



Mgr. Bruno Wolnik, S.J.
(1882-1960. In Zambia 1925-1960)

7 September 1960

Bruno Wolnik was born on 6 October 1882 of Paul and Eve Piela, at Bienkowice in south-west Poland which at that time was under German rule. He remained a German citizen until Polish independence in 1918. He entered the novitiate at Stara Wies in 1899 and went on for his philosophy in Nowy Sacz (1908-1910). He did his theology at Cracow (1910-1914) and was ordained there in 1913. Even from his first year, he was already on the editorial board of the Jesuit review *Przegląd Sapiieha*. During the First World War he was drafted into the German army as a military chaplain. Immediately after the war he did his tertianship and was quickly appointed rector of the Philosophate and Theologate at Cracow. Upon completing his term he was missioned to Northern Rhodesia arriving in December 1925 together with Fr Tomaka and Brs Borecki and Misiag.

The Mission had since 1924 begun remote preparation to becoming an independent ecclesiastical unit and on 17 October 1927 he was appointed Prefect Apostolic of Broken Hill (Kabwe). The Prefecture covered sixty percent of the country and he had only 10 priests, 11 brothers and 8 sisters. His first efforts were to hand over different regions to other missionaries. In this he was eminently successful and by 1931 the Italian Franciscan Conventuals took charge of the Copperbelt under Fr Mazzieri, who later would be their cherished bishop for several decades. The same year, after the usual negotiations with the Propagation of the Faith, the Irish Franciscan Capuchins took over Livingstone and the Western Province. Later on he would support the Mission Superior Fr Zabdyr when he negotiated to get the Irish Jesuits to take over Canisius Secondary School. Later they would take charge of the new diocese of Monze (1962).

To keep up with the times, he soon moved his office from Kasisi to Broken Hill (Kabwe) in 1930 and some years later in 1938 to Lusaka, after it was declared the new capital (1935).

His second major problem was the staffing and support of the missionary work of the prefecture in those poverty-stricken years after the stock market crashed in 1929, right up to the late forties when the Western world was still struggling to recover from the devastation of the Second World War. The monthly subsidy for each mission station during this time was \$40. Besides, Poland was still in a period of reconstruction after finally shaking off foreign domination in 1918 and beginning to develop again its own sovereignty and economy. However, World War 2 put an end to all aspirations of supporting the Zambian Mission when the Communists took over and prevented all supplies of men and money leaving Poland.

In appointing Mgr Wolnik they found the right person for the straitened circumstances the mission was going through. He was willing to hand over large regions to other orders and yet be able to maintain the Jesuit ministry within the strict limitations of manpower and funds at his disposal. He had the necessary qualities of prudent judgement with the tenacity to follow up the consequences of his decisions. As Fr Grzebian wrote "The Prefect acted within the possibilities of the personnel and the finances available. Only in this way could the mission survive during those difficult times. And he was right to act as he did, because in this way he achieved what was intended – survival". Later, when Fr Zabdyr was appointed Mission Superior, his gentle and caring personality helped the missionaries to cope, despite the financial restrictions.

He set up a catechist training center at Mpima and when the Blue Sisters came out in 1928 he asked them to take over the projects in Kasisi, while the Dominican Sisters already there, were brought to Broken Hill to open up first, a general primary school and later one for European girls. Gradually all the stations became more firmly established while the foundations of later developments in the towns like Lusaka were carefully laid.

In 1947 he requested Rome to retire. His request was granted in 1950 when Fr Adam Kozlowiecki took over the post in Lusaka which was upgraded to Apostolic Administrator. He retired at the age of 68 and took over the catechetical center at Mpima. A couple of years later in 1953 he was sent to Mpanshya but with his health failing he was pulled back to Kasisi in 1955, where he died on 7 September 1960.