



**Fr Thomas O'Brien, S.J.**  
**(1932-1992. In Zambia 1958-1987)**

**6 August 1992**

Fr Tom's death was very sudden. He was acting Mission Procurator in Dublin and had just picked up his sister from the airport. He drove back to the Mission Office. While speaking to her there, he just fell from his chair, with a massive heart attack, and so he died. That was on 6 August 1992.

Tom was born in Limerick in 1932, attended the Jesuit school of the Crescent and then entered the Society in 1950 in Emo. He pursued the normal course of studies of the Society and came out to Zambia for his regency where he taught, prefect and was games master at Canisius Secondary School and Charles Lwanga Teacher Training College.

He was ordained priest at Milltown Park, Dublin on 31st July 1964 and returned to Zambia after his tertianship. He was in the Southern Province from 1966 to 1970 as minister and bursar at Chikuni, minister and assistant Parish Priest in Monze and minister/teacher at Charles Lwanga TTC. The rest of his life in Zambia was spent in Lusaka. Chaplaincy and teaching occupied his time and he also helped in the parish at St Ignatius. He taught at Munali Secondary and Chongwe Secondary. For the Advanced Primary Course at Chalimbana, he taught Religious Education as well as being involved in student counseling. Students at Evelyn Hone College also saw him for spiritual direction. Counseling was what he wished to do with third level students and so he studied at Loyola University in Chicago, USA, for his Masters in Education.

From 1978 to 1983 he became socius / secretary to the provincial, a job which took him to all the Jesuit houses. He became rector of Luwisha House in 1983 and worked as chaplain at the Christian Centre at UNZA. While there, he had a serious heart attack and left for Ireland in 1987, when he was well enough to travel. It was while he was acting mission procurator, that he had the massive heart attack. As he wished, he was active to the end.

There was a history of heart ailment in the family. Tom himself had minor strokes as well as a by-pass. He was well aware that he would probably die from a heart attack but forged ahead with his life. He was so busy in Dublin – meetings of the Irish Missionary Union, interviewing possible volunteer teachers, traveling for Missionary Exhibitions, fund raising, bringing missionary awareness to the pupils of the Jesuit schools in Ireland – these all kept him on the go.

His great talent was his ability to relate to other people, to share friendship with them. He had his own close circle of friends in the Society, yet this never interfered with his sharing his friendship with others. He was approachable and warm-hearted, person-centered. Being with others meant more to Tom than efficiency in planning and execution. He looked for the best side of others, accepting them as they were. In his own community he would give himself as freely and as warmly to the shy and withdrawn as to the stronger members.

A 20-year friend of Tom wrote about him after his death: "He loved life; he loved people. And he did so from a base that was hidden and silent because he dreaded that anyone would think him 'pious'. But over the years, I became more and more aware of that hidden rock in Tom – his love of Christ. It came through in his homilies to the students and his love of the Jesuits. I think he was at his most fulfilled and contented as

a Jesuit during his years at Luwisha. He loved his brothers. I find myself also thinking of the contradictions in him. He was confident and proud; but he was also humble. He was contented, so contented – but he was questioning, sometimes startlingly so. He was above all compassionate but his compassion didn't let you off the hook”.