



**Fr Joseph Moreau, S.J.**  
**(1864-1949. In Zambia 1905-1949)**

**20 January 1949**

Fr Joseph Moreau was born at La Bruffiere in the Vendee, West France, on 12 January 1864. His family was of farming stock, a heritage that Joseph used all his life. In 1883, at the age of 19, he entered the Jesuits at Tronchiennes in Belgium, having being inspired by the accounts of the letters by the early Jesuits of the Zambesi Mission. While there he had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of Fr Depelchin himself, who had just returned from the Mission. Quite early on he was sent to South Africa to Dunbrody where he studied philosophy. Afterwards he replaced Julius Torrend at Keilands and completed his regency teaching in Dunbrody. The English Jesuits took over the responsibility of the Zambesi Mission in 1894, so Fr Moreau went to England for his theology, and was ordained a priest there in 1896. He returned to Africa, this time to the present Zimbabwe, where he worked for four years learning chiShona and being minister in Chishawasha.

In 1902, with his mentor, Fr Prestage, he set out for Northern Rhodesia, with a view to selecting a site for a future mission. In his younger years, Fr Prestage had tried to introduce the plough at Empandeni but failed to get King Lobengula's permission for any radical change, since the King was facing serious issues of possible conflict with the advance of the British and the Boers. Twenty years before there were two attempts to establish missions among the Tonga and the Lozi but both had failed. They reached Chief Monze's area. The Chief welcomed them and gave permission for them to take four young men back to Zimbabwe. These were Haatontola, Jojo, Bbinya and Jahaliso. One died early on from a fever, one returned to his village and the other two, Jojo and Jahaliso, were presented with papal medals during the consecration of Fr Corboy as Bishop of Monze in 1962. In Empandeni they were instructed and baptized in 1904. Fr Moreau had them taught elementary schooling and some useful trades including ploughing. While he taught them English, they taught him chiTonga which he later mastered remarkably well.

Imagine their delight in 1905, when Fr. Moreau and the four, joined by Fr Torrend and the young man Francisco, returned to Chief Monze's, true to his promise to bring them back safe. The site Fr Moreau had selected was already occupied by a Mr Anderson, an American Seventh Day Adventist who arrived a few days earlier. Another site was chosen after a three day's search, four miles up the Magoye River, near the junction with the Chikuni stream. On 14 July 1905

Chikuni Mission was founded under a musekesi tree.

Being of farming stock, Fr Moreau introduced the plough drawn by oxen to the Batonga. Hitherto farming was done with the hand hoe only and famine was a familiar feature of life. Fr Moreau's emphasis on farming had several purposes. The main one was to overcome the constant famine in Tonga land. Also he reckoned that he could help the local farmers pay their annual hut tax with their maize, without having to go to the far off farms and mines of Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. This would avoid the cultural disruption caused by, what he called, 'Bulawayo fever'. The ox-drawn plough revolutionized farming among the Batonga.

After settling down, Fr Moreau opened a school and also started an elementary Teacher Training Centre in 1926. In the forefront of the curriculum was progressive farming which the rising generation of Tonga were open to. Uplifting the living standards of the people went hand in hand with preaching the Gospel. Thus began Chikuni's contribution to education which greatly expanded in the years to come when the early Poles came to work there. Fr Zabdyr developed a network of 40 primary schools in the area. Later this culminated in a secondary school launched by Fr Prokoph in 1949 - the year that Fr Moreau died. A decade later Charles Lwanga TTC, under the auspicious of the Bishops Conference, was constructed by Fr McCarron and Br McElduff, with a good part of the funds coming from the Government.

Fr Moreau was a missionary using the local language, bringing God to the people, helping the sick and solving the many problems people brought to him. He became their 'father'. By his own sense of devotion to duty and respect for authority, he impressed upon them the virtues of good living. Visitors to Chikuni were charmed by his hospitality and his old-world courtesy. When he died on 20 January 1949, the Tonga gave him a funeral worthy of a big chief.