

"I Have learnt to always be grateful
and to realise from experience
that the more you give
of self and things
the more you receive
in all areas of life
The poor have taught me much
about my faith and about religious life
the value of caring and sharing which
always bring ample rewards"-

BURNS



Darjeeling, 1 Mar, 2019(Nagendra Gorkha):

TRANSLATION:

A LIFE DEVOTED TO HUMANITY: FR. E.P BURNS. WORKS AND HAYDEN HALL

Born on 26 April 1925 in Montreal, Canada, Father E.P. Works was raised in the Burns family as the beloved son of Nora and Claude Burns. Although he lost his father before reaching the age of eighteen, the hardships faced by the family never weakened his spirit. Together with his mother, brothers, and sister, the family carried forward with resilience and determination.

Father Works began his education at McAdam Primary School and later attended Loyola Jesuit School for his secondary studies. He often recalled that his educational environment from primary school to college had been enriching and inspiring. During his father's time, educational opportunities in Canada were limited, and economic responsibilities forced many, including his father, to work long hours daily. Yet, despite these struggles, Father Works grew up with a deep love for sports, learning, reflection, and guiding others.

From the age of nineteen, he dedicated himself to social service while also pursuing philosophical studies. Recognizing his commitment and potential, the Jesuit Committee in Canada sent him to India in 1951. Among all places, Darjeeling captured his heart. He soon understood the immense poverty and suffering faced by people in the hills and committed himself wholeheartedly to their upliftment.

After arriving in Darjeeling, Father Works pursued theological studies and later served as a teacher at institutions such as St. Joseph's School Darjeeling, St. Alphonsus School Kurseong, and St. Robert's School Darjeeling. These institutions, established by Belgian Jesuits, entrusted him with great responsibilities. Through his interactions, he came to admire the people of Darjeeling for their warmth, friendliness, and spirit of service.

At the age of thirty-three, Father Works was ordained as a priest. Witnessing the harsh realities of poverty deeply moved him. He constantly reflected and prayed, believing that something meaningful must be done for the poor and marginalized. His office became a refuge for the needy, and no one ever left empty-handed.

Driven by this vision, Father Works established Hayden Hall during the 1970s, beginning modestly in a rented building. Guided by the motto "Love Through Service," Hayden Hall became a center of social commitment and humanitarian action. Students, professors, and volunteers from schools and colleges enthusiastically joined him in serving society. Distinguished individuals such as Professor T.B. Chettri, Professor C.B. Rai, and Noreen Dunn were among those who supported the mission.

Father Works believed that poverty was more severe in rural settlements than in towns. To better understand the realities of the people, he initiated socio-economic surveys across Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong, Mirik, and surrounding regions. His observations revealed that nearly seventy to ninety percent of villagers lived in poverty. This strengthened his conviction that true service must reach remote villages and neglected communities.

Together with his colleagues, Father Works travelled tirelessly from one settlement to another—often on foot through rugged hills, muddy paths, and narrow village trails. Carrying only a walking stick, wearing a simple hat, T-shirt, and trousers, he journeyed to places such as Pringtam, Tanyang, Nimbong, Mariabasti, Suruk, Kagey, and Mirik. These visits focused not only on material support but also on mental, spiritual, social, and personal development.

Under his leadership, Hayden Hall launched numerous initiatives in health education, personality development, social awareness, citizenship education, and community empowerment. The organization helped build roads, bridges, schools, and homes for the poor. Medical assistance was arranged for the sick, clothing was distributed to the needy, and blankets and bedding were provided during winter months. Throughout the year, Hayden Hall remained committed to uplifting disadvantaged communities.

Father Works often shared spiritual reflections rooted in compassion and humanity. His message emphasized feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, caring for the sick, and serving the suffering as expressions of divine love.

Despite being the Director of Hayden Hall, Father Works remained deeply approachable and humble. He embraced the local language and culture wholeheartedly, speaking Nepali with remarkable fluency and purity. His generosity reflected his profound belief that love for humanity was inseparable from love for God.

During one of his journeys through the villages, Father Works expressed how deeply attached he had become to Darjeeling. He once remarked that Darjeeling had become dearer to him than even his homeland, Canada. He admired the literature, culture, and people of the hills and believed that education should not serve only personal advancement but should also contribute to the upliftment of society.

Father Works strongly advocated for holistic human development. According to him, food, shelter, healthcare, water, and education formed the foundation of development, while spiritual growth gave true meaning and direction to human life. He believed that educated individuals had a responsibility to serve the uneducated and marginalized sections of society.

A firm believer in collective responsibility, Father Works emphasized unity, love, and shared participation in social transformation. He often said that real change could not be achieved by governments alone; rather, every individual must contribute according to their abilities—whether through knowledge, resources, service, or compassion.

Hayden Hall also became a center for adult literacy and social awareness programmes. Volunteers and educators trained villagers in reading, writing, household accounting, citizenship awareness, health education, and family welfare. Workshops and training programmes were organized regularly to create grassroots social workers capable of leading change within their own communities.

Father Works observed that many developed societies had become materially advanced but spiritually distant, often lacking deep human connection and compassion. In contrast, he found warmth, faith, and humanity among the people of Darjeeling. Seeking spiritual depth, love, and human solidarity, he devoted his life to the hills and its people.

Although constantly occupied with responsibilities, meetings, and visitors seeking help, Father Works always found time for meaningful conversations and encouragement. His office was filled with papers, plans, letters, and schedules, reflecting a life completely dedicated to service.

Even as his mother in Canada longed for his return, Father Works remained committed to Darjeeling and its people. He confessed that thoughts of the poor and suffering continually drew him back to India, leaving him with little desire to settle permanently in Canada again.

Throughout his life, Father Works met and interacted with numerous distinguished personalities, including Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Jyoti Basu, Mother Teresa, and many other leaders, governors, and dignitaries. Yet his deepest connection always remained with ordinary villagers and struggling families.

Father Works left behind not merely an institution but a lasting vision of compassion, dignity, and social responsibility. His life became a bridge between humanity and service, spirituality and action, education and empowerment.

When he departed from this world, the people of Darjeeling bid him farewell with tears and heartfelt gratitude. Intellectuals, villagers, workers, mothers, and children gathered in the rain to honour the man who had walked alongside them in their struggles and hopes. To them, Father Works was not simply a priest or social worker—he was a fatherly figure, a guide, and a symbol of unconditional love through service.

His legacy continues to live on through the countless lives transformed by his compassion and through the enduring mission of Hayden Hall.
