

REV. FR.

**MICHAEL BALAWAN**

S. D. B.

**Born :**

14.01.1922

**Professed :**

17.10.1945

**Ordained :**

23.05.1954

**Died :**

11.10.1989

**R.I.P.**



## **My dear Confreres,**

Fr. Balawan offered his soul into the hands of his Lord and Creator in the early hours of Wednesday, the 11th of October 1989, at Nazareth Hospital, Shillong. He was admitted to the Hospital on the 30th of September for continuous vomiting and high fever. His arm which was broken in an accident near Madanriting Shillong about a year ago was troubling him constantly. Although he had gone to his native land for better treatment, a fall in his apartment worsened the condition of his aching hands. His diabetes rendered all treatment ineffective. It were as though the evening of his life was spent with His Lord in the garden of "Gethsemene."

His mortal remains were laid to rest in the Cathedral Cemetery at Shillong on 12th October, Thursday. The funeral Mass was conducted at the "Divine Saviour Parish" Church at Nongthymmai. His grace the Archbishop of Shillong-Guwahati, presided over the Requiem Mass and His Lordship Mathai Kochuparampil and Rev. Fr. Resto the Vicar General preached the Homily in English and Khasi respectively. Thousands of his spiritual sons and daughters participated in the Holy Mass celebrated by 60 priests.

## **EARLY YEARS**

Michael Balavoiné (Balawan) was born on 14th January 1922 at Chartres in France. His parents were merchants. He was the second child in a family of three sons. His primary and secondary education was completed at the "Institution Notre Dame" in Chartres. At the age of 12 Michael lost his father. In 1938 he got Bachelor's degree in mathematics. Every Sunday and Thursday he used to look after the children in the young men's "JOAN of ARC Club." It was at this time the thought of dedicating his life in Priesthood was born in him. He completed his higher studies in mathematics at the HOCHÉ School in the year 1939.

During the second World War he was helping his mother in her retail trade and in March 1943 he was requisitioned in the S. T. O. (Work Compulsory Service) by the Germans. At the end of 1943 he got out of S. T. O. and took refuge with the Salesians in Port Abinson near Chalons sur Marne where he became an applicant for Salesian Aspirantate. There the Germans arrested him and sent him to prison. He escaped the deportation in Germany because he was suffering tuberculosis. He underwent



treatment in the Hospital at Chalons sur Marne until the liberation of France in 1944. Soon after this he entered the Salesian Novitiate in La Guerche (Brittany). In 1945 he made his first Religious Profession.

### **LIFE AS A SALESIAN**

Young Br. Michael's spirit longed to be a missionary. He made a request to his Superiors and his desire was fulfilled when he was sent to India in 1949. Soon after his arrival, discerning his mathematical mind, his superiors advised him to take Degrees in Science and Mathematics in order to be a Teacher. After having his M.Sc. degree from the Gauhati University, he went to do his Course of Theology at Shillong. On 24th May 1954 (the feast of Mary Help of Christians) Deacon Michael was ordained a priest, at the Cathedral Church, Shillong, by His Lordship Bishop Ferrando SDB.. The Rector of the St. Anthony's College Rev. Fr. Dal Zavo preached the Homily to the faithful and congratulated the new Levite. It was a glorious and auspicious day, wrote Fr. Balawan in his diary. His Ordination motto was, "Euntes Ergo Decete" (Going therefore... teach all nations) Mt. 28. 19. Fr. Balawan in his bed of sufferings might have recalled to his mind the day of his ordination.

He began his priestly ministry at Don Bosco Shillong. He was also a lecturer in St. Anthony's College for a short time.



*His Zeal  
led him  
to far flung  
villages to  
preach and  
Catechise.*

### **LIFE AS A MISSIONARY**

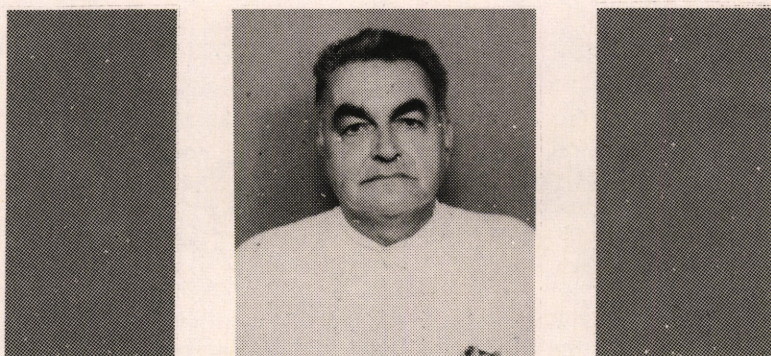
Although he obtained a Master's Degree in Mathematics, his heart was pining for the remote missions. He could achieve what others could not. Among the Karbis and Lalungs he preached the Gospel and established Christian communities.



His missionary zeal took him to the remotest villages. Like St. Paul of Tarsus, Fr. Michael's aim was to go "Where the Gospel has not been preached by anyone". In this he was a veteran. He did pioneering work at Nongpoh, Sojong, Umswai, Umsohlait, Umsning, Namdong and many other places. "He truly toiled and moiled for the salvation of many souls. "He traversed the difficult and tough paths in order to bring the Good Tidings to the poor". said Bp. Mathai in his homily during the Mass. His zeal and enthusiasm for souls was unbeatable. In fact, his ordination promises bore witness to his works in the mission. He also worked for the social uplift of the people, by constructing roads, bridges and culverts.

### LINGUIST

A born linguist, he was sharp in his thinking and a visionary in his planning. Fore-seeing the needs of the people, he established Schools wherever he went. He mastered the languages of the people. Fr. Michael wrote the first Karbi Dictionary. The Lalungs and Karbis are grateful to him for his literary contributoins. He composed poems, Hymns, Dramas in the Karbi and Lalung languages. He wrote Catechism books, Science, Geography, History and Arithmetic books in their languages. Besides the translation of the Bible into these languages, he wrote "Baibe



History" (A Bible History) in the Tive Language. As a true shepherd of his flock, he fed their minds, souls, and bodies and gave fullness of life to them (Jn. 10.10). In fact his Ordination prayer to the Lord was "that never any boy entrusted to my care die accidentally". Fr. Michael Balawan as a good shepherd protected all the souls entrusted to his care.



## A PRIEST FOR OTHERS

His life was marked by two outstanding virtues : **Childlike Simplicity** a virtue extolled by our Saviour as a pre-condition to the Heavenly entry (Mt. 18 3). He was available to all and all had access to his pastoral care and concern. He was "A priest of God to the people".

*At Namdong  
with his  
M. E.  
Schools  
kids.*



Like Don Bosco, he was a "priest everywhere", a genuinely Catholic Priest. In his large heart and broad mind, he could accommodate anyone – Irrespective of race, nationality, colour, creed or status.



**His devotion to the Mother of God.** In all his talks and homilies, he exhorted his flock to have deep filial devotion to the Mother of Jesus. As a true Salesian he inculcated and spread the devotion to the Blessed Virgin. In other words, he was a "Marian Priest". It was as a result of his initiative that for the first time in the history of the Smit-Church", on the 14th of May 1989 a Solemn Marian Procession was held. "Filial devotion to the Mother of God brought me success" in my missionary works". said Fr. Michael.



## HIS EVENING OF LIFE

Two years ago, on the 17th of May (1987), his 97 years aged mother departed from this world. He could read the signs of Hour of his soul". He had the premonition that he would not live long. When he reached Smit, he used to remark. "This is the Ka iing Khatduh" (house of the youngest sisetr) where he had to wind up his life-journey. In Smit he was engaged in the work of developing a new centre. He established the hostels for boys and girls. The village children were happy to meet him at their door-steps and they used to say : Phadar Balawan, la wan". He entertained the children with music, Film-shows and games.



***Fr. BALAWAN in Smit – his last assignment – completed.***

Fr. Michael was never weary of doing Good and fulfilling the demands of his missionary call. He feared nothing when it was a matter of saving souls and mission work. He had fought the good fight: he had kept the faith. The victory is his. Fr. Balawan is an immortal name among the Karbis, Mikirs and the Lalungs. This veteran Salesian missionary has 'poured out his life' to the last for his faithful people. "When it happens that a Salesian dies of working for souls, the Congregation has won a great triumph" (Art. 54). May the memory of this heroic Salesian, inspire us to follow Christ more closely and intimately. "By entering fully into Christ's pascal mystery, he entered into the joy of his his Lord" (Mt. 25.21) Art. 54

May God rest his soul in peace

**Fr. Herman SDB.**

Parish Priest-Nongthymmai.