

01 July

# Fr LORENZ VON WALTER

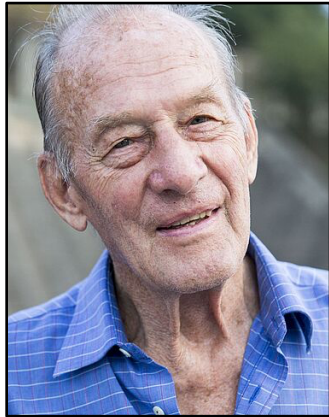
11 August 1930 – 01 July 2024

*He was in his 94<sup>th</sup> year of life, and was in his 72<sup>nd</sup> year in the Society; in his 61<sup>st</sup> year of Priesthood; and in his 46<sup>th</sup> year of Final Vows.*

Ort.....11 August 1930  
Loc. Nat..... Köln (Colone), Germany  
Ingr. .... 14 April 1953  
Loc. Ingr. .... Jacobsburg, Germany  
Mag. .... Zimbabwe  
Stud. ....Munich (Pullach) (Phil.) and  
Heythrop and Innsbruck (Theol.); Ireland.

Diac.....  
Loc. Diac. ....  
Ord.....25 July 1963  
Loc. Ord. ....Innsbruck, Austria  
Grad..... Professed of 4 Vows  
Loc. Grad. ....Zimbabwe  
Dies.....08 December 1978

Defunc. ....01 July 2024  
Loc. Defunc. .... Richartz House, Harare, Zimbabwe  
Date of Funeral.....04 July 2024  
Place of Funeral:.....Chishawasha Parish, Zimbabwe  
Place of Burial: ...Chishawasha Cemetery, Zimbabwe  
Prov. ....SAP



Father Lorenz von Walter SJ passed away on the morning of 1 July, 2024 in Harare, Zimbabwe. He was born in Cologne, where he grew up during the war years and experienced the misery and poverty in the bombed-out city. He was one of the children that younger Jesuits took off the streets at that time to teach for free. This act of charity impressed him, and awakened in him his calling. After graduating from the Aloisiuskolleg in Bonn, he entered the novitiate of the Jesuits' Eastern Province in Jakobsberg in 1953. While studying philosophy in Munich, the opportunity arose to open a mission in what was then Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe), and he was part of the first group to arrive there in 1958. In addition to studying languages, he gained his first experience in teaching there. Lorenz von Walter studied theology in Innsbruck, where he was also later ordained in 1963. He completed his Tertianship in Ireland, before returning to Rhodesia in 1965. Father von

Walter's first place of assignment was St. Albert's Mission. After nine years there, he was moved to parish work in Karoi. On 5 November, 1978 he was assigned to what was then the Sinoia Mission. This was followed by assignments in the city of Chinhoyi, and in various mission stations. In 1999 he returned to Germany and took on responsibility in Saarlouis until the newly appointed Bishop Dieter B. Scholz SJ called him back to Chinoyi in 2007 to work as Vicar General. With his health failing, Father von Walter moved to Richartz House three years ago. He fell in front of the chapel and injured his head. The brothers of the community prayed at his bedside after early mass on July 1 and sang the Salve Regina as Father von Walter passed away peacefully shortly after 9 a.m. and gave his life back into the hands of his Creator.

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*An abridged version of a transcript by Nigel Johnson of an account by Lorenz of his early life, together with some brief notes from the Harare archives.*

Lorenz's grandfather, three generations back, was one of the 'efficient Germans' recruited by Catherine the Great in the 1700s to come from east Germany to modernise Russia. He was an Oberkonsistoriara, that is holding a very high office in the Protestant Church. Lorenz's father was born in St Petersburg and the family spoke German at home, Russian at school and French 'with distinguished visitors.'

Russia and Germany were on opposing sides in the First World War and Lorenz's father decided it was safer to move back to Germany where he became a Russian language teacher in Berlin. He had an interest in German literature (Goethe, etc), and translated Russian authors into German (Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, etc).

Lorenz's mother's family were wealthy landowners in Latvia but that country also had a communist revolution aPer the first war and her family fled to Germany as refugees. Although her family were Protestant, she found comfort, support and a sense that she had a home at the Jesuit church of St Clement in Berlin. Lorenz's father employed his mother as his secretary and they fell in love. She became a Catholic and Lorenz's father followed her into the church.

The Jesuits at St Clement church organised a Catholic wedding for them. But Lorenz's father was furious at his son becoming a Catholic and there was never a reconciliation in the family.

Lorenz went on in his account to the Richartz House community, 'My father was then offered a job at a university in Köln (Cologne), so the family moved there and that is where I was born in 1930. I did primary school there, but then came the rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazism. I remember how the Nazis ordered all crosses removed from the classrooms as they wanted to get religion out of us. But Köln remained a Catholic

city. Although the crosses were removed, the mark on the wall of where they had once been remained. Nazi ideology saw Slavic people as inferior, fit only for heavy labour, but German army officers wanted to communicate with Russian and Ukrainian people, who were Slavs, and so they valued my father's teaching of Russian.'

'I remember Kristallnacht in 1938, when gangs of Nazi youth attacked Jewish shops in Köln, breaking the windows and driving the Jews out of their homes while the police stood by doing nothing. My father took me and my younger brother to see the scene; he said nothing, but we saw the helplessness of the people driven from their homes, crying with their children around them, bewildered, in despair, not knowing what to do. People asked themselves what the hell is going on? Where was all this leading? Only later, after the war, did we understand the Nazi 'Final Solution' – the genocide, the extermination of the Jews.'

'I started secondary school at the Three Kings Gymnasium (school) named after the shrine to the three Magi in Köln Cathedral. It was later destroyed in a bombing raid and I lost three years of schooling. These 'thousand bomber raids' were intense and included phosphorus bombs causing huge fires, impossible to put out. The British bombed by night and the Americans by day. Once we were sheltering in the cellar of an eight-storey building, when a bomb went right down into the cellar. We were lying flat on the floor. Our father told us, "get your noses down on the floor", and he lay between us, pressing our heads down to protect us. We felt the waves of pressure from the explosion of the bombs. We wanted to pray, and didn't know what to pray, but we knew that our father did know.'

'During this time, my mother developed tuberculosis and was mostly in a sanatorium; she died when I was 13 years old. By the time the war was over (1945) there were bombed out abandoned buildings everywhere and a great food shortage, coupled with extremely cold winters. The river Rhine froze over one year. With no school and families starving, we children ran around making a nuisance of ourselves. We searched railway wagons to steal bricks of brown coal to burn for cooking and keeping warm. We searched destroyed buildings for hidden food supplies.'

'Our family kept together through all these years because of our Catholic faith, with night prayers, Mass, church music, singing in the choir. We loved it all; the whole Catholic way of life fascinated us. We were always against Adolf Hitler's propaganda, but because of the sorry state of Germany by the end of the war, our dreams were fading.'

'The Jesuits had their headquarters in the south of Köln and they set up a school, giving free lessons in German, Latin, Greek, Maths. I wanted to become a priest, so I asked myself, why not join the Jesuits? But for this I needed to have good school results, and I had missed out of so much school. My father made use of his connections to get me and my younger brother accepted into St Aloysius College. The school had been taken over by the Nazis to propagate their ideology, but by now it had been returned to the Jesuits.'

'During this time many refugees were arriving, fleeing the communist takeover of the East Germany. These included some Jesuits who were driven out of Poland. One of them, Fr Andreas Hönisch, became my friend. He was the son of a headmaster in Silesia; he played the organ, and I admired him very much. He inspired me to pursue my vocation into the Jesuits. I then went to the Noviciate at Jacobsburg in 1953 when I was 23 years old.'

Lorenz did his philosophy in Munich (Pullach) and theology in England (Heythrop). After ordination in 1963, he worked at St Joseph's farm near Sinoia (Chinhoyi) in 1965 for a year before moving to St Albert's as a teacher until 1975. He was there the night of the abduction of the school children. In 1975, he moved to Karoi on the parish before moving to Chinhoyi in 1981 where he was pastor and superior. In 1986 he went as a teacher to St Ignatius, Chishawasha, until 1988 when he returned to St Albert's as parish priest and superior.

In 1993 he moved to St George's as teacher and boarding master and in 1999 he returned to Germany and lived at Saarlouis. He would probably have retired there had not Bishop Dieter Scholz invited him back to help him as bishop of Chinhoyi in 2007. When Dieter retired, Lorenz stayed on for a while before moving to Richartz House in 2020.