

Fr. Hugh Tuena, s.d.b.

Born in Rome
First Religious Profession at Tirupattur
Ordained to the Priesthood at Shillong
Rector for 20 Years
Died, aged 59, at Ambur, (Madras), India

December 24, 1906
January 29, 1935
August 8, 1940
May 5, 1966

Province of St. Thomas the Apostle

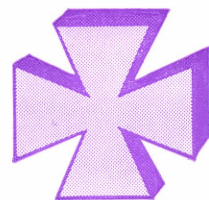
Madras - India

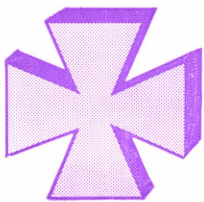
8th May 1966

My dear confreres,

On the 5th of this month, the Angel of Death visited this Province of ours, and called to eternity **REVD. FR. HUGH TUENA, aged 59.**

The dear confrere had been keeping quite good health despite his frail constitution. On the 29th April he had come to Madras to meet some of his countrymen who had arrived on a mission of charity, and while with them, he had tape-recorded a message to his dear ones in Switzerland, little knowing it would be his last. He returned to Tirupattur on Saturday 30th and throughout Sunday was in the best of spirits. It was in the evening that he took suddenly ill, and it soon became evident that the trouble was serious. Dr. Swaminathan, our devoted House Doctor, was called at once, and diagnosed it as a severe case of gastro-entiritis. Father Tuena was taken to the Government Hospital where Dr. Swaminathan stayed by his side throughout the whole night. In the morning Dr. Charles from Ambur and then Dr. Mathew from Vellore were summoned to the bedside of the sick Father, and by Tuesday morning, because of the loving care and attention of these good doctors, Fr. Tuena was out of danger. It was therefore decided to take Father to the Mission Hospital of Ambur where more and better medical facilities are available. By Wednesday Father felt so well that he seemed his old cheerful self, though





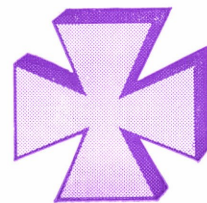
weak and exhausted. All rejoiced at this happy conclusion and thanked God for what seemed indeed a miraculous escape. But on Thursday, 5th May, at 3 a.m., Father complained of some breathing difficulty. Two Brothers were with him at that time. Around 8 a.m. his breathing difficulty plus some bleeding gave reason for concern. So Dr. Benjamin had him x-rayed at once and, to our concern, suspected cancer or pneumonia. Every attention was lavished on him. To help him breathe more freely, oxygen was administered. Throughout all this, Father could still talk and follow all that was going on around him. It was a matter of shock for the confrere with him that minutes later the nurse felt his pulse and immediately called Doctor Benjamin. The doctor, after a brief examination, turned to the confrere present and said: "Father is no more". It was 9:52 a.m. It was hard to believe that Fr. Tuena had passed away. The same quiet and peaceful smile was on his face. He had, true to the phrase, merely slept in the Lord.

You can imagine my sadness on hearing the unhappy news by phone in Goa where I was then presiding over the Spiritual Retreat of the confreres. I had even started for Tirupattur before, but had been stopped by the wire that Father was out of danger. Within fifteen minutes of receipt of the news of Father's death, I was on the bus to Bangalore, and reached Tirupattur in time for the funeral which took place in the evening of May 6th. Bishop David Marianayagam, S.D.B., of Vellore, sang the Mass, and performed the last funeral rites at the cemetery in the House com-

pound, and I was privileged to speak a few words regarding the life and virtues of the dear departed.

Father Tuena's life is quickly told. He used to recall with a sense of pride that he was born in the shadow of the dome of St. Peter's Basilica, in Rome, on 24th December 1906 as the bells called the faithful to Midnight Mass. Later, his family returned to Switzerland, and there he completed his studies and became a School Teacher. In 1933, following God's call, he entered the Salesian House of Ivrea, and from there came to India for his Novitiate which he completed at Tirupattur with his Religious Profession on the 29th January 1935. He was ordained a priest in Shillong by Bishop S. Ferrando, S.D.B., on 8th August 1940.

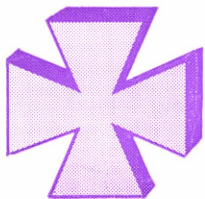
From 1945 till his death, he was successively Rector of Don Bosco, Vellore; St. Bede's, Madras, and finally of Salesian House, Tirupattur. During this period, he was appointed three times Acting Provincial. Everywhere he endeared himself to the Salesians and boys alike. The presence of over one hundred Salesians at his funeral and of a good number of past pupils is indeed a clear proof of the affection and esteem he everywhere enjoyed. The last days of his life were positively strenuous and even busier than usual as he had practically sent all the confreres of his House for their retreats or holidays respectively. He could be said to have died at his post, working virtually right till the last minute. After his death, I looked up the registers he maintained, and found entries made right up to the 1st May. This is a further proof that he was a true son of Don Bosco who said: "When a Salesian



dies at his post working, then you can state that the Congregation has achieved a great triumph."

But if it is easy to describe his life, it is not at all an easy task to speak of his virtues as they are many and luminous. All those who have known Fr. Tuena intimately, will agree with me saying that he was a man of more than ordinary virtue, one of those men who like Christ, "went about doing good," and "whose memory shall be held in benediction." One will recall his proverbial simplicity and unostentatious behaviour which made him approachable to all; another will recall his deep humility, how he was even ready to ask pardon from people who had wronged him; his confreres and pupils will ever retain fresh in their memories his jokes and humorous stories, more often than not old ones, but repeated with the sole desire of making others happy. But he will, above all, be remembered — should I say "missed" — in the words of a confrere who has just written to me: "We will miss him for his exemplary religious life, his unassuming spirit, his equanimity, habitual cheerfulness, great hospitality and cordiality." Bishop Francis Carvalho, Auxiliary to the late Archbishop Louis Mathias, S.D.B., who knew him intimately, summarises his life and virtues in these words: "Blessed are the meek for they shall possess the land of promise!"

Fr. Pianazzi who was his Provincial for six years, writes: "I have been sorrowfully shocked with the news of Fr. Tuena's death. Don Tuena was a little saint, and the Lord has certainly given him already a great reward for the much work which he has accom-



plished for His greater glory. May God help us to imitate his example.”

There are other characteristics for which dear Fr. Tuena stands out among many, and which make him a model to imitate.

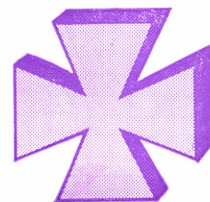
□ First, his love for the poor. Among the many who wept at his funeral, was a past pupil who today holds a good position in life. He was heard to exclaim amidst bitter tears of sorrow: “If I am anything today in life, I owe it to him. I was a poor orphan boy, but he took care of me.” And like him, there are hundreds of others who could repeat similar words. The amount of charity Fr. Tuena did in secret is known to God alone. I remember how a few months ago there came to Tirupattur a man who was definitely giving a false identification and who was asking for help. I happened to be there and Fr. Tuena asked my opinion. I told him that the case, as far as I was concerned, was certainly not genuine. “Perhaps you are right,” he replied, “still shall I give him Rs. 5 for the love of God?” That was Fr. Tuena: a man of Christian charity!

□ His attachment to Don Bosco and Salesian traditions was proverbial. He spared no pains to make Don Bosco better known and more loved. Wherever he was, his one endeavour was to keep alive the Salesian spirit.

□ His spirit of obedience and submission to Superiors was something remarkable. To his new Provincial he wrote:

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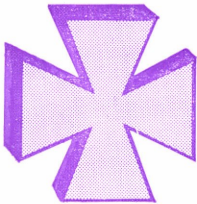
“On my part, as in the past, I shall try to give my Superiors the least amount of trouble, and to be always obedient and



loyal. I shall always consider you the representative of Don Bosco and shall cooperate with you in every way possible and in whatever place you might put me. I hope to be able to give you many consolations and few preoccupations, and I also hope you will be as patient with me as the other Provincials have been."

□ When he thought it was his duty to disagree with his Superior, he would do so but only after apologising profusely for the same. If, at any time, he thought that he had been too insistent on certain points, he would invariably come back to beg pardon and to assure his Superiors that he was always ready to abide by his Superior's decision.

My dear confreres, you can easily understand that it is no common man that we have lost with the death of Fr. Tuena. As Rector of one of the most important Houses of the Province and Provincial Councillor, he has left a void which will not be easy to fill. Even from a purely material point of view, and forgive me the reference, his absence will be keenly felt, since through his appeals to Switzerland, he has been responsible over the years for a substantial contribution to the material growth of this Province. Two monumental Houses at Katpadi, the auditorium of St. Bede's and the land in Coimbatore are the result of his personal efforts. Not content with those, he had already started asking help for the new Aspirantate of Tirupattur. We are confident that from heaven he will help us to accomplish what he had no time to complete here on earth. Another remarkable quality in Father was



that, though so much money passed through his hands, he was ever ready to use it according to the Superiors' intentions, even if that meant depriving his own House of something much needed. As for himself, he practised the strictest sense of poverty and never at any time tried to use money he collected or the influence thereby gained for his personal advantage.

Though Fr. Tuena's end came suddenly and unexpectedly, it did not find him unprepared. The day after the first crisis he called for his Confessor and made a general confession and received the Last Sacraments, saying: "I want to be ready if God calls me to Himself." And then together with his Confessor, he repeated that beautiful prayer of the Mass: "May the Lord receive this sacrifice from my hands to the praise and glory of His name. . ." It was his evening sacrifice, and we are sure the Lord accepted it. It is a sacrifice for us too, my dear confreres, who are left to carry on the work he left undone. Please pray that the Good Lord may send many such labourers into this His vineyard, and that we who are in it "may be found worthy of it," as our departed was.

Yours afftly. in Don Bosco

FR. L. DI FIORE
Provincial

