



Dr. Franc Lorenc Mihelčič, Prof. Dr. of Biology, Theologian

He was born on December 22, 1898 in Rijeka (Croatia) as the third child of his mother Marija, born Gerl and his father Franc Mihelčič.

He died on July 1, 1977 in Amlach 21, Lienz, Austria.

When he was 6 years old (1904) his family moved from Rijeka to Ljubljana. He attended the public school and the high school in Ljubljana and at the Salesians in Veržej. He passed the Matura in Ljubljana.

After his military service in the years from 1916 to 1918 he returned to the Salesian monastery in Ljubljana. In 1921 he continued with his study at the Salesian Seminary in Turin where he studied theology for three years. For health reasons he had to return to Ljubljana where he completed his study.

At the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul on June 29, 1925 he was ordained a priest.

In addition to his work at the Salesian educational institute Selo in Ljubljana he also worked as a bishop secretary and studied biology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Ljubljana. He performed extensive microscopic research. With his thesis "*The Contributions to the Knowledge of the Tardigrades in Slovenia*" he was awarded a doctorate at the University of Ljubljana on December 6, 1941.

He spent the Second World War in Ljubljana but did not participate in the fighting. At the end of the war he left Yugoslavia. On May, 1945 he went by foot to Klagenfurt. The bishop of Klagenfurt assigned him the pastoral post of the chaplain in the municipality of Maria Rain (Žihpolje). Later he was reassigned to the adjacent municipality of Göltzschach (Golšovo).

Throughout this time he worked on research in different areas, predominantly in soil zoology and pedology, and in particular the systematics of pedogenetic animals. He worked closely with Prof. Dr. Herbert Franz from University Vienna. In 1954 he expanded the scope of his research. During his several months stay in Madrid he cooperated with the local institute and their experts. He researched the pedology and systematics of oribatides. After his short stay in Austria (Nußdorf on East Tyrol) he returned to Spain where he spent two very productive years on his research work.

The focus of his research was on tardigrades and mites (the groups *Oribatei*, *Mesostigmata*). He described several tens of new species. Very important are his dissertations in the field of faunistics and systematics of mites and ecology of tardigrades. His literature from the field of natural science, scientific literature and collections of tardigrades and oribatides are kept at the *Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum* in Innsbruck.

Several of his works were published: *The Medicinal Plants*, manual (LJ 1940); *The Secrets of Nature*, arbitrary general biology (LJ 1944); *The Doctrine of Human Being*, natural sciences, 1. Part 1 (TS 1949); *Our Healing Plants* (Klagenfurt 1956).

On October 1, 1956, he finally returned to East Tyrol. He became the priest in the parish of St. Johann im Walde (Lienz) and stayed in this municipality for 13 years until August 31, 1969 when he retired due to his age and ill health. His constant companion was his sister Rozalija who led the parish household.

Together with his sister Rozalija (1906÷1992) he moved to Amlach in Lienz. In this quiet holiday village Franc enjoyed his well-deserved retirement but he still continued with his scientific activity and pastoral care.



Working room in Amlach /Photo Gisela Jobst



Rozalija in Franc at the Christmas meeting of pensioners in Hotel Laserz

After 1972 he had to give up several plans and could no longer publish scientific papers or work with microscopes due to his poor eyesight. In his later years he was not very active. His sister Rozalija took care of him and helped him through his final years of illness. He died on July 1, 1977 at the age of 79 years. He is buried at the local cemetery in Amlach.