



Fr Denis Carroll, S.J.
(1920-1992. In Zambia 1952-1992)

29 October 1992

Fr Denis Carroll, known to his colleagues as "Dinny", was born in Offaly, Ireland in 1920, into a large family of farming stock, with strong religious traditions. These traditions were far more prominent during his life than his agricultural background, though at one stage he took charge of the school garden in Mukasa! Five of his sisters entered religious life and his brother, John, was a Jesuit on the Hong Kong Mission.

After his schooling at Mungret College, he entered the novitiate at Emo in 1937 and went through the normal training, being ordained a priest in 1950. Two years later he came to Zambia and went almost immediately to the eastern province to learn chiNyanja at which he became quite proficient.

Dinny's life can be divided into two distinct ministries: the apostolate of the school and the apostolate of the parish, the latter being determined, to a large extent, by his proficiency in chiNyanja. He served in many parishes along the line of rail in the Monze diocese. He started his parish work, however, in Regiment parish in Lusaka around 1953. He came to Chikuni in 1956 as Rector of the community, teaching and supplying at Mazabuka, Choma and Kalomo. A bout of sickness took him to Ireland for two years and when he returned he was posted to Choma parish in 1962. Mazabuka and the Sugar Estate saw him from 1968 to 1975.

One would never have classed Dinny as a well-organized person. Yet despite his fluid approach, one thing was uppermost in his mind while he worked: the administration of the sacraments. He made them available to his parishioners and was always willing to administer them. He was conservative in his theology and never liked the phrase "the people of God". His vision of God's people was as a Sacramental People, a Eucharistic People. He saw the Eucharist as the center of Catholic parish life.

He tried to serve the people as he found them, offering liturgies in different languages. He preached strongly and upheld the sanctity and sacramentality of Catholic marriage. In his parish work he believed in family-by-family visitation. In that way he got to know his parishioners, both adults and youth. At a later stage, many would consult him on their marriages and the advice he freely gave was, solely and loyally, from the Catholic point of view. He worked with the St Vincent de Paul Society and engaged the services of some of his adult parishioners in the teaching of catechism to the youth.

While his move from parish work to schoolwork in the mid-seventies, was partly necessitated, by considerations of health, for his arthritis was making constant physical movement around the parish more and more difficult for him. Nevertheless, he had a firm conviction of the value of Catholic education. He decried the closure of Jesuit schools here and there, and he saw the practice of superiors of allowing young Jesuits to choose other apostolates than teaching as abdicating responsibility for the Catholic education apostolate. For 17 years he liked teaching and was not happy at the thought of possibly having to give it up because of failing health. The Lord read his mind and Dinny taught at Mukasa right up to three days before his death. He was a fine teacher, attaining excellent results in all his subjects, English and English Literature, History and even chiNyanja. He understood the youth and had good *rapport* with them. From time to time the unwise and misguided behavior of boys would depress him, but by and large he had the understanding and patience to accept such conduct in its own context. He

took it for granted and did not judge them harshly. He often acted as mediator between them and the administration, thus earning for himself the title of "Peacemaker" while, at the same time, he would never compromise the Headmaster, his fellow members of staff nor the aims of Mukasa Seminary. At his funeral Mass, at least five of the concelebrants were Zambian priests who had been past pupils of his.

As a religious and Jesuit, Denis Carroll was a man of prayer and deep faith with a personal closeness to Christ in the Eucharist. He was loyal to the Society and interested in its growth and its apostolates. He was worried about how devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus seemed to have taken a less prominent place in the life of the Society.

Though failing in strength little by little, his death was sudden and very simple. He had gone to St Kizito's Pastoral Centre for ten days rest as ordered by the doctor. While waiting for supper on the second day there, the Lord called him home to his reward on 29 October 1992.