



Fr Joseph McCarthy, S.J.
(1912-1986. In Zambia 1950-1986)

5 January 1986

Because Joe was such a 'character' - widely known and admired (as it were from a distance), fondly mimicked, amusedly quoted in his characteristic phrases like 'old chap', 'nonsense!' 'My community,' etc., perhaps the full depth of his humanity and Jesuit identity were known only to a small circle of friends with whom he felt totally comfortable. His achievements as a missionary can easily be narrated for the edification of others or the annals of history.

Born on 17 April 1912, to a Dublin family of Cork stock, Joe had to compete with several brothers and sisters for the approval of his father - his mother died when Joe was very young. After secondary school with the Christian Brothers, he entered the novitiate at Emo on 3 September 1930. As a junior he finished with a B Sc in Mathematics from Dublin University. Philosophy, regency and theology brought him to ordination at Milltown Park on 29 July 1943. He went to teach at Clongowes Wood College and was looked upon as a very competent teacher. From his oft repeated anecdotes of his life there, it is very clear that he enjoyed himself immensely.

A call for volunteers to meet the need of the Jesuit Mission in the then Northern Rhodesia, saw Joe packing his bags and saying goodbye to Clongowes. His ability to discard the comforts of life would be a feature of his life till his dying moments, despite the fragility of his body and the poor state of his general health. He came out with the first nine Irish Jesuits in 1950.

In the late 50s, Joe pioneered the Chivuna Mission where he built the community house, the church and the Trade School with the co-operation of Br Jim Dunne and won the esteem and affection of the people in the locality who fondly spoke of him as 'Makacki'. For four years he was in Namwala, again building the mission house, a sisters' convent and outstations. In both these places he was full time parish priest.

The Bishop of Monze, in his wise fashion, appointed Joe as his Vicar General in the newly established diocese of Monze. Few (if any) could match Joe's qualifications for such a post: clear-sighted, wide experience in pioneering Church expansion, adroit in negotiating with local authorities, ability to collaborate with so varied a group of people, and an ability to make most of the limited funds. Joe contributed enormously to the expansion of the church in the Monze diocese in those years.

At the Bishop's request he was assigned to Chirundu in 1966, to the Zambezi Farm Training Institute, sponsored by the Archdiocese of Milan. In those ten years Joe became known in the vicinity and was highly appreciated by government officials, trainees and their families.

It was characteristic of Joe that wherever he lived and worked soon became 'his'. He would speak of 'my' mission, 'my' road, 'my' community etc. He loved to reminisce about the good old times of his life as he got older, amusedly recalling the characters of the

old days, their witty sayings that indicated their nimbleness of mind. Such memories provided him with immense entertainment. The older he got the more he tended to repeat himself.

The Society he loved and felt part of was the Society of pre-Vatican II days, the Society in Ireland before the 60s; or the pioneering Society of Chikuni Mission characterized by the thrust and energy of the newly arrived Irish Jesuits, enjoying a degree of autonomy and homogeneity. How often would he later recall those great times. The present-day emphasis on community meetings, faith-sharing and more open dialogue between the members of the community, continued to baffle him and defeat him to the very end.

His health was never very good and began to wane. After surgery in early 1977, Joe realized the strong possibility of the recurrence of the cancer. However some years later, the end came quickly. Jim Carroll was with him for his last four hours of life. When taking his leave of Jim in his final moments, Joe revealed so much of himself in his final words: 'I think you should leave me here, old chap; there are certain formalities to be undergone from here on'! Within minutes Joe had died, leaving behind so many friends regretfully but at the same time looking forward to meeting so many others.