

HOLY CROSS FAMILY COLLABORATION IN BANGLADESH / 1994 - 7

by

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SUJJECT: Holy Cross Family collaboration in Bangladesh.

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This Topic presented at 09:15 a.m. Sunday June 5th. by Lucie Germain, csc.

"An impossible mission of which no one wants"
page 107 "As a mighty tree" Graziella Lalande.

I would like to insist on the fact that this impossible mission in a special way is a blessed mission. It is in Bengal (Bangladesh) where, to a certain extent, one of the dreams of Father Moreau is realised in a continuous way and to a certain extent in an exceptional way. This dream: Collaboration of the Family of Holy Cross.

In the mind of father Moreau Holy Cross collaboration is nothing less than an Icon of the Communion that exists within the Holy Trinity, nothing less. So I have no pretention to affirm that in Bangladesh this depth of communion is reached. But I wish to affirm that something of this communion by collaboration is being lived and that it is beautiful and good and I dare hope fruitful.

The collaboration is being lived since the very beginning. The first missionaries left: fathers, brothers sisters. Often seen as a family taking care of families. The parish priest head of the parish and the brothers and sisters taking care of orphans, in dispensaries taking care of the sick; brothers teachers and running schools and seeing to constructions and maintenance. Inter-dependancy, complementarity was seen as essential. Despite our human limitations collaboration has been going on, has been lived in Bd. and I think this is one specific characteristic of Holy Cross family in Bangladesh.

Notice that I am realistic and maybe the cause of this collaboration at the end has very little to do with the individuals that are there and live and work there. But it is an undeniable fact: collaboration is lived and it finally creates a certain communion undeniable also. And beyond our sensitive differences, a bond is created stronger than our good will.

The zeal and fire animates the members of the family of Holy Cross living there as elsewhere. But I suspect that other conditions, other factors are the cause of this special experience of collaboration. At the same time it is a special grace.

This collaboration is lived at times between fathers, brothers, sisters, lay people; at times between csc, CSC, Msc; at times between Candiens, Americans, Bengalis, French, Italiens, etc. Because the diocesan frontiers are falling and progressively we find one

another into each others' geographical territory. Ex.: -- Jessore National Centre is a sign of collaboration even broader than Holy Cross.

- The Oriental Institute is another sign of collaboration broader than Holy Cross collaboration. It served generations of missionaries. Now this service is rendered in Dhaka for study of Bengali Language.

From the early days Father Moreau at Holy Cross college wanted men and women to work together side by side at the education of youth. For sure with the perspective of women's place and role conceived in those days, in Bengal (Bangladesh) some thing of this vision still lingers on. The muslim context does not foster the opposite. But still some conditions do foster collaboration between equals. I list a few. It is not an exhaustive list.

1. One same mission gathers us.
2. We are faced with an evidence: It is only together that we may succeed. Probably we are challenged by the enormous task awaiting us.
3. Bangladesh is mostly a farm land and family values are still prevailing.
4. Christians are a minority. It fosters family spirit. But on the other hand we have the "ghetto" mentality at our doorstep.
5. The number of members in the Holy Cross family living in Bangladesh is such that it is still humanly possible to get to know one another a little bit. Even if we do not know each one by name. We hear about one another.
6. Within the Church, a family atmosphere still prevails. The bishop can present himself at our door as a friend or a relative would. Relationships with the hierarchy is less formal, less institutionalised. Maybe the Bengali's hospitality finally rubs off on us a little bit. I firmly believe that anyone who lives a while in Bangladesh is molded by the people's simplicity.
7. Frequency. Collaboration is often not a matter of just a once a year meeting. Often it is a daily basis, in some circumstances it is weekly, that collaborators meet. There are various ways. But all concrete and challenging.

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X The condition that I am discovering to be the condition "par excellence" of all collaboration is the first Beatitude: poverty. We are challenged by poverty. The poor evangelise us. Bangladesh is not only poverty. For those of Holy Cross who are in Bangladesh, as foreigners, we need to be born again to a new culture. We are constantly in a learning process: learning the language, the customs, the meaning etc. . For the Bangladeshis who receive us they also have to adapt to this father, that sister, with our changes and all. But as foreigners we are placed in ideal conditions to be born again.

In an inculturation process we have to revise our way of thinking, our values, if what we have to offer is suitable to the people. If it is meaningful, what is the best way in which it should be presented?

After this list of conditions, I arrive with another list of concrete examples of collaboration:

Just the fact of traveling in the country. If Canadians go to Dhaka or if Americans go to Chittagong. Right then and there we encounter one another: CSC sisters going to Dhaka we live at "our" sisters place The SMRA, sisters Mary Queen of the Apostles. They were founded by one CSC sister. But we consider them as our sisters. We live with them, we rejoice with them, pray with them. We get to know one another and we become bonded. The LHC Little Handmaids of the Church. They are also our sisters. They were founded by one Canadian sister: Lucille Latour, Mother Alfonse. With time passing by and in due time in missions like Narikelbari and Padrishibpur Bengalis took over and when we go into these villages we stay with them. It is the same thing for the brothers and fathers. They are referred as "our" fathers and brothers.

When we go to one another's geographical territories, (This situation is due to the distribution by territories of missions to the different congregations. To the fathers and brothers it becomes to one province or the other). But little by little for the Bangladeshi fathers and brothers only one holy cross family becomes compulsory. They progressively become autonomous provinces a province of fathers and a province of brothers. For the sisters since they are different congregations it is more complex, but some collaboration exists just the same. The facts are such that we are in situations that make us interdependent and this inter-dependency is favorable to collaboration.

Collaboration is not communion. But collaboration fosters this communion. Through collaboration we have occasions to meet, to know one another better, to appreciate one another, to render each other services. But the more aware we become, that we are gathered for one same cause: The kingdom of love the more communion is possible.

The CSC have a house in Shillong they let the CSC sisters use this house for holidays.

Whether it is Jute works cooperatives, coconut works or peanut butter etc...collaboration for the development of families and of women goes on. We can witness joint efforts. This from different corners of the country Barisal, Dhaka, Jolchatra.

Leprosy patients who go to Jolchatra leprosarium with our Marianite sisters come back to their village. They are allowed only a certain amount of medication. So that they do not have to travel too far too often their medication is kept and given in sub centers under the directives given by the leprosarium.

The LHC sisters, the fathers and brothers had their noviciat

in Barisal. It is natural for a novice master or mistress to receive the collaboration of others for a course, for a day for a weeks vacation. What ever be the case, there also, collaboration is found. And it is so natural that we may overlook it. One year the noviciate place is for the sisters another year it is for the fathers and brothers.

If we take a look at the Major Seminary there also a lot of collaboration goes on. SMRA sisters working there, sister Anna Marie Labarre went for the set up of the Library, Marie Jeanne continues, Pauline for a time gave St. Ignatius exercises in daily life to seminarians.

If we take a look at liturgy and singing: we then have names like Fr. Francis Sima, Fr. Banes and many others. They gave courses and training to frs., brs. sisters lay persons. It is in some ways as if the talents of one are placed at the service of all.

If we look at charismatic renewal we have people like Marguerite Shield and Myriam Richard they work together since the very beginning in collaboration.

Last summer in Le Mans one CSC sister asked me if I knew Marguerite Shield. I felt so funny, it was as if she had asked me: do you know your sister. I then realised that within me Marguerite was my sister. Period, without any distinction of congregation. I am not saying that there are no differences anywhere.

But we live in an Oecumenical surrounding so dense that we are molded by it more or less consciously. In some villages it is not seldom to see one joint-family with: one brother Catholic, another Baptist yet another Anglican. Other areas as exclusively Catholic Christians like Padrishipur of Toumillia. But we have mix marriages Muslim-Christian, Hindou-Christian, Tribal-Bengali. These are more and more frequent. In this context our christian brothers and sisters at times ask us why the different Churches? You can imagine that our Bangladeshi brothers and sisters also ask us why different provinces? why different congregations in the family of Holy Cross? Historical consequences are often complex and at times difficult to explain.

Another sector where there is collaboration is family planning. Not the fathers, brothers and sisters.....But those working in family planning or family ministry.

Since I left there are other areas of collaboration, as an example: assistance to the drug addicts etc.....

One privileged area of collaboration was and still is: parish work for those who work at parish level. I think there, collaboration is at it's maximum. It is together that the planning and the working is undertaken: liturgy, school comitee, social activities, dyspensary policies, Basic Christian Communities (BCC) where they exist. Not all working at parish level are together all the time, nor all present in all the comities. But one or the other is on a comity, information is circulated to all those involved and concerned. All are concerned. To a certain extent parish life is a kind of "Joint family System" It is lived more in the villiges. Even in Bangladeshi families the joint family system is crumbling in many instances. But maybe Holy has this gift to offer: this

sense of communion beyond and within different systems. So that even if the system changes that maybe communion may foster collaboration and vice versa.

Interiority is also a characteristic of Bengladeshi people. And it molds us by osmoses. The minute we pay a little attention to it this also fosters communion.

For sure there are tensions, for sure at times it degenerates into conflicts, for sure there are unjust structures and simply structures, for sure there are institutions. It is true also that when a group of the family has an institution to manage if the group personnel has sufficient personnel to cope with it's own needs collaboration, with the other members of Holy Cross family, is less, on a daily basis maybe. And the less we know one another the more risky it is that we may less collaborate, maybe. Maybe in big cities collaboration takes on the form of comitties. But none the less the institutions often serve the needs of all. Ex. The sisters may not teach at the brothers' school but if a sister needs school premises at St. Placid's for a catechetical meeting the facilities will be given. Or at St. Scolastica's convent at Our Lady's of the Mission Sisters. In Dhaka at Holy Cross college and at Notre Dame for sure each institution is managed autonomously but for sure some collaboration is lived. I am less experienced. But I can almost affirm that mutual services do exist.

What also favors communion is that we have fewer escapisms. Until 1985 very few TV existed in Bd. Where there are no electricity TV no question, shopping is less also.....all our means of escapism....even the multiplicity of courses, video etc..etc. So relationship is fostered by the absence of these intruders.

CONCLUSION: for these multiple reasons or conditions, we are confronted with situations of collaboration and in fact collaboration is lived. This dream of Fr. Moreau does live on. It is incarnated and in a special way in Bangladesh. Placed in situations of collaboration often communion is a fruit of collaboration. I wish us all situations of collaboration so that the dream of Fr. Moreau may live on, may spread and may a deeper communion come to life more. But my belief is that situations of collaboration will seldom be given to us just like that. And that we must often create the favorable conditions for a wider collaborative endeavor.

These days of Historical conference are another type of collaborative effort, a means to get to know one another and our heritage and history better. It is a different type, a valuable type of incarnation of Basile's dream for his family. Even if it is not on a daily basis. So I dare wish us all to continue to live side by side in unity, in autonomy and in collaboration the Holy Cross Adventure of COMMUNION always deeper. May we continue to live these days dwelling into the Communal love of our God.