leaves in South Africa where he was always a welcome, cheerful, gracious and interesting guest. Even in his eighties when his legs were none too sturdy, his mind and his memory were as sharp as ever, keeping up-to-date in his theology and spirituality and full of reminiscences about the seminary and noviceship.