

5 October

Fr CHRISTOPHER DEVLIN 30 May 1907 – 5 October 1961



Born in Aberdeen, Christopher Devlin was much influenced by the writings of C. C. Martindale and especially a sermon he preached on Good Friday on ‘the courage of Christ’. He joined the Society in 1926 and during his studies he was drawn to poetry after studying Hopkins and Scotus from whom Hopkins drew some of his ideas. In 1932, he and his friend Henry John, also a Jesuit, were due to go to Oxford but their friendships could turn violent and in one case they came to blows. The decision was made it would be unwise for them to be in the same house in Oxford. So Henry went but Chris did not. It seems an extraordinary decision to deny Chris Devlin a degree but, in those days, it was not seen as it would be now.

Ordained in 1938, he became a military chaplain in 1941. After the war he taught in Beaumont and his students remembered his *panache*, his ‘fiery originality’. His classes were full of impromptu plays and debates. ‘We live with a volcano and were forever being made to produce original writing.’ He had a ‘strong face and temper’. In Christian Doctrine he would talk of John the Baptist and link him with his own experience of being marooned in the desert during the war and living off sheep’s milk.

In 1957 he volunteered for Southern Rhodesia and was at Musami for two years. He loved the country, its people and the sense of the closeness of Africa to God. He was also in touch with the University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and Professor McKenzie was distressed at Devlin’s early death – he was only 54 – and the loss of his knowledge of Hopkins for his students. Devlin had written on Hopkins’ religious prose. But he is best known for his book, *Robert Southwell, Poet and Martyr*.

In 1959 he was diagnosed with cancer and died two years later.