



**Fr Edward Hancko, S.J.**  
**(1920-1995. In Zambia 1951-1957)**

**30 April 1995**

Fr Hancko was born on 17 September 1920 in Likavka near Ruzomberok, Slovakia. He entered the Society in Ruzomberok in 1936 at the age of 15, so he still had to complete his secondary education. In 1939 he went for philosophy to Gallarate in Italy, where Fr Paulo Dezza was his rector and professor of metaphysics. From 1943-1944 he was a teacher at the Jesuit Minor Seminary in Plest'any and then for the next two years he taught at a Catholic school in Levoca, but the German army occupied half the buildings. Later when the Russian army took over the whole school, the provincial dispersed the staff. In 1945 he went to Heythrop in England for theology. He was ordained in 1948 by Bishop Chichester S.J. of Harare.

He was obviously a very gifted person with a deep interest in his home country of Slovakia. He was even employed part time by the BBC in their religious broadcasting aimed at his own country. It was said that he had no difficulty loving the people of Zimbabwe since he had first loved his own. At his funeral service in Harare the Slovakian ambassador, Dr. Voderadsky said: 'I came as the first ambassador of our newly independent country two years ago, but I found we had an ambassador here already!' While in England he was also chaplain for the displaced Slavs in the country.

In preparation for his work in Zambia he did a postgraduate course in education at London University in 1950. He completed his training by doing his tertianship at St Bueno's in Wales. On his way out he passed by Rome where he said goodbye to his Jesuit brother Fr Benedict Hancko, who was then leaving for Argentina, as professor of canon law. They never met again.

In Zambia he was in charge of Kasisi Upper Primary but was soon struck down by typhoid and so Fr Zylka replaced him. The next year he was sent to Mpima to supervise the building of the minor seminary, then under construction by Mr Rapetti, an Italian architect. He was a full time teacher as well. In 1953 he was transferred to Katondwe as manager of schools and was in charge of Katondwe Upper Primary. He was also at that time in charge of Chapoto School in Southern Rhodesia across the Zambezi River!

In 1957 he went to Southern Rhodesia and was chaplain for the Marist Brothers in Kutama Teacher Training School while doing extensive missionary work in the Kutama area stretching up even to Karoi and Urungwe. Every Sunday he had three Masses in

three different places and under the old fast laws, his breakfast, lunch and supper were at 8.30pm! During his stay in Kutama he baptized over 3,000 persons, mostly school children. In 1960 he replaced Fr Hannan as Principal of St Paul Teachers Training College in Musami.

In 1965 he was offered a Fulbright fellowship at the Rhodesia University and an Afro/American scholarship at Columbia University (USA) where he obtained an M.A. in February 1966, in June a Professional Teachers Diploma and in July 1967 a doctorate in Education. The master plan was that he would get professional qualifications and then return to the Teachers Training College at Musami but by the time he returned, the College had been transferred to Bulawayo, in an effort to amalgamate all the smaller colleges into one. He then returned to St Paul's but left shortly afterwards to be bursar at Chishawasha Major Seminary. In 1972 he moved to St Ignatius College and then to St Peter's, Mbare as assistant priest. In 1979 he became superior of Chishawasha Mission but there was a threat to his life and so he was sent on leave to the States and Canada. He returned after independence and was in charge of Mount Darwin Mission and in 1984 in charge of Marymount Mission. He spent his last years from 1990 in Mabelreign parish in Harare.

He had a great gift for languages and could speak 4 or 5 East European languages and the same number from West Europe, as well as chiNyanja, chiBemba and chiShona. His remarkable knowledge of Shona and his ability to communicate earned him the name of a totem 'Gushungo' indicating that people thought 'he is one of us'. While academically an intelligent person, he obviously was more at home meeting and talking with different people. This is reflected in his initial ministry in schools which later developed into direct parish work. Fr Jeep Davis in filling out a form on him for further studies summed him up as 'a rare find'.

After 40 years he eventually managed to obtain an entry permit for Slovakia. It was Easter time and he was going around helping in various parishes and giving talks on his work in Zimbabwe. He passed away after concelebrating a Mass with Archbishop Alojz Tkac who was consecrating a new church in the city of Presov.