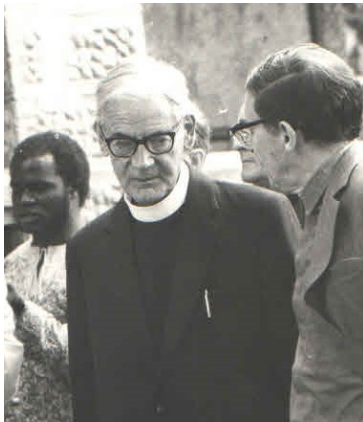


June 24

## Fr JOHN McCANN

18 November 1911 – 24 June 1997



John McCann was proud of being a Preston lad and went to school at Preston Catholic College. He entered the Society in 1931, did regency at St George's (1938-41) and returned to England in wartime to do theology and be ordained in 1944. The journey from Cape Town took them to Free Town where they waited until they had a convoy of 30 ships. They then went across the Atlantic to the American side and approached the English coast by a circuitous route. The Germans were sinking an average of two ships a day at the time.

When John returned to Southern Rhodesia in 1949, he went to the Seminary for three years and then St George's, Hwedza and Marymount, for about two years in each place, before going to Mhondoro for five years. He then moved to Monte Cassino as principal of the Secondary school although 'the sisters said they did all the work!' He was a good teacher (he had to have two girls to carry all his books) but could not keep discipline in the classroom. He was there for six years before moving to Musami for seven years. He was absent in town on the terrible night of 6 February 1977 and went into depression about the event and the fact that he was not there.

He returned to England for health reasons and worked at Preston for the rest of his life. He was of a 'humble, gentle disposition' but had what we would call today 'low self-esteem' and felt he was not living up to his ideals as a Jesuit, a priest and a man. But John Fairhurst records that a teacher at Hartmann House considered John McCann 'one of the saintly priests.' Mark Hackett remembers him as a great community man who enjoyed telling stories. One that people remember is of the man in a town near Preston on a mission to fund raise. He approaches a slightly deaf man to ask, 'Would you like to make a contribution to the Accrington Stanley Football Club Brass Band Benevolent Fund?' The man seems to not hear and turns away without giving anything and the fund raiser mutters a hardly audible, 'b... you' and moves on. But before he can knock on the next door the 'deaf' man shouts back, 'a b... the Accrington Stanley Football Club Brass Band Benevolent Fund!' John would quiver with laughter as he told such stories.

But Mark, who knew him well, says that deep down, John 'was in many ways a very unhappy man' who suffered from depression and found it hard to accept who he was in place of his perfectionist view of who he should be. To others, he was 'a devoted Jesuit, a good teacher and a marvellous companion, faithful to prayer even if with no consolation.' To himself he was a failure. In Preston, as old age asserted its claims, he had to give up visiting the home for unmarried mothers and the refuge for battered wives that he constantly visited. Deafness impaired his hearing confessions and he could not even manage Mass. He was being totally emptied. He even gave up reading which had always been a joy to him.

He knew about distress, darkness and depression and treated everyone with dignity as he knew suffering himself. To Tom McGuinness, his nephew, it was a presence of God that he gave to others and he saw the holiness in others. He loved people and was loved by them.

