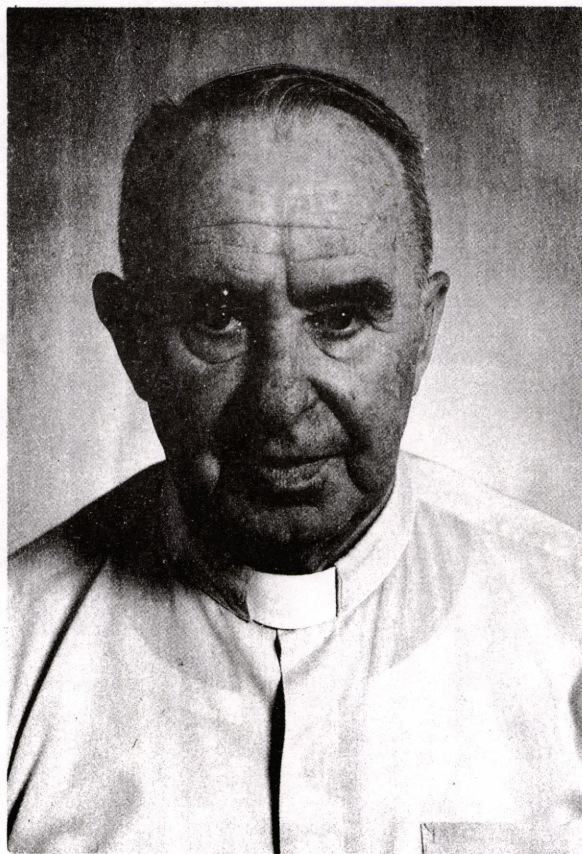
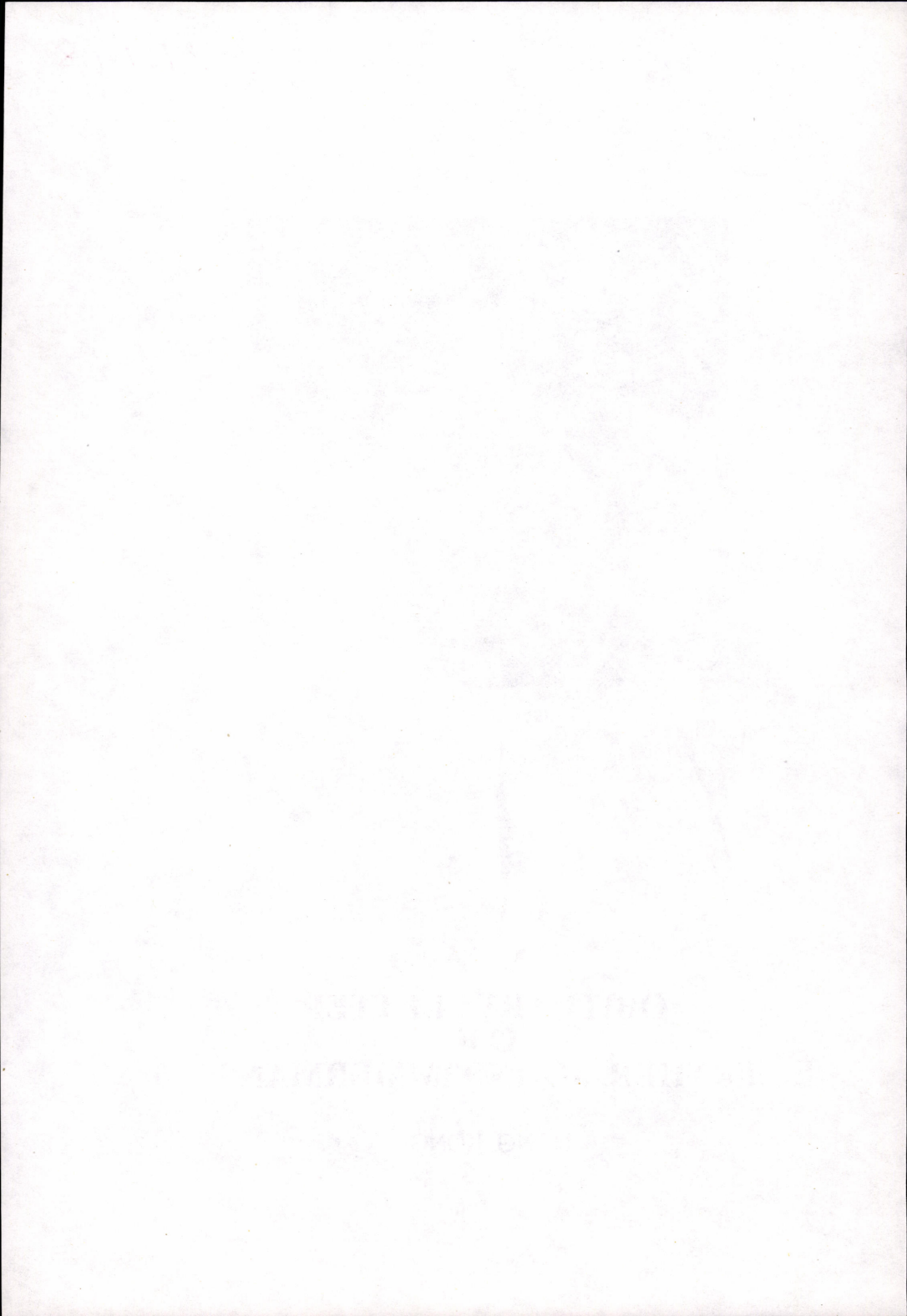


38B148



**OBITUARY LETTER  
OF  
FATHER JOHN TIMMERMANS**

HONG KONG





FR. JOHN PETER LAMBERT TIMMERMANS  
SALESIAN MISSIONARY IN CHINA

In January 1991 our Province reserved and equipped a part of our House of Formation (in Hong Kong) to which elderly and ailing confreres could retire and receive all the attention conducive to a happy community life that would crown their many years of apostolic work in the vineyard of the Lord. Presently, the average age of the seven confreres in this community (known among us as Braga House) is slightly over eighty. (In the Houses there are still four octogenarians and one nonagenarian whose state of health permits them to engage in pastoral work.)

In the month of March of this present year four members of the Braga House community happened to be hospitalized at the same time; and only one of them, a nonagenarian, rejoined the community. The other three confreres - Frs. Peter Pomati, Francis Wang and John Timmermans were called to their heavenly reward.

FATHER PETER JAN LAMBERT TIMMERMANS had joined the Braga House community on 11th. July 1993; he was admitted to St. Paul's Hospital on 27th. December 1993; and on March 14th. he **died peacefully, no longer able to continue the struggle against** a carcinoma in the stomach, cardiac ischaemia and a chest infection. He was halfway through his seventy-seventh year at the time of death.

As is the custom in Hong Kong, his remains were removed from St. Paul's Hospital to a nearby Funeral Parlour where, on the evening of March 15th., many Salesians, religious of both sexes, past pupils and friends attended a devout liturgical service, during which one of his former pupils, now a Salesian priest, spoke with emotion of his gratitude to Fr. John for the loving care that he had expended upon him. The following day His Eminence Cardinal John Baptist Wu, Bishop of Hong Kong, presided at the Eucharistic concelebration, assisted by the Salesian Bishop of Krishnagar, Msgr. Lucas Sirkar, who happened to be in Hong Kong for a meeting of Asian Bishops. The Regional Councillor, Fr. Thomas Panakezham, who had just arrived for the Extraordinary Visitation, also assisted the Cardinal at the altar. There were also at least forty priests who concelebrated the Requiem Mass. Fr. Provincial delivered the funeral oration, portraying the life and work of the deceased. A big number of nuns and lay people, besides representatives of the teachers and students of Yuet Wah College where Fr. John had spent the last twenty years of his life, were also present at the funeral Mass, which was a fitting tribute to a confrere who had spent his whole priestly life, spanning forty-seven years, serving the missionary church in China.

His Eminence the Cardinal also performed the Final Commendation and Farewell in the church as well as the Burial Service in the cemetery. A medal was conspicuously displayed on the top of the coffin to remind us that in 1983 Fr. John had been made a Knight by His Majesty the King of Belgium, in appreciation for our confrere's dedication to young



people in the Missions. Belgium was fitfully represented at the funeral services by the Deputy Consul General of Belgium.

Msgr. Lam, Bishop of Macau, faxed to our Provincial Office in Hong Kong an artistically hand-written message of sympathy, "Deepest condolences to all Salesians for the loss of Fr. John Timmermans."

John (this is the name he preferred to be called by) was born in Overpelt (Belgium) on September 23rd. 1916 to Anthony Timmermans and Henrietta Voets, who brought up a good christian family that was only too happy to offer their son John to the Salesians. Shortly after his confirmation, at the age of twelve, he entered the Salesian school at Hechtel. On August 24th 1937 he entered the novitiate at Groot-Bygaarden, received the religious habit on November 11th. and made his first profession in the Novitiate House on September 2nd. 1938. He renewed his vows at Liege three years later and made his perpetual profession in 1944. He studied philosophy at Louvain and at Grand Halleux, and in 1940-43 was a member of the school staff at Remouchamps. His theological studies were done at Oud-Heverlee and on February 2nd. 1947 he had the immense joy of being ordained to the priesthood. Since he had opted to go on the Missions he was given the opportunity to dedicate many months to his preparation for the Missions and attend courses that were to serve him well in his future mission.

He left Belgium for China in early January 1948 on a Sabena Airline plane that came to grief shortly after take-off

from Kunming (then known as Yunnan-fu), where it had stopped to refuel. The pilot died in the crash while some passengers suffered injuries. Fr. John, and the two Italian Salesian clerics travelling with him, were among the injured - a baptism of fire for the mission ahead of them! The three arrived in Shanghai in reasonably good shape and were present at the requiem Mass that was sung in one of the principal churches of the city, in suffrage for the soul of the deceased pilot; the schola cantorum at the Mass was made up entirely of our students of theology and aspirants.

John's first assignment was to teach in our parish at Chapei, in Shanghai; but in the same year he was sent to our technical school in Kunming where he was prefect of studies until the Nationalist Government was supplanted and the Salesians expelled or imprisoned. In 1951 we find him in Macau as bursar in the Salesian Press. For the next twenty years he was a teacher in Hong Kong, on the staffs of St. Louis School, Tang King Po School and Tang King Po College. He loved teaching but he also loved to work in our youth centres, especially in the Oratories attached to St. Louis School and to Yuet Wah College in Macau. He also was, from time to time, bursar, catechist, Vicar while still teaching and looking after the local Oratory. He fell in love with Hong Kong and it cost him quite a lot when he was transferred to Yuet Wah College in Macau. However, he was always happy to be in the midst of a throng of boys; of these there were plenty in Yuet Wah College also; and so in due course he grew attached to his work for youth there. He was vice-Rector of the College from 1979 until 1993.



Yuet Wah College enjoys a special characteristic in our Province; it is blessed (or plagued!) with lots and lots of stone steps, that can be demanding for the Salesian who wants to be in two places at the same time. Fr. Timmermans suffered a bad knee injury that made the continuous negotiation of steps and stairs a painful chore for him. He was nearing his seventy-fifth birthday and beginning to feel that age was creeping up on him, with the inevitable restrictions that ageing counsels and compels. It was thought that a visit to his home, and home Province, might give him a new lease of life. From Belgium he wrote to his Provincial in China saying that the Superiors and confreres in Belgium were extremely kind to him, that his health was poor and in such a state he felt that prudence and the advice of the local Provincial suggested that he postpone his return to Macau. He added that if after some weeks his health got no better he would ask permission to remain in Europe. He stated that if such were to be the case he would deeply regret not being able to return to China.

Barely eight days later (18.9.1991) he again wrote to his Provincial: "My health has improved and I feel that I can return to Macau. I love China." And so on October 5th. he arrived in Hong Kong, accompanied by his younger brother. He wasted no time in getting to Yuet Wah College where he once more threw himself into his work, with love and devotion. However, only twelve months later he wrote to Fr. Provincial stating that although he still loved his work he must also realize that he was no longer doing justice to the work involved in teaching religion to catechumens, running the Oratory and assisting in Legion of Mary work. It was on July 11th.1993 that he arrived



at Braga House where he joined the elderly confreres for the annual retreat, after which he became part of the community. It was evident that his health was rapidly deteriorating. He had a few short spells in hospital until his final admission on December 27th. that ended with his death on March 14th. 1994.

Mention has already been made of the funeral services in Hong Kong. We might add here that on Saturday March 19th.1994 a Requiem Mass was concelebrated in his native parish in Overpelt, in which many Salesians took part, among them Fr.Provincial from Brussels. Several hundred people participated in the service and the letter sent by Fr.Timmerman's Provincial in Hong Kong was read to them, much to their appreciation, edification and joy.

Fr. Timmermans won the respect and esteem of his superiors right from the beginning of his religious life. We find no negative judgements on him throughout his years of formation. He was considered as being "very active, pious, generous - but with no great taste for prolonged study". In the thumbnail sketch of a deceased confrere that is customarily sent to the Secretary-General in Rome we read that Fr. Peter John Timmermans "distinguished himself especially by his love for and dedication to Oratory work, forming a goodly number of leaders, some of whom became Salesians while others presently hold good positions in society". One of his former superiors summed up his appreciation for him in these words: "He was kind, humble, smiling; an educationalist and a philanthropist".



Perhaps the most fitting conclusion to this brief account on Fr. Timmermans could be these words of the students of Form 6 in Yuet Wah College: "Fr. Timmermans insisted on carrying on his work, even when his health was deteriorating. We can vividly remember that at one time the doctors advised him strongly to return to his native country and rest until his health improved, but he declined. He continued to work in the school. Every day, with his walking-stick, he hobbled through the campus - up and down the steep stairs and through the playing courts, with great effort and uneven breath. Yet he never stopped to rest, for fear his work might suffer. His concern for young people was even greater than for his own health! And all of this because of his love for them! This love which, forty-six years ago, compelled a devoted young man to leave his beautiful homeland in Belgium for a totally strange clime where he thirsted to spread the Good News, stood first in his mind and stands highest in ours."

"Home hath gone and ta'en his wages" as the poet beautifully puts it. Yes, he lived, he worked, he persevered...and all for the glory of God. As a true son of Don Bosco, he loved our Blessed Mother, and it is to these we ask you to pray for the happy repose of the soul of Father Peter Jan Lambert Timmermans, and for the staff of St. Paul's Hospital that took such loving care of him during the final months of his earthly life.

Yours sincerely,  
The Salesians of  
Yuet Wah College

**For the Necrology:**

Father John P.L.Timmermans, born at Overpelt (Belgium), on 23.9.1916, died in Hong Kong on 14.3.1994 at the age of 77, 56 years of profession and 47 of priesthood.