

**R. I. P.**



*REV. FR.*

**PATRICK BURNS**

*S.D.B.*







PROVINCIAL OFFICE  
DON BOSCO  
GAUHATI.

*My dear Confreres,*

On 17th May, 1981 phone calls from St. Paul's minor Seminary informed institution after institution that

## Rev. Fr. Patrick Burns

was no more. It was a shocking piece of news to one and all especially on a Sunday morning.

Fr. Burns had been ailing for some time and had gone for medical check-ups quite frequently. On 15th May when he had gone for his check-up he looked pale and tired. The doctor who attended to him at Nazareth Hospital, Shillong, advised him to stay in for a complete check-up. But he had already planned his trip home. His tickets were bought and everything was ready for departure for Ireland on 25th May. He must have had a fear that hospitalization might force him to cancel his trip. The advice of the doctor was turned down by him on the plea that he would get a thorough check-up in Ireland or England. But that was not to be.

On 16th night at about 7.00 p.m. Fr. Burns said Mass with some difficulty, assisted by Bro. Bosco, one of the clerics in regency in St. Paul's Seminary. He took a light supper and was tucked into bed. That was his last Mass and that was his last night too.

On 17th morning as the same brother went up to wake him up for breakfast, he found him cold, lying in the same position in which he had left him the night before. He realized that Fr. Burns was already dead and informed the fathers and the community. According to the doctor's verdict he must have passed away in his sleep because of a massive heart attack.



Fr. Patrick Joseph Burns was born in Belfast, Ireland, on 17th January, 1916, of Thomas and Isabella Burns. After finishing his elementary studies in the local school, he entered the Salesian Aspirantate at Shrigley at the age of 14. After four years of studies there, he entered the Novitiate at Cowly in Oxford in 1934. After his first profession in 1935, Bro. Burns volunteered for the missions of Assam and arrived in India on 21st November, 1936. His three years of Philosophical studies were spent in three different places, '37 in Shillong, '38 in Sonada and '39 in Bandel.

He did his practical training in Saharampur, in U.P. and there made his perpetual profession. He did his theological studies for a period in Sonada under Mons. Marengo. Then during World War II he was called down to Calcutta where he continued his theological studies and looked after the aspirants. He finished his studies of Theology in the Salesian house at Tirupattur, in the North Arcot District of Tamilnadu, and was ordained a priest there in 1944 by the late Archbishop Louis Mathias.

His first assignment as a priest was to Barpeta Road. There he stayed nearly one year. In 1945 he became the prefect of Studies of Don Bosco, Shillong and in the following year we find him doing missionary work in the Cherrapunjee parish.

Fr. Burns' activities in Gauhati date back to 1947 when he was appointed as the superintendent of the then existing college hostel. Many students who were with him in those years still remember his kindness, understanding, and above all his sportsmanship. Those who have met Fr. Burns only in his last years would not even be able to guess that he was a great footballer and cricketer. He had a great love for games and sports and enjoyed watching them as much as playing them.

He lived in his native Ireland just 19 years, but he spent 46 years in India working as a missionary. He loved the Indians, especially the people of Assam and Meghalaya, among whom he spent the longest part of his life, as his own brothers and sisters. One of the ways in which he showed his love for them was by learning their language. In Saharampur he learned to speak Urdu, in Shillong he learned to speak and write Khasi, and in Gauhati he



mastered Assamese and Hindi. With the knowledge he had of the local languages he was able to communicate both with the children and their parents. For the same reason he was able to make friends easily.

He worked in Tezpur as a missionary and as a teacher for one year. In 1951 Fr. Burns once again came up to Shillong to do his B.T. studies in St. Edmund's College, and helped Mons. Ferrando as his secretary. In 1952 Fr. Burns went back to Gauhati and remained there for full 21 years doing the work of Headmaster of Don Bosco School, Rector and Parish Priest.

He was well accepted among the intelligentsia of the town and was often called upon to give talks over Gauhati Radio on religious topics. He was hailed as an able educationalist by the local people and their claims were justified because of the brilliant results Don Bosco School, Gauhati, was able to secure in the public examinations during his tenure of office as Head Master.

In 1973 Fr. Burns came back to Shillong, worked in Don Bosco as a confessor till he was appointed Rector of St. Paul's minor Seminary at Upper Shillong in 1978. This was his last assignment and it is while he was Rector of St. Paul's that God called him away for his eternal reward.

Fr. Burns was a Salesian to the core and loved Don Bosco and things salesian with all his heart. He was a great missionary as well. All the talents, his knowledge of languages, and his natural eloquence were put at the disposal of his ministry as a priest and missionary.

He had several outstanding qualities, but the two main ones were simplicity and optimism. He was approachable to everyone and he had a kind word for everyone whom he met. Those who knew him, when given the news of his death, almost unanimously exclaimed: "We have lost a good friend." He made himself at home in a minister's house or a tea garden manager's bungalow as in the homely huts of the workers and village folk. He discouraged no one, on the contrary, with his priestly ministry in the confessional and outside he was able to console and help many who were



downhearted. He had words of praise for everyone and patiently helped the so-called problem boys to improve. He never hurt anyone in word or deed.

The Christian faith that was inculcated into him by his God-fearing parents, he tried to spread everywhere he went. His life of priestly and missionary zeal moved others in his family to imitate his example. He has a brother, Fr. Jim Burns, who is a salesian priest. He came to India to be a missionary, worked here for a few years and is now doing praiseworthy work in his native Belfast. He has three sisters in the congregation of the Queen of the Missions (Notre Dame). One of them followed him to India and was a missionary here for many years.

Fr. Burns was accepted as an able preacher by the religious communities and the people at large. The sermons he preached are numberless as would also be the retreats he has given to religious as well as to the laity. He was a welcome after-dinner speaker in many of our gatherings. And everyone used to wait eagerly for his little jokes and witticisms.

He exercised his talents as a writer by publishing two biographies, one about his own companion, Bro. Denis Cavanagh who died in his early twenties, and another about the apostle of the Khasis, Fr. Vendrame. These biographies are of a simple type. Their value will be seen really when there will be no one left to tell the new generations of Salesians what these departed missionaries have done for the missions of North East India, for the Church and the Salesian congregation. He had another book, "My Soul glorifies the Lord," an explanation of the Litany of Loreto, ready for publication. As the manuscripts are ready, we feel sure it will be soon published to spread the love of Our Lady which burned in the heart of this great Salesian.

Two bishops, Mons. Marengo and Mons. Robert Kerketta, were present for the concelebrated Mass in which 80 Salesian priests took part. The Archbishop, Mons. Hubert D'Rosario, could not be present for the funeral as he was in Ireland on a Marian pilgrimage. Fr. Thomas Panakezham, our regional superior for Asia, gave the homily. An unusually big number



of mourners attended the Mass and then walked in procession, saying prayers for the repose of his soul, while his mortal remains were being carried to its last resting place in the Salesian Family Chapel in the Shillong Cathedral graveyard. And there he who had spoken at the funerals of so many others listened while Fr. N. Kenny spoke so eloquently about his life and work. Fr. Provincial in the name of the Salesians, and a seminarian from St. Paul's in the name of the staff and seminarians, wished Fr. Burns good bye.

For us who believe that "Life is changed, not taken away," Fr. Burns is not dead. He lives in his works and especially in those whom he patiently and lovingly educated.

May he who lived in peace with everyone find eternal peace in the kingdom of our Heavenly Father. And may Fr. Burns from heaven continue to enlighten and guide the superiors and seminarians of St. Paul's Seminary. They, more than anyone else, miss his fatherly presence. May his life and example inspire young boys and girls to be good and zealous missionaries. May his prayer from heaven help the Church and the Salesian congregation to find dedicated young men to serve the people of God in the priestly and the religious life.

Sincerely yours in Don Bosco

FR. MATHAI KOCHUPARAMPIL, S.D.B.

*Provincial.*

*For the Necrology :*

REV. FR. PATRICK BURNS

Born at Belfast, Ireland on 17th January 1916.

Died at Shillong on 16th May 1981 at the age of 65 years 4 months 46 years of profession and 37 of priesthood.

He was Rector for 11 years.



