



The Rev. Msgr. EMMANUEL BARS

S. D. B.

Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong - 793003, Meghalaya

SHILLONG 24th MAY, 1974

The Salesian Congregation regrets to announce the death of The Rev. Msgr. Bars, S.D.B. on Thursday, April 4th at 5.45 a.m. in the Nazareth Hospital, Shillong. Assisted by Bro. K.C. George and Bro. David Kandulna and the hospital Sisters. Just a few gasps for breath and the end came very peacefully, just as he had lived, at peace with everyone. Our sincere thanks to the Nazareth Hospital Staff for their efficient and devoted care.

On Wed. 27th March, at the request of the confreres of Don Bosco Technical School where he had been Confessor since 1961. He went over to the Nazareth Hospital run by the Spanish Sisters – Missioneras de Christus Jesus, for a check up. Jokingly Monsignor remarked that he was going as a boarder for a rest and not as a sick patient. It seemed that he had but a passing cold but actually he had caught pneumonia and considering his great old age of eighty four years and the seriousness of the malady, despite his heroic efforts to live on, he gradually lost strength from day to day. However he retained his lucidity of mind and Salesian good humour and optimism to the very end. Two days before his death, when a Sister asked him,

" Monsignor " how did you sleep last night ?

" With my eyes closed. ", he replied with a smile.

During the week of his last illness, this extraordinary Salesian, preached some of his greatest sermons. During his serious illness never once did he omit Holy Mass. And up to a few days before his death, he was faithful to the recitation of the Divine Office. No one could dissuade him from Celebrating Holy Mass. He lived for his Holy Mass and while saying it he gained new strength ; his eyes became bright and his otherwise inaudible voice uttered the prayers of the Mass clearly and distinctly and a celestial joy radiated from his face emaciated with sickness and fever.

His last Mass as a Priest of God was Providential and extraordinary. On previous days, V. Rev. Fr. Uguet, S.D.B. presided and Msgr. Bars concelebrated from his sick bed. But April the 3rd was the Centenary of the approbation of our Holy Salesian rules and Monsignor has a great joy in store for him. At 6 P.M. in his sick room, Fr. Uguet presided, and Frs. Ignatius Rubio, (Episcopal Vicar) Fr. George, Vice-Rector of Don Bosco Tech. School and Fr. Patrick Burns, all concelebrated with Monsignor Bars. For those present it was a moving sight to see this dying Priest assisted by Fr. George,

pronounce the words of the Canon with such meaning and devotion. After the celebration his face lit up with Holy joy.

While in the full possession of his faculties a couple of days before his death, he had received the Sacrament of the Sick and the Apostolic Blessing.

Msgr. Bars is no more; but he lives on in the hearts of all. The loss is a grievous one but this Province is blessed to have had such a Salesian.

Msgr. Bars was born in Torroella de Montgri, Spain, on Oct. 20th 1889 (just a year after the death of Don Bosco).

He was a Salesian pupil at the age of twelve in Saria, Barcelona. As a boy he was working in the Press but after a year or two he was directed to study Latin. His knowledge of the press was providential and was put to good use in the missions. He made his Noviciate in Saria, Barcelona.

He was Professed as a Salesian on the 31st Aug. 1908. He did his three years of practical training in Mataro and was famous for his teaching of Science.

Msgr. travelled to Foglizzo, Italy to our Salesian International Theologate, for the study of Theology. While here as a Theologian (1913 - 1917) he assisted Professor Mezzacasa in the preparation of his books on Ethiopia. While engaged in this task, he learnt the main language of Ethiopia. Our Veteran Spanish Missionary and life long friend of the deceased, Fr. Gutierrez, asserts that while a Theologian in Italy, Fr. Bars was brilliant at studies. Besides the usual course of Theology, he took special studies in Holy Scripture and in Oriental languages under the famous Fr. Mezzacasa, Fr. Bars took the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Ecclesiastical Faculty of Turin.

He was ordained a Priest in Foglizzo on the 10 August 1917. He went over to Salamanca as Catechist and as a Science teacher.

He prepared the pupils for their public examinations in Science. This interest in Science always remained with him. He had a methodical and analytical mind. On the missions, he knew the names of every rock and plant and herb and their medicinal properties. He became an expert in the study of Homeopathy. Thus his classes as a Cleric and a Priest became a springboard for greater achievements and pro-founder research and study on behalf of the young and his people.

But Divine Providence had a very special eye on this young Spanish Priest, Emmanuel Bars, because in 1921 he was selected to join the Pioneer group of Missionaries who would set out for Assam. The Pioneer group selected by the Rector Major at that time, V. Rev. Fr. Albera were the following :—eleven Salesians :—

Rev. Fr. L. Mathias, their Superior and Leader (Later Fr. Mathias, became the first Bishop of Shillong and later, the famous Archbishop of Madras.)

Rev. Fr. J. Hauber, Rev. Fr. J. Gil, Rev. Fr. Bonardi, Rev. Fr. Deponti, Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Bars, Rev. Bro. L. Santana, Rev. Bro. Augustin Conti, Rev. Bro. P. Aprile, Rev. Bro. Marius Calzi, Rev. Bro. G. Cid. On the 20th Dec. 1921, our eleven pioneers received the blessing of the Superiors and proceeded for France. They boarded their ship, the Kaiser-i-Hind at Marseilles. The Priests celebrated Mass daily and Christmas was Celebrated with all solemnity. A Carmelite Father presided. Fr. Mathias played the piano. A Maltese gentleman strummed the guitar and Fr. Bars singing with his imposing tenor voice, conducted the choir.

On the 6th Jan. 1922, our Salesians reached Bombay on the Feast of the Epiphany. On the 11th Jan. at 16.42 our first group left Calcutta on the Assam Mail for Assam. Msgr. Bars writes.

"In the small hours of the 12th, we entered Assam and saluted the new land." Fr. Lefevre, S. J. on the 12th Jan. had arranged a truck to take them to Gauhati where they admired the Church and the bungalow built by the Salvatorian Fathers." They spent the night in Gauhati and heard the welcome of the jackals. They celebrated morning Mass in Gauhati.

Msgr. Bars writes, "When leaving Turin there was 20CM of snow. Surely it was hot in the Red Sea, in Bombay and in Calcutta and yet it was only the middle of January. Yet on our trip to Shillong we could admire the abundance of flowers. It was extraordinary for us. Paradise. Imagine our fascination in reaching Shillong, the town of flowers." Msgr. Bars describes the great enthusiasm of the group on entering the Cathedral Church for the first time. The main altar had been beautifully carved by a German Salvatorian Brother. But imagine the delight of the Salesians when they discovered that the statue put by the Germans on a side altar as Our Lady Queen of the Missions, was really the statue of Mary Help of Christians. Msgr. Bars writes, "The statue had no sceptre, but Fr. Gil was quick with a penknife to prepare one from a stick, and next day I made one of wood with a lathe; this sceptre was with the statue till on the Silver Jubilee of our coming, it was substituted by a golden one in Mawlai, Shillong."

In Shillong a grand welcome was given to the Salesians. Msgr. Mathias replied in French (not a single one of our Salesians knew English, not to mention Khasi). (But Msgr. Bars writes, "When I arrived in Shillong I did not know Khasi, but (he is writing in '72) now I know Khasi better than Spanish."

The first assignment of Msgr. Bars was in Shillong as counsellor in St. Anthony's Middle English School, with Fr. Bonardi as Rector. After a few years, we find him transferred to Khrishnagar in Bengal over six hundred miles away from Assam. Khrishnagar is about 80 miles north of Calcutta. At the time of Msgr. Bars, the hot tropical climate there was almost unbearable for Europeans.

Apostolic Administrator of Khrishnagar.

Mons. Bars was appointed Apostolic Administrator of Khrishnagar in 1928 by the Holy See. He held this post of responsibility from 1928 to 1934. Fr. Lopez, one of our veteran missionaries, still with us in Shillong, writes of Msgr. Bars during this period, "My first impression of him was that he was a man of clear ideas, deep and solid ideas, grounded on the foundation of the Faith, therefore rigid with himself, elastic with others to understand their difficulties, their crisis, their lack of virtue or formation, their weaknesses—anything. He would bear up, wait, help and if required, advise but especially he would understand and pray. He would always approve of any initiative even if he had to abandon his own— that gave us the impression that we were obeying, though perhaps we were only doing our own "holy" will. So kind and understanding was his way. With the personnel in crisis (he received a number of them most willingly) he showed himself understanding, kind, watchful, not mentioning the past, pointing to the future. And many a time he succeeded in raising up a needy soul. He was Administrator during the years of the world slump. There was no flow of money. They were difficult days for the missions. Yet Msgr. Bars worked with his own hands and used all available means to keep the work going. In a short time almost without personnel, he re-adjusted, the Parish House and the Cathedral. He built the school (now the Bishop's house) the old womens' house, the workshop, the little chapels of Chapra, Cherrutipi, Baniarchol and others. He repaired the houses of Barampore, Ranabondo, Phulbari and a number of chapels. He started building solid chapels in place of the old straw ones. He bought the land of Khrishnagar and pushed on the development of the mission admirably. Not only was he short of personnel, but due to the climate and tropical fevers, there was always someone in the hospital.

Fr. Uguet writing about this period mentions the great zeal of Msgr. Bars and how he had applied himself to learn the Bengali language. He built many primary schools and turned the Khrishnagar school into a Technical school. During this period he was once at the point of death due to the bite of a cobra. On a visit to the

mission, he fell down from his horse and was in the P.G. Hospital, Calcutta with a broken leg. For forty days he was in plaster of Paris and he was persuaded that he would never be able to run the diocese. He asked Fr. Uguet to write to the Rector Major, Fr. Ricaldone, to exonerate him from the diocese. The Superiors considered his case and after several months Msgr. Ferrando was appointed Bishop of Krishnagar and Msgr. Bars returned to Shillong as Vicar General. Fr. Uguet praises Msgr. Bars for his spirit of obedience and adaptation to any place he was sent to. In the hills and valleys of the North Eastern Region Msgr. Bars traversed thousands of miles on foot. The Khasis gave him the name of "Fr. Motor car" when motor cars did not exist in the interior. He was given the name due to the speed with which he travelled and climbed from village to village.

During the second world war the Govt. of Assam wanted him at Dibrugarh. Without any difficulty he went there to start a new language and new work. There were in that area eighteen military chaplains and they all took him as their spiritual guide. After the war, he was the first residential Priest in Kohima, the capital of the Naga Hills. He was chaplain of the Spanish Sisters who were working as nurses in the Civil Hospital, Kohima.

From 1954 to 1960 we find him VICAR GENERAL AND ASSISTANT PARISH PRIEST IN TURA. Only his humility and obedience could reconcile these two terms. But he did it. He was always ready to help and to serve and to substitute. He was always working from morning to late at night. His work was constant, quiet, methodical, constructive. While here, he began his work on a Garo English Dictionary which he completed before his death.

Last year the State of Meghalaya launched his Khasi English Dictionary. It is a monumental work of one thousand printed pages and over forty two thousand entries. This work was lauded all over India. He had almost completed his Anglo Khasi Dictionary and just before his death he announced at the community table of Don Bosco that he had completed this up to the letter, "S".

Eventually his colossal work which he has left in manuscripts will be revised and published as the book which he published is one of the glories of the Meghalaya State and the Khasi language. Besides his work, on Dictionaries Msgr. Bars was one of the most important members of the Commission for the New Modern Translation of the Khasi Bible, headed by Fr. H. Fantin, Parish Priest, Jowai. All of us were encouraging him to live to see the completion of the Catholic Bible— but God's Holy will be done !

For over twelve years Msgr. Bars has been confessor of Don Bosco Technical School which numbers more than thirty confreres.

In the vast Salesian complex in this area due to St. Anthony's College, St. Anthony's High School, the Cathedral, the spiritual assistance of Msgr. Bars was always needed by many confreres and other Religious and Priests of our Province.

The confreres of Don Bosco Technical School and all the Boarders were edified with the example of this old cheerful, hard-working Salesian. He was always punctual. He enjoyed the entertainments of the boys and never missed them. He was always full of fun. He was never in a bad mood. On Feastdays he used to sing even in his old age, to keep the community cheerful.

Since he was a strict follower of Homeopathy, he never took tea or coffee. Just plain milk. To the end he retained a little trace of his life in Khrishnagar. At meals he took a little mango chutney. In the house of Don Bosco Technical School, now, the seat of Msgr. Bars is very empty. As a matter of fact there is a great void.

Letters of condolence have poured in from all over the world. At the time of his death I phoned up from Calcutta and expressed my grief for the loss of a confrere who had been an extraordinary Salesian filled with our genuine spirit. Grave and serious duties on behalf of our house, prevented me from attending the funeral. Archbishop D'Rosario Bishop of Shillong from Italy praised the Religious spirit of the deceased. Archbishop Ferrando who had been associated closely with Msgr. Bars since 1924 up to 1973 stated that the death of Msgr. Bars had plunged them all into deep grief. Archbishop Ferrando writes, "Of Msgr. Bars we may say. He has been faithful to God, to his duty, to the Missionary ideal, till the end, and victory is promised to those who persevere to the end. What a beautiful crown of glory Msgr. Bars has gained, full of years, rich in merits like an old Patriarch he has gone to his Eternal reward. He has gone ahead of us and helps us with his shining example to be good Salesians and zealous missionaries."

On Friday, April 5th there was a concelebrated Requiem Mass in the Shillong Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians. Bishop Marengo from Tura presided and lauded the great Missionary work and example of Msgr. Bars. V. Rev. Fr. Fantin in Khasi praised the virtues and hard work of the dead Priest. Fifty Priests concelebrated in a solemn and fitting. Sacrifice. V. Rev. Fr. Mathew Pulingathil, S.D.B. Provincial of this Province and V. Rev. Fr. Ignatius Rubio Acting Episcopal Vicar, assisted Bishop Marengo at the Mass.

The funeral was a solemn testimony of our gratitude to the dead missionary. Salesians, Fathers and Brothers, Secular Priests, Religious of many Congregations of Shillong and a huge concourse of the faithful filed along with the Parish band led by Bro. Castellino and the St. Anthony's boy scouts headed by Scoutmaster Bro. John.

We had had cyclonic weather and rain and winds for two weeks. But the day of the funeral of our dead Patriarch was bright and sunny and beautiful. And a packed Laitumkhrah cemetery witnessed the burial of one of the greatest of our missionaries. Farewell speeches at the grave did justice to the beloved Pastor. The speakers were Mr. Peter Marbaniang, M.L.A. for the lay people; Fr. Provincial for the Salesians; A speech from a boy of Don Bosco School brought tears to many eyes.

Since we are determined to produce a biography this year in honour of Msgr. Bars, we request readers to please forward any details or anecdotes regarding this outstanding Missionary by air mail as soon as possible. Details may be sent in Spanish, Italian or English, to the Provincial Address :

V. Rev. Fr. Mathew Pulingathil, S.D.B.
Provincial Office,
Don Bosco High School,
Gauhati - 781001 (Assam) India.

May the example of Msgr. Bars inspire us to be better Religious. He has served the Church and the Salesian Society with distinction. He loved all and was loved by all. As a Dictionary his life was well defined and classified. His priorities were clearly set forth. He was a humble religious who performed his duty. He was never caught off his guard in a compromise for principles, and our Holy Rules guided him. He combined humour and wit, piety and devotion, love of God and his neighbour. He united zeal for souls and love of learning. He was a worker to the last and never lost a minute of his time. By his deathbed were found the corrections he was preparing for his last book just published.

For us all, Msgr. Bars was a faithful and exemplary Religious and a Holy Priest. Truth was his guide and truth made him free.

Khrishnagar, Shillong, Tura, Cherrapunjee, Laitkynsew, Jowai, Raliang, Kohima, Dibrugarh and all our cities and towns and villages of the north East mourn the death of this beloved Salesian.

While we are confident that Msgr. Bars is enjoying the bliss of Heaven, yet we ask all our confreres to be generous in offering up suffrages for the repose of his soul.

Begging your prayers for Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong and for

Yours in Don Bosco,
FR. UGO TURCO, S.D.B.
Rector.

Necrology : Rev. Msgr. Emmanuel Bars, born at Torroella de Montgri, (Spain) on the 20-10-1889 died at Shillong (India) on April, 4th, 1974 aged, 84 years. 66 Profession, 57 Priesthood, He was Apostolic Administrator of Krishnagar Bengal India for 6 years, and Vicar General of Shillong, for 34 years.