



**Fr Lawrence Kearns, S.J.**  
**(1912-1986. In Zambia 1969-1975)**

**28 October 1986**

Lol (as Fr Laurence was known in the Society) was born in Cobh, Co Cork on 27 June 1912. After school at Mungret College, he entered the Society at Tullabeg and did the second year noviceship at Emo. The normal studies of the Society brought him to his ordination on 13 May 1942.

Immediately after theology, Lol became chaplain in the British Army from 1943 to 1947 and served on the European continent. Towards the end of the war, his unit was sent to free Belsen concentration camp, "That's how I saw hell on earth" he wrote. He also tells us about his bad car accident: "While driving in convoy on the first stage of our journey to Brussels, my driver ran the car into a tree north of Magdeburg and my head was banged into the glove compartment in the dashboard. I saw Fr Morrison again at Celle as he bent over my stretcher and formed the opinion that I should never look the same again. Even my mother did not recognize me at once. But a few months in Gloucester under the great "guinea-pig" surgeon, Emlyn Lewis, who grafted a hunk from my arm into my mouth, set me up again.' After demobilization, he made his tertianship 1947/1948.

Minister, retreat giver, bursar was his lot at Manresa 1948-1954, 1962-1965, 1968-1969. He taught religion at Bolton Street Technical College, Dublin 1962-1965.

He attended courses at New York University and at the University of California on TV and film production. On returning to Ireland, he was given the job of minister again but felt rather disappointed at having no outlet for the newly acquired skills he was so eager to practice. The Ministry of Education in Zambia at that time was about to launch an Educational TV Unit in Kitwe, so Lol was sent to Zambia and served two tours in the Kitwe TV Unit, six years in all, 1969 to 1976.

These were happy days for Lol in spite of the hardships of living at a long distance from Jesuit companions, the uphill grind of accustoming himself to a new environment, and the conflict arising from his insistence on precision as contrasted with the easy-going ways of the Zambians he was to work with and train. Lol was a perfectionist who demanded exact standards from his students and apprentices. A stray bit of fluff or a human hair would draw from him a devastating diatribe on sloppy standards. The wear and tear of the consequent tension took its toll on Lol's good humor, so that fault-finding could become obsessive with him.

Naturally, as a priest, Lol was not content to confine himself to civil-service hours. He sought out apostolic openings, celebrating Mass at weekends for neglected congregations, acting as Spiritual Father to a novitiate of Sisters, giving lectures on medical ethics to nurses-in-training, all of which he could do through the medium of English. In addition, he became sufficiently adept at chiBemba to celebrate Mass in the local language.

In his last year in Zambia, Lol was responsible for the purchase of the first Jesuit residence in Kitwe on Nationalist Way. He had hoped to be employed by the Zambia Episcopal Conference in communications, but this was not to be. Shortly after returning to Ireland he was invited to inaugurate the communications department of the Catholic Secretariat in Lesotho. So for more than two years in Lesotho, in the face of lack of interest if not actual apathy, he wore out his energies and enthusiasm. The same

problems that he had faced in Zambia he found to be deeper, more ingrained and infinitely less tractable in Lesotho.

He returned to Ireland in 1978 where, at the age of 66, he took up more genial work - curate in Donnycarney. He died in Jervis Street Hospital in Dublin on 28 October 1986.