



**REV. BRO. JACOB ETTIL S.D.B.**

*Born* : 7th February, 1930  
Champakulam, Kerala, India.

*Died* : 31st August, 1982  
Don Bosco School, Calcutta, India.



REVEREND BROTHER JACOB ETTIL was born on 7th February 1930 at Champakulam in Kuttanad, one of the districts of Christian Kerala, the Southern most state of India. Brother Jacob is the sixth of nine children born to devout Catholic parents who brought them up in faith and devotion that dates back to the times of the Apostle, St. Thomas. His own younger sister, Sister Ancy, belongs to the Adoration Convent in Kerala and he has four nieces, daughters of his eldest brother, also nuns dedicated to the service of the Lord. This is a clear indication how religious the Ettil family was. Brother, from his earliest years, had a taste for the divine. He was often found in the church, serving Holy Mass and occupying himself with the activities of an altar boy. He was an active member of the Parish Sodality and his membership in the Mission League for youngsters of the parish sowed the seed for his future missionary apostolate. With his enthusiastic companions, he dedicated himself to social service and help of the poor, an attitude that, as a Salesian brother, blossomed in him to be a fragrant flower.

With the vast mission land open to the Salesians in Assam, the Salesians in the North East India, systematically with a purpose, recruited vocations to the missions from the vast reservoir of Kerala from the year 1948. Brother Jacob Ettil belonged to the group of missionary minded youngsters brought up to Mawlai, Shillong, by Rev. Fr. Pianazzi in 1950. From the very beginning he fell in line with the demands of a missionary life and he had the rare opportunity of imbibing the genuine Salesian Spirit in the cradle of Salesian formation, Mawlai, Shillong, at the school of such stalwart salesians such as Rev. Fr. Gutierrez, Rev. Fr. Comba, Bishop Ferrando and Rev. Fr. Pianazzi and a host of others.

Brother Jacob had a strong inclination to become a priest but the inscrutable plans of God directed him to be a Salesian brother. In his application for admission to the first profession, he wrote : "I had a great desire to become a priest but I was not successful. All the same I am very happy to be a lay brother. This is the will of God." He made his first profession on 8th May 1952 in Mawlai, and ever after he always boasted that he was the 'first salesian' from Kerala to profess in the Salesian Society in North East India.

Soon after his profession, Brother was sent to Shillong to learn printing. After about six months he was called down to Calcutta to help at the Catholic Orphan Press. Here, under the watchful eyes of Fathers Alessi and Ferraio, he matured to be a holy salesian. He always cherished a loving memory of father Ferrario. Bro. Jacob kept framed a photo of Father Ferrario in his room till the end of his life. And



gaze of our Lady of Happy Voyage. Our firm hope is that Our Blessed Lady made it really a 'happy voyage' for Brother Jacob from this earthly dwelling to the heavenly abode.

Brother Jacob had scribbled on a small sheet of paper these words as a memento of his retreat in 1981 : "Word of God made alive in you, "Logos"...Personal prayer ( in block letters )...community life." It was a pleasure to celebrate the Eucharist when Brother Jacob was participating in it. Infallibly he would, with devotion, follow the celebration with his daily missal in hand, answering all the prayers and following the rest in his missal. He studied and meditated on the Rules as you find the pages of his Constitution underlined with his own personal reflections by the side. Personal prayer in his room with the help of the New Testament and bhajans ( Indian devotional hymns) was a constant feature in the later years of his religious life.

Under a rough exterior he treasured a humble and accepting attitude and this is borne out by one of his companions : "When Brother Jacob realized that we were not speaking to each other it was he who used to come and ask me the reason of such coldness. After explaining each other's view it was he who used to ask forgiveness and embrace me. I must sincerely confess that those moments were the happiest ones of my religious life. It is from him I learned how to ask pardon for the mistakes I commit and forgive and forget."

He loved his salesian vocation and he was greatly interested in getting vocations to the Salesian life. As a Salesian brother he was keenly sensitive to the formation of Salesian brothers. During the first Salesian Brothers' seminar on an all India basis, held recently at Bandel, Brother had these observations in his file, regarding the formation of the brothers: "A religious and Salesian formation which will help the brother to grasp the special ethos proper to our society, adequate pedagogical, cultural and salesian training, sufficient apostolic competence in theology and catechetics, and a technical and professional training proper to the individual. Towards the achievement of this ideal a proper and methodical selection of the candidates to the Brotherhood is essential."

Going through his diaries of the past years, I found innumerable addresses which indicated the wide circle of contacts he had right through his life. He was very delicate in mailing greeting cards for feast days and birthdays, and his contacts were full of warmth and genuine interest. One of his close friends had this to say about Brother Jacob : "When Provincials, Salesian Bishops and many other well-wishers heard that brother Jacob was seriously sick, they



usual enthusiasm, undaunted by difficulties, preparing plans for his apostolate in the Diocese. His last master plan was to help the people of the place with fisheries as West Bengal is studded with ponds suitable for fish rearing. It was a master plan with a vision and he wanted to translate it into action with all the resources at his disposal. This project was so convincing that he had no difficulties to get it approved by funding agencies. At this point, brother Jacob found himself dragging along with various pains and aches. Little did he know this beginning of his calvary would eventually bring him to the cross in a very short time. And so, his crowning dream remains a swan song unsung filed away in the archives of the Bishop's house.

Brother complained of aches and pains right from the beginning of November 1931 and yet he went about doing his duties unconcerned. He was later treated for spondilosis. In February this year, X-rays showed that he was suffering from Pleurisy. All the while one could make out that Brother was not his usual self as he was suffering very much. His complaint was that he could not carry on his apostolic activities due to his illness. As he was not improving we took him to a nursing home in Calcutta. The doctors here diagnosed cancer of the lungs in an advanced stage. There was very little that the good doctors could do for brother and they were sorry for it. The realization of the seriousness of his illness made him to react strongly...he was not going to die... he had great plans to help the poor people...his apostolate was waiting for him...his dreams had not yet been fully realized. As the fatal illness slowly but inexorably drew him closer to the grave, one could find a total transformation in him. He was resigned to the Holy Will of God and as he matured in spirit with the help of his physical sufferings he was able to cry out in the spirit : "Lord, increase my Faith." On 31st August at 7.15 p. m. his prayer was heard by the Lord, fully conscious he received the Lord in Holy Communion and his Faith was transformed into Vision of the Lord as he breathed his last upon this earth to be reborn eternally in the bosom of the Father.

On the following day, Salesians and his friends and admirers gathered together in the age old shrine of Our Blessed Mother in Bandel for the funeral service. The funeral Mass was celebrated by Rt. Rev. Bishop Matthew Baroi, S. D. B., Bishop of Krishnagar Diocese, while 45 salesian priests concelebrated with him. Sadness was written on the face of every one present as the cortege moved from the church to the courtyard and his own brothers in religion lifted up the coffin on its way for the final resting place under the sweet



we all know what a kind and generous salesian, father Ferrario was.

His eagerness to better himself and become a saint was humbly expressed in his application to the perpetual profession. He wrote : "I beg of you to remember me in your Holy Mass so that I may lead a saintly salesian life according to the wish of St. John Bosco." He had the longed for opportunity of perpetually committing himself to the service of God and man in the Salesian Congregation on 20th May, 1958. He still stayed on at the Catholic Orphan Press and he, not only worked in the press, but took an active interest in the spread of the apostolate of the press. In his own capacity, Brother Jacob took keen interest in the publication of "The Herald." He cherished to have a personal copy of the weekly till the end of his life. In 1967 he had this to write to his superior about The Herald : "I have done whatever I could to spread the word of God through that paper."

In the late sixties, Brother Jacob spent his salesian life at Cossipore in the administrative section of the Polytechnic school. It was from here that Brother was sent to Ireland to the Salesian Agricultural College, Warrenstown. While his stay in Ireland he endeared himself to the salesians and he went through a two-year course in Agriculture, Dairy farming very successfully.

Brother Jacob spent most of his salesian life in Don Bosco Agricultural Centre at Krishnagar. His cherished dream was that this institute become an experimental cum training centre for the benefit of the poor farmers of the districts around. Infact, he worked hard and methodically to make it a model farm with the collaboration of government and private agencies who were all very enthusiastic about his plans and achievements. Experimental fishery cum farming innovations brought the applause of government and international experts. Representatives from the FAO visited the centre and Dr. Balforn Hepher had this to write in the visitor's book : "I was very much impressed by the progress made in Acquaculture. I am sure this beginning will develop further for the benefit of the entire state." Brother Jacob was thoroughly versed in his field of labour and he went out of his way to advise others on fisheries and agriculture. I lived with Brother Jacob during his last three years and I must confess that he was a real master at his trade, and thorough with his planning and execution.

His last obedience brought him to the Bishop's house, Krishnagar. Once he settled down, he went about with his



all felt that one of their close friends was suffering." A number of his addresses included government and private agencies in India and abroad directly linked with his apostolate. The number of correspondence he kept up with these agencies, the innumerable scribblings in his diaries and writing pads, planning his work, are witnesses of his untiring efforts to improve the agriculture, dairy, farming and fisheries of the region. His methods were so convincing, his planning so meticulous and his experiments yielding results that the funding agencies were ever willing to finance his projects. In all his apostolate he always had the interest of the poor farmers at heart to uplift them and improve their living standards.

Dear confreres, I have not written everything about Brother Jacob. Every one who came into contact with him will have his own story to write. But we all agree to this thoughtful appraisal of Brother Jacob : "The more I came to know him the more I appreciated him as a noble and genuine soul." The departure of brother Jacob has left a void in the Calcutta Province and especially in the Bishop's house.

In his application to be admitted to perpetual profession in the Salesian Congregation Brother Jacob wrote : "I am well aware of my weakness, but with the help of God, Mary Help of Christians and St. John Bosco I hope to persevere till the end." For Brother this prayer had its fulfilment on 31st August, surrounded by the love and prayers of his confreres, consoled by the sacraments of the sick, and completely resigned to the Holy Will of God, he persevered till the end of his life.

I am sure Brother Jacob Ettil enjoys the bliss of heaven and intercedes for us at the throne of God. Kindly remember him in your prayers at the Altar.

Pray also for the needs of the Bishop's House, Krishnagar and for the manifold apostolic activities of the Diocese to bring people closer to Jesus, Our Lord.

Yours ever in Christ Jesus,  
**Fr. Varkey Padamatumel, s.d.b.**  
RECTOR.