



**Fr Maximilian Prokoph, S.J.**  
**(1910-1990. In Zambia 1940-1990)**

**28 May 1990**

Fr Max was born in Hanersdorf in Bohemia on 28 March 1910. He entered the Jesuits in 1928. After philosophy and a two year stint as a teacher and prefect of discipline in the Jesuit College at Duppau, he went to England, to Heythrop College for theology but returned to Germany for ordination as a priest in Munich in 1937. He returned to England to do a post-graduate certificate in education at London University.

He came to Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) in 1940 and spent ten years in pastoral work as well as being in charge of teacher training at Chikuni from 1940 to 1950. During this time he fought for and eventually opened Canisius Secondary School.

He then moved north to Broken Hill (Kabwe) to the Sacred Heart Church where he worked for 15 years (1950 to 1965) as manager of schools, education secretary and parish priest. For his work he was awarded an MBE from Governor Hone in 1964.

In 1966 he came to Lusaka to St Ignatius Church and was the first chaplain at the newly opened university (UNZA) from 1966 to 1979. He had to start everything from scratch, as there was no physical infrastructure. He had to negotiate for a classroom for Mass and initially there was very little public manifestation of Catholic life on the campus. Many of those, who were students then, remember the industry and diligence with which he visited the hostels in the evening and the fire he put into the Eucharistic celebrations. He was able to rein in his forthright manner of speaking, characteristic of him, and did not give offence as was shown by the number of students who showed great confidence in him by the way they turned to him in their difficulties whether academic, faith-based or personal. He laid the firm foundations of a ministry that later matured and blossomed.

During these thirteen years, he was pastorally active in preaching, giving marriage preparatory sessions and counseling. He also found time to visit, help and encourage detainees and prisoners. Then there were his radio programs. Through "Thought for the Day" and other programs, he reached an ever wider public, presenting clear, well-thought-out views on current questions and life in general.

On 24 October 1985, he received the Order of Distinguished Service (1st Division), from President Kaunda for tirelessly 'working for the development of this country for the past 40 years'.

Fr Max was devoted to serving others. School boys, school girls, teachers and managers of schools – all were helped in one way or another. He even organized a bursary fund for students who needed help.

Forty years ago he had the vision to see the potential for development and education among the women of the country. Quite early on, he persuaded a group of girls, with permission from their parents, to enroll for teacher training. He transported them from Chikuni to Chilubula Training College. They changed their minds when they got there and wanted to return. But their tears were to no avail. Later, of course, they thanked Fr Max for launching them on a worthwhile career which gave an example to the many young women who followed them.

He did much to encourage, support and motivate the first Zambian priests, men like the late Elias Mutale, the late Dominic Nchete (the first Tonga priest) and Archbishop Adrian Mungandu who acknowledged his influence on them. He also introduced the Handmaid Sisters of the BVM into Zambia. Married couples, both before and after marriage, were a

concern of his; he always encouraged and supported them.

Did he consider his life and work worthwhile? His answer was, "What could be more worthwhile than working for Christ. If it was given to me to choose again where to live and work for these 50 years, I would choose no other country, no other people".

He was 'a man for others', driven by the love of Christ. At times he was impatient, he could say the most devastating things, but the people forgave him, because they knew his heart was in the right place.

In the last few years, his health began to fail. The Nazareth Sisters accepted him in their hospital in Johannesburg where he died on 28 May 1990, aged 80, fifty of those years were lived in Africa.