

JESUITS IN SOUTH & CENTRAL ZAMBIA

By Fr. Eddie Murphy, S.J. presented on 17 June 2017

I. The first attempt failed (1880-84)

In the early 19th century the Catholic Church was devastated by the Revolution in France which had been the greatest Catholic power in Europe. By the middle of the 19th century the Protestant Churches had launched the missionary enterprise especially in the rapidly growing British Empire. In the second half of the century, the Catholic Church experienced a new sense of freedom and cohesion, belatedly tried to catch up, especially with the founding of the missionary orders like the White Fathers, the Spiritans etc.

When the Zambesi Mission was authorized by Rome (1879), the Jesuits were given the territory north of the Limpopo River right up to Lake Bangweulu in Zambia. The Empire had not yet been established there and so all the necessary permissions were granted by the local African kings. After an arduous journey of four months in ox carts, a small band arrived at Bulawayo (Zimbabwe) and was authorized to evangelize the neighbouring peoples whom King Lobengula counted as his vassals. He forbade any evangelization of his own Matabele people, as he needed to keep complete control over his own people as he faced the advance of both British and Boer. Chief Moomba let two missionaries settle in the Gwembe Valley in Zambia but within three weeks Fr. Terorde died in 1880 from malaria and the exhausting 2600km journey. A second mission to the Lozi at Lealui collapsed, when King Lewanika withdrew the permission he gave previously. The small party returned to base at Pandamatenga, south east of the Falls, minus Br. De Vylder who drowned in the Zambezi at Lusu Falls. They regrouped in South Africa.

II. The second attempt succeeded (1890):

(a) Chikuni

A small group of Jesuits with some Dominican Sisters joined the Pioneer Column organized by Cecil Rhodes under a treaty with Lobengula, and pitched camp in the Shona region where Harare now is, in 1890. Fifteen years later, Frs. Moreau and Torrend crossed the Zambezi and negotiated for a site with the British South African Company. Chief Monze welcomed them and they settled at Chikuni in 1905. Almost immediately Fr. Torrend headed off north and established Kasisi in 1905, now near the International Airport. Some of the journey from Bulawayo to Kalomo was done on the newly constructed railway line, which was heading north to Kabwe (1906) and Ndola (1910).

From a previous exploratory expedition, Moreau had witnessed the starvation in Tongaland and he brought with him a plough and within a short time taught the rising progressive Tonga farmers how to harness the plough to their oxen. In time the Polish Jesuits came and Fr. Zabdyr set up a network of 40 schools all around Chikuni. With the coming of the Irish Jesuits in the early fifties, this educational drive developed into a secondary school, Canisius College (1949), and later at the request of the bishops, Charles Lwanga Teachers Training College (1959). Later still the

missionaries continued their involvement in education by providing some staff for the new university in Lusaka.

(b) Katondwe

Within a few years of the opening of Chikuni, the Jesuits in the remarkable missions of Boromo and Miruru in Mozambique were expelled in 1910 by the new republican Government in Portugal. Most of the 40 Jesuits were reassigned elsewhere e.g. Brazil, but a small band of five, mostly Poles, crossed the Luangwa River and established the Katondwe Mission (1910) and then Chingombe (1914) which linked up with Kasisi. It is from this missionary effort, originally resulting in a number of early deaths, that the Church of Lusaka was eventually founded. The small band from Mozambique came with a pastoral program and quickly set up prayer and catechetical centers that then grew into primary schools.

After the First World War (1914-18), the Protestant Churches put pressure on the British Government to take some responsibility for both education and health. Seeing the direction of the political change and the fact that education now became the insertion point for the introduction of the Christian message on the African continent, Rome sent Bishop Hinsley on a grand tour of much of Africa to get the Catholic missions to make education the focal point of their ministry.

III. Ecclesiastical establishment

When Northern Rhodesia became a Protectorate in 1924, Rome realized that the Zambesi Mission could no longer be administered from Salisbury (Harare) and so, after suitable preparations, the Luangwa Mission became the Prefecture of Broken Hill (Kabwe) under Mgr. Wolnik in 1927. Within a few years (1931) he had handed over the Copperbelt area to the Franciscan Conventuals and Barotseland to the Franciscan Capuchins. Having thus reduced his diocese to one third its original size, he could concentrate his efforts on the growth points of the population – Broken Hill and Lusaka, as well as some rural stations.

The administration of the mission originally in Katondwe, moved to Kasisi near the line of rail, then to Kabwe for a short time, but when Lusaka became the capital in 1935, Mgr. Wolnik moved his office there.

There was reduced development during the Second World War (1939-45) but by the 1950s development was under way. In 1955 Fr. Kozlowiecki became the bishop of Lusaka and, a few years later in 1959, the hierarchy was established in Zambia. With the post-independent development after 1964, the Church too became more locally implanted and self-reliant as the number of diocesan clergy increased and more parishes and dioceses were put in charge of local personnel.

IV. Jesuit charism localized

In 1969 while Archbishop Milingo took over the archdiocese, the Jesuits opened their novitiate. Initially the novices came from all over English-speaking Africa, but after a few years, the Nigerian Jesuits in 1991 opened their own novitiate and the East Africans followed suit. So the novitiate continued to train young men from both Zambia and Zimbabwe, as it does to this day. Later the major Jesuit seminaries for Theology and

Philosophy were established: the former in Nairobi in 1984 and the latter in Harare in 1994.

At present there are about 60 Jesuits working in Zambia/Malawi and more than half are local men. Almost half of the missionaries are now over 70 years of age. There are about 20 young men in training, while five of the local elders have already died. Within a few months we will have our third local provincial, an office that is usually for six years.

Our charism is always to serve the needs of the Church where we go or where we find ourselves. When we first came to Zambia, this was mainly in primary evangelization with schooling as the point of insertion. As time went by, the local clergy established themselves in the parishes. Our efforts then continue in both secondary and tertiary education, as well as some few parishes.

As the Church in Zambia continued to grow and develop, other needs arose like the social apostolate (e.g. Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection) and communications (Radio Chikuni, Loyola Productions). Increasingly there are demands for more developed guidance in spirituality, in providing retreats and spiritual direction, following the principles of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

When the Jesuits began, the enterprise was called the Zambesi Mission. Now there are plans afoot to establish a Zambesi Province comprising of Zambia – Malawi – Zimbabwe – Mozambique – South Africa. Already Zimbabwe and Mozambique are working as one unit with South African as a dependent region. We continue to serve the local Church as well as some more universal needs.