



Fr Felician Czarlinski, S.J.
(1868-1921. In Zambia 1914-1921)

13 August 1921

Felician Czarlinski was born on 7 July 1868 into a noble and wealthy Polish family in Brachnowek near Torun, 200 km north-west of Warsaw. He entered the Society at Stara Wies as a young man of twenty. He was ordained in Iasi (present-day Romania). After his training he taught science and languages in the diocesan seminary of Iasi (1896-1905) and administered a parish in Tamasenii for two years (1905-1907), before being sent back to Stara Wies to teach Mathematics, French and German. He was appointed superior (1910-1914) in Czechowice.

At the age of 46 he came to Northern Rhodesia on 8 April 1914 with Fr Hankiewicz and Br Pacek and after a short stay in Kasisi he was appointed to be the first superior at Chingombe. He headed for Chingombe and, after a week's safari on foot, he arrived. He set to work immediately to get a temporary house erected before the rains came and to do some initial gardening. The farm had been run by John Harrison Clark who found it too difficult to make a financial success of it, for despite the plentiful supply of water and the fertile soil, it was too far removed from any commercial market to make it a going concern. Fr Czarlinski was a dynamic and energetic person and with his scientific background he soon had amassed a fund of knowledge of the local area. He kept his own personal diary as well as notebooks of general observations and frequently wrote accounts of the mission in its early stages for various missionary magazines. With his technical background he even made a useful income from repairing clocks and watches for the farmers and administrators around Mkushi. In many ways he was the right man to have in those early days of setting up a mission, for he had good practical skills as well as an outgoing personality that pushed him to evangelize the people around.

However, shortly after he arrived the First World War broke out and although he a Pole like his companions, he was part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and hence one of the 'enemy' in the eyes of the local British administration. The regulations that were applied all over the British Empire were also enforced down in the Lukasashi Valley. The missionaries were mostly confined to the mission area and had their firearms confiscated. Czarlinski wrote a sharp letter to the authorities about the restriction on their missionary activities which he said contravened the Brussels Conference of 1890. He claimed that the restrictions imposed by the Government of Southern Rhodesia were not in line with those of the Britannic Government, 'Which, if appealed to in London, would free us from the persecutions to which we are being subjected'. His correspondence embarrassed his ecclesiastical superior Mgr Sykes in Salisbury. The latter did all he could to placate the commandant general in Livingstone. Czarlinski was ordered to submit all such official correspondence in future, to Mgr Sykes first. The letter reveals his own deep sense of justice which would be seen again when the colonial administration began to impose stricter controls on the proliferation of schools which they saw as no more than 'prayer-chapels'. He could get to the heart of an issue even if at times his expression of it was not always balanced.

The superior, Fr Kraupa, after a long journey to visit a dying man at Feira, collapsed on his return to Katondwe and died within two weeks in 1919. On his death-bed he appointed Fr Czarlinski as superior of the mission. Shortly afterwards he took up his residence at Katondwe. With his usual energy and intelligence he continued the good

work initiated by Fr Kraupa. He continued to extend the network of schools and tried to develop a more streamlined pastoral plan by asking all to make chiNyanja the official liturgical language.

His last journey was tragic. He decided to visit the sick Torrend at Kasisi and also he had the intention of making Kasisi his new headquarters. He set out from Katondwe on the eight day journey, though he was not in great shape. After three days, he arrived at the village of Ku Sanje but he could go no further. Br Longa sent back an urgent message to Katondwe for medical help and Fr Spindel hurried off to his assistance but on arrival found that the good father had died some hours before. He was wrapped in a simple mat and was buried under a giant tamarind tree.

Fr Wilhelm wrote: "He has gone to his reward, and we are left to mourn the loss of a loving father and wise superior. His was the death of a true missionary, without house or bed, without doctor or nurse in his last sickness, without medicine or any comforts, without a fellow priest to give him the last Sacraments and the consolations of our holy religion, and far from those who loved him and would have given anything to be able to help him. And after his death there was no coffin to enclose his body. Such was the death and burial of a member of an ancient and wealthy noble Polish family – a death that might be considered miserable by the worldly-minded, but which was truly precious in the sight of God."

Later Br Markiewicz transferred the remains to Katondwe which were placed in a coffin made by Br Stofner. On 10 August 1924 Fr Bert conducted the memorial ceremony at Katondwe almost three years to the day after his death i.e. 13 August 1921.