



Fr Jean Indekeu, S.J.
(1905 -1984. In Zambia
1955-1972)
21 December 1984

Jean (or John as we called him) Indekeu was born in the northern part of Belgium on 21 March 1905 of Jacques and Franciine (nee Janssen). He went to the Jesuit College in Turnhout and, at the age of 18, he entered the Society in the novitiate at Aron for the Northern Belgian Province. His first year of juniorate was at Drogen (1925/26) and the second year was his military service (1926/27). Early on he was destined for the missions and so at 23 years of age he began his philosophy in the south of India (1928-30) at Shenbaganur (Madurai). Afterwards he did his regency in Ranchi (1931-1933) and his theology at Kurseong in Darjeeling Province (1934-1938) where he was ordained in 1936. His tertianship was in Ranchi (1938). He taught for a while in the college there. After a number of years in ministry it seems that he clashed with the authorities in some development work he was involved in and was obliged to leave the country. Although an extrovert and an affable person, his natural reserve did not lead him to talk about it.

In 1955 he came to Northern Rhodesia with Fr Tom O'Meara and scholastics Michael Kelly and Michael Tyrrell. They were among the first batch of missionaries to come by air and the journey from London took almost five days via Marseilles – Malta – Wadi Halfa (now under the Aswan Dam) –Mersa Matruh (north Egypt) – Nairobi – Ndola – and finally to Lusaka.

John went immediately with the others to learn chiTonga under Fr Paddy Cummins in Chivuna. Although he found the language difficult, he used to take great care with his homilies and often sought local assistance. After a brief stay in Chikuni he headed to Kasiya where he opened up new Mass centers almost as far away as Namwala. He also made welcome additions to the facilities of the house. In 1958 he was sent to Choma where initially he used a camp bed in the sacristy until he got the house up. He furnished the Church and also went to build the neat little Church in Kalomo. He always excelled at putting up well designed Churches and took care with the decor and vestments. This love of neatness could be seen in his own personal appearance, with his well-trimmed beard and immaculate but not expensive clothes.

He was pulled back to Charles Lwanga TTC as minister and bursar where he looked after the brethren well. Later the first provincial, Fr John Counihan used to tell the story of now, as he was being transferred to Monze, he went into John' room and asked him where the week-end refreshments appeared in the account books, which he had carefully scrutinized but failed to locate. Fr Indekeu replied laconically "Look under jam". He took good care of the community and was an amiable support to some of the younger men who found the missionary life difficult at times. During this time his real solace, as he says himself, was the weekend supplies in Mazabuka where he was duly missioned together with Frs Tom O'Meara and Vinnie Murphy. He was largely responsible for the well-designed town Church, as well as for the Churches at Nega Nega and Magoye. He was involved also in helping in the construction of the community houses of both the Sisters' and Brothers' schools.

While next on leave, he became anxious about his aging mother, who was then 97 years old. On his return, he lived in St Ignatius in Lusaka and worked in the small

township that sprang up with the building of the Kafue George Dam. He was able to get suitable plots for the Church and the parish house, as a result of his good relations with the international construction team, especially with the French engineers. He also worked with Fr Prokoph on the Luwisha House project and when he returned back to Belgium in 1972, at 67 years of age, he sourced substantial funds to cover the cost of its chapel.

He was in pastoral ministry for a number of years in Dormaal but he never forgot his time in Zambia. A couple of years before his death on 21 December 1984, a donation of a thousand pounds came for the Province library.