

PROVINCIAL OFFICE

80-c, Broadway

Madras - India

September 8, 1965



*Fr. Paul Bazgier*

aged 74

For the third time within the period of three months, the Angel of Death has called at the portals of our Province. Towards the end of April, a dear deacon of ours, just 8 days after the date of his intended priestly ordination, passed away. Then on August 3rd there occurred the untimely and unexpected death of our illustrious Archbishop Mathias, the true patriarch of Salesian work in India. Four days later, on August 7th, the noble soul of our cherished and unforgettable Fr. Paul Bazgier, left us at the age of 74. You can easily gauge the bereavement that is ours in the face of these great losses; but we resign ourselves to the Holy Will of God.

The robust physique of Fr. Paul had been already wearing itself out during the last years. He was, however, utterly broken down by the heat of this year's summer. His Rector repeatedly besought him to leave the parish for a few days of rest but in vain. He wished to remain at his post during the entire month of May with the intention of leading the evening devotions in honour of Our Lady. Even the month of June found him at his post for the sake of the boys and girls who were to be sent for better education to various orphanages. All those who are acquainted with the poverty and misery of many of his parishioners, will surely understand what a strenuous task this must have been for Fr. Paul.

It was only about June 10th that I came to know of the alarming state of

his health. He could not even celebrate Mass. I had to write to him, asking him under obedience, to go for a month of rest. He was taken to Yercaud where we have the novitiate and the studentate of Philosophy. The bracing climate of the hills and the loving attention of the Confreres there seemed to help him to regain his lost energies. In a few weeks' time he was his old cheerful self. He could now celebrate Mass. But Fr. Paul soon had another relapse of anaemia bringing about serious nervous debility. Towards the end of July, seeing that his condition was worsening, the superiors had him taken back to Madras for better medical treatment. Fr. Paul was brought here by car on August 1st. In his Parish on that day they were holding the annual Eucharistic procession. This scene of the Eucharistic piety of his parishioners, at least in a confused way, must have gladdened the worn-out heart of good Fr. Paul.

Just that very evening I had landed in the city after my trip to Italy for the General Chapter. I hastened at once to St. Joseph's Technical School to meet the dear patient. When I embraced him and tried to cheer him up, he replied sadly: "Fr. Provincial, everything comes to an end in this world: the same for me." Neither my words of encouragement nor the greetings and remembrances from the Confreres of Poland whom I had met during the General Chapter nor even the news about his beloved homeland, could boost up his spirits. He seemed dazed as if already living in another world.

On the following day I visited Fr. Paul again, as also again the day following. On noticing that his condition was deteriorating, I advised the superiors of the House to have him admitted into a clinic. There was some temporary improvement, but by Saturday, August 7th his condition worsened and the doctor counselled us to take him back to our House, as nothing more could be done. All the care that was lavished on him was to no effect. The Rector of the House administered to him the Sacrament of the Sick, and to everybody's consolation, it was seen that Fr. Paul was fully conscious then. His Excellency, Msgr. Francis Carvalho, rushed to the bedside of Fr. Paul to give him the last blessing, but he was already in a coma. The end came at 8:30 p.m. It was Saturday, August 7th. All through that evening very many of our Confreres had come to visit Fr. Paul. A good Catholic Doctor assisted him to the very end. He would have loved to have a word of consolation and a blessing from his life-long friend Msgr. Mathias, of whom Fr. Paul was the ordinary confessor, but the sad news of the demise of His Grace was never revealed to him.

Fr. Paul's remains were exposed in the parlour of the House and people came in large crowds to pay their last respects. Among these there were many religious and priests who had him for many years, as their spiritual director; but most of all, there were present his poor parishioners for whom he had laboured and sacrificed himself for more than 12 years.

On Sunday at 4:30 p.m., the funeral services began. Since the parish church was too small to contain the concourse of people, the functions took place in the open grounds of our Institution. I had the consolation of celebrating the Solemn Requiem Mass at which the Vicar Capitular, Msgr. Carvalho, was present.

Rev. Fr. A. J. Adaikalam, Parish Priest of Egmore, eulogised the virtues of the dear deceased. After the Absolution, a kilometre-long funeral procession escorted the last remains to St. Roque's cemetery, which is about 3 kilometres away. Msgr. Carvalho recited the last prayers at the grave, but they were drowned by the heart-rending weeping of men, women and children. Even after the mortal remains were interred at about 7 p.m., the mourning crowd did not disperse until 10 p.m. They had to be forced to go away, but they returned early next morning to place fresh flowers and burning candles on the tomb.

Fr. Paul was born at Pruchna, Poland on January 14th, 1891, of Joseph and Susanna Bazgier. At baptism he was given the name of the Apostle of the Gentiles whom he was later to imitate. In that deeply Christian family, he acquired the spirit of piety and that Christian optimism which was ever his characteristic trait. At the age of 14 he entered the Salesian House of Oswiecim, where his priestly and Salesian vocation blossomed. In 1910 he was sent to the novitiate of Radna-Kraina in Slovenia, where he made his first religious profession in 1911. The years of intense study that followed were crowned by his ordination to the priesthood on May 9th, 1921.

He spent the first 10 years of his priestly life in his native land working in parishes and oratories. But the desire to do still more for souls, urged him to abandon his dear fatherland to follow his missionary vocation. He arrived in India, this country of his adoption, on November 25th, 1930, never to leave it again. Soon he learned Tamil, the local language, well enough and in 1931 he was appointed Parish Priest of Pattiavaram, a little village of North Arcot. In his 35 years of missionary life, he was parish priest in different places leaving everywhere a happy memory of his charity and zeal. On different occasions the superiors interrupted his apostolic activities by appointing him as professor and confessor in the diocesan Seminary and in our own studentates of Philosophy and Theology. His priestly ministry was very much sought after even by other priests of the city who used to come to him for direction and comfort. All are unanimous in acclaiming the wisdom and charity of this humble and lovable Salesian.

In the person of Fr. Paul we have lost an apostle of true evangelical charity, whose right hand ignored what the left did. His parish was the poorest in the city. The greater part of the parishioners have mere huts for their dwelling and even these, often enough, do not belong to them but are rented. These men who stood in need of everything, found in Fr. Paul a good father who listened to them patiently and generously gave away whatever he could get. Extremely sympathetic at heart, he even anticipated their needs. Since the parish was so poor, the only source of revenue for his work was the monthly allowance which the adjoining House gave him. Whenever he received food-stuff from America, he used to spend several hours distributing the packets himself. This also gave him the opportunity of meeting each of his parishioners and of telling them a good word. He feared ostentation and hence he was wont to do it all as quietly as possible, both to conceal his act of charity and also not to arouse jealousy.

In a few years the number of his parishioners increased from a few hundreds to more than 1,500 and as the Good Shepherd, he knew them all. He did not even consider employing a catechist as he would have been a burden on his meagre financial resources. Every morning both before and after Mass, he used to approach all who came to church getting personally interested in everybody and in everything, consoling, solving difficulties, settling irregularities, restoring peace in their families. No wonder then, that at his funeral the poor wept over him calling on him with the sweet name of 'father'.

The death of Fr. Paul has sunk a great void in our midst. A man both learned and endowed with special gifts, he had won over the good will of all. He was a priest with a most lovable and joyous disposition; he took cheerfulness in plenty wherever he went. He had a ready wit at which no one could ever take offence. He was simply the good man who, as Fr. Pianazzi wrote, "would not have hurt a fly." He preferred to suffer in silence rather than make others suffer. I cannot forget how, in 1947, on receiving the news of the death of his dear mother on the eve of Rector's Day, he kept the sad news to himself till the day after the feast in order not to spoil the common joy. During the feast itself, he took an active part in the manifestations of joy without betraying in the least the grief that was saddening him.

Fr. Paul could infuse his courage and joy in the souls of those who approached him even when his own heart was weighed down by the distressing problems that are unavoidable in the regular run of the apostolate. It was on this account that he was cherished by all. Our various Houses considered it a privilege to have him as the confessor. How often haven't we said among ourselves: "There should be a Fr. Paul in every House."

My dear Confreres, Fr. Paul has given us all a magnificent example of what a saintly Salesian can do even when discharging the humbler offices. Let us be generous with suffrages for the repose of his soul. At the same time let us pray the Lord to send us many Salesians endowed with his excellent qualities.

Please pray also for the various needs of this Province, and also for

Your affectionate Confrere,  
Fr. L. Di Fiore  
Provincial

FR. PAUL BAZGIER: born at Pruchna (Poland), Jan. 14, 1891; died at Madras (India), August 7, 1965 at 74 years of age, 54 of Religious Profession and 44 of Priesthood.