



**Fr John J Moore, S.J.**

**(1927-2018. In Zambia/Malawi 1983-2018)**

**20 September 2018**

John was born in Kilmovee, Co Mayo, of four children to Charles and Marion (McGrath) Moore. Two important experiences in his youth were: the long period of isolation in hospital after, as a baby of six months, he pulled a kettle of boiling water over himself. He carried the scars with him all his life but no one ever saw them. The second was that his mother, a teacher herself, being dissatisfied with the local primary school, sent him to live with her father, an outstanding primary headmaster of another school. When he was ten, the family left for Dublin and he was sent to Belvedere College for his secondary education. He never thought about a vocation until the school retreat in his final year.

He entered the novitiate at Emo Park in 1945 and went on to university studies. He began his first year in Arts doing mathematics and classics but, despite the fact that he had done no science at school, the Provincial, who had been his master of novices, transferred him to Science. While doing philosophy in Tullabeg, the Provincial encouraged him to keep up his interest in Botany and he did some research in the local bog land, unearthing two rare plants. While doing his theology in Dublin he continued his ecology research in the hills of Dublin - of how the plants were related to each other and the environment. While away in Germany for tertianship after his ordination in 1958, his work was published and caused some stir in the academic world. The University requested him for the Botany department where he lectured from 1960 onwards. He was granted his doctorate in 1971 on the quality of his published research. In 1972 he became head of Botany and professor. His work on ecology was pioneering and he used the latest methods of research then developing in Germany. In 1982 he was honored with the *Europa-Pries fur Landespflege* in recognition of his contribution to ecology. For 23 years he lectured in UCD, where his reputation continued to grow, not only as a researcher, but also as a brilliant and very clear teacher. He became the head of the Botany Department in 1973.

John was the very essence of a scientist – looking for evidence, keeping records, measuring quantities and drawing conclusions. He had practical skills too and was always ready and willing to repair any kind of electric gadget, often with nothing more than his ever-ready penknife, with which he peeled his fruit and cut his cheese. In his spare time he was involved in the spiritual direction to married couple and the giving of retreats.

In 1981 he was invited by Fr Michael J Kelly (a fellow novice), then Pro-Vice-Chancellor, to be an external examiner in the University of Zambia. The experience made him aware of the needs of Zambia. In 1983 he was overcome with a strong desire that he should relocate to Zambia, and so he requested to be missioned there. The Irish Province agreed to his request, provided he continued his work in third level education. At the age of 56, he requested early retirement from UCD. On arriving in Lusaka, he lived initially at St Francis and later at the Provincial house on Senanga Road. He settled down to acquire chiNyanja and later he could be seen cycling to Kamanga for Sunday Mass. After some initial difficulties with his contract, he eventually did two terms in the School of Biology.

While at the Provincial house, he overheard the discussions about the request from the Vatican to provide a supervising team to run the major seminary at Zomba, Malawi. They had a rector in Fr Peter Carroll and a spiritual Father in Jack O'Leary. John volunteered to be the dean. So, at the end of his second contract with UNZA, he headed off to St Peter's in Malawi. Initially he taught sacramental theology and later Scripture, as well as being librarian. After ten years the job was done and a local team of Diocesan clergy was able to take over the running of the seminary. He stayed on for two more years and then headed for Arrupe College in Harare.

He was 76 when he came to Zimbabwe and settled in to provide urgent needs in the computer network as well as teaching Scripture and the philosophy of science. When he was 82 in 2009, he retired to the novitiate in Lusaka to continue his teaching and to look after the library, the archives and the computerization of the house accounts.

John was always kind and patient: never boastful or conceited because of his international standing as a distinguished scientist; never rude or selfish, always ready to say 'yes' to any request. He was an ascetic and lived very simply all his life in the Society. While teaching at UCD he noticed that some students, who appeared quite healthy, did not eat meat. So he became a vegetarian for the rest of his life. He rarely was ever sick.

He was always a free person – able to give himself wholeheartedly and intelligently to any job he was asked to do. He was always ready to leave a well-established position he had made, to respond to what he saw as a greater need. All his religious life he gave retreats and spiritual direction to those who sought his skillful direction. He worked among the younger generation that he was training and forming in one way or another. He was twice superior of small communities of scholastics in Ireland. He was a person of great talents and gifts and used them to educate and help the upcoming generation.

## JOHN J MOORE 1927-2018



For the last ten years of his life “JJ” was a familiar figure moving around our novitiate at Xavier House. He was there in the morning joining us for prayer before the sun rose and he was there in the evening in the “professed” sitting room, listening to the conversation and occasionally jumping in with vivid anecdotes of his own experience or protesting at crass

scientific observations when aroused.

But did we know who this gentle, ever available, old man truly was? Had we any idea of the life that filled his ninety years? John was born in 1927 in Kilmovee, a village in the west of Ireland and was badly burnt in an accident when he was six months old. Seemingly he carried scars for the rest of his life but no one ever saw them. The family moved to Dublin when he was ten because of his father’s work – he was a civil servant and his mother was a teacher - and it was there that he met the Jesuits when he went to school at Belvedere College. He never thought about a vocation to join the Society until his final year at school. He made a retreat and at one point felt a sudden but intense desire to become a Jesuit. He told himself this was crazy but he could not shake off the thought. After seeking advice, he yielded and decided that God was definitely calling him and so, on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1945, he entered the Jesuit novitiate in the Irish midlands.

We knew him as the very essence of a scientist – looking for evidence, keeping records, measuring quantities, and so forth. But John had never done science at school and had concentrated on Greek and Latin, studies that, as it turn out, would be useful to him later. It was only in his second year at university that John changed to science and from then on he proved himself a dedicated and gifted scientist. Even as an undergraduate, he made discoveries in plant life that drew the attention of some of Europe’s leading botanists. One sideline in these years was his friendship and cooperation with the Jesuit photographer, Fr Frank Browne, famous for his photos of the *Titanic* on its tragic and only voyage. Preparing himself for ordination John had to put these scientific interests on hold, but his reputation had grown so that even before ordination the National University of Ireland indicated it would like to have him on staff. So, in 1960, he became a university lecturer in botany, rising quickly to the rank of Professor.

For 23 years, John continued at the university eventually becoming head of the Botany Department. John’s tenure brought distinction to the University through his research and the international reputation that this developed. At that time there were

few concerned with the health of the environment and John was a pioneer and far-seeing in his focus on ecological and environmental issues. Years later, at Xavier House, John read Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* with enthusiasm and approval! He could find no scientific lapse in it!

And also during those years in Dublin John became involved in the guidance and spiritual direction of married couples, in giving retreats and in helping in parishes at weekends. He was also (twice) superior of Jesuit Houses of Study.

In 1981, John came to the University of Zambia as external examiner for the Biology Department. The UNZA experience captivated him and after his return to Ireland he volunteered to work in Zambia. The Irish Provincial granted his request on condition that John continued in third-level education. And so John was appointed Professor of Biology at UNZA and remained there for six years. He developed many other pastoral interests in these years and could be seen cycling to Kamanga on a Sunday to say Mass in ChiNyanja

When his second contract with UNZA was drawing to a close, the Zambian Provincial was requested by Rome to provide three Jesuits to help staff the Major Seminary at Zomba in Malawi. Fr Jim McGloin could come up with only two names until John, then in his mid-sixties, suggested it was time for him to retire from teaching Biology and go to Zomba to teach Theology. The Provincial was amazed and delighted and so for the next twelve years John taught Biblical and Sacramental Theology at Zomba.

At the time when he was to retire from this second – or was it third? – career, word was received from Arrupe College, as it then was, asking for another Jesuit from the Zambia-Malawi Province. John's name was put forward but the initial reaction from Arrupe was quite negative: "we did not ask for a geriatric!" But the ZAM Province was firm, knowing that Arrupe would soon warm to this exceptional man. And indeed opinions changed when Arrupe found that, in addition to his teaching qualifications, John was experienced in establishing and maintaining computer systems. John combined his computer work with courses in the Philosophy of Science and introductory courses in Scripture.

In 2009 JJ was 82 and he thought it better for the College that he should retire. He felt his advanced age might prejudice the College's bid for international recognition as a university. He returned to Zambia, to the novitiate, where he gave the novices lectures on the New Testament and a number of other subjects. He used to say he found it hard to wean some of the novices from their fundamentalist ideas. While at Xavier John worked with congregations of Sisters, heard confessions and gave spiritual direction and retreats. He also devoted himself to the care of the province library and archives.