

HOLY CROSS GOES TO BENGAL, 1853-1859

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By James T. Connelly, C.S.C.

It has long been known that Father Moreau's acceptance of East Bengal as a mission territory for which the young Congregation of Holy Cross would take responsibility was part of an implicit understanding with the Holy See that this would lead to the Congregation's receiving papal approval. Some have even gone so far as to say that Holy Cross was approved only because of its willingness to take on East Bengal, its previous labors in Canada and the United States notwithstanding. In any case, the acceptance of the Bengal mission in 1852 was followed three years later by a Brief of Praise and two years after that, in 1857, by full approval.

Behind this recitation of facts, however, lies a story of suffering, death, bad planning or no planning at all, heavy strain on the modest resources of the Congregation, and personal bitterness, as well as real heroism on the part of many of the first Holy Cross missionaries to what is now Bangladesh.

The Bargain

When Father Basil Moreau had been in Rome at the end of 1850 and the beginning of 1851 to establish the Brothers at Santa Prisca and Vigna Pia, he had been advised to apply for papal approbation for his new Congregation as a missionary institute. Moreau had taken this advice and before he returned to France in March 1851, he had been informed that Pope Pius IX was favorably disposed to his petition.¹ Six months later, in November 1851, Cardinal Franzoni,

¹See F. Linneborn, Circular Letter (ca. 1915) as cited in Raymond Clancy, *The Congregation of Holy Cross in East Bengal, 1853-1953*, 2 volumes (Washington: Holy Cross Foreign Mission

the Prefect of the Propaganda, had written to inquire whether Holy Cross would send missionaries to work among non-Christians if this request were made. Moreau had replied immediately that everyone in Holy Cross desired to do something for the pagans. The following day, Moreau wrote to Fr. Victor Drouelle, the Holy Cross superior in Rome and Moreau's agent at the Vatican, that if Franzoni made a specific request, Drouelle should ask that an entire mission vicariate be entrusted to Holy Cross.²

The two projects, papal approval for Holy Cross and the Congregation's support of the church in East Bengal, thus became entwined. By the end of April 1852, Drouelle was writing to Moreau that Barnabo, the secretary of the Propaganda Fide, had told him that the pope would make approval of the Congregation contingent upon the recommendation of the Propaganda. Drouelle also informed Moreau that Bishop Thomas Oliffe, the Vicar Apostolic of East Bengal, had spoken with him and Barnabo about confiding his vicariate in Bengal to Holy Cross and that the bishop now wanted to speak with Moreau himself about it. Drouelle noted that Bishop Luquet, the retired Indian missionary living in Rome who had been instrumental in bringing the Brothers of St. Joseph to Santa Prisca, thought that about five priests and some Brothers could adequately care for the Christians in East Bengal. Moreover, Drouelle observed that surely Oliffe would soon succeed the Vicar Apostolic of West Bengal and move to Calcutta. Oliffe could then resign his charge to Holy Cross. He conveyed Barnabo's observation that the Congregation could not take over the vicariate apostolic until it had received papal approval but that Oliffe could

Seminary, 1953), I, pp. 25-25c.

²Franzoni to Moreau, November 15, 1851. Moreau to Franzoni, December 8, 1851. Moreau to Drouelle, December 9, 1851. All correspondence cited is to be found in the General Archives of the Congregation of Holy Cross in Rome (*hereafter* G.A.) unless otherwise indicated.

propose a Holy Cross priest as his successor.³

Negotiations were now under way. Moreau wrote to Barnabo that he would discuss a mission for Holy Cross only with the officials at the Propaganda directly.⁴ A few days later he received a letter from Oliffe saying that he was coming to France with Propaganda's approval to talk to Moreau about Holy Cross taking over his vicariate. He assured Moreau that he would propose a Holy Cross priest as his successor in East Bengal. Moreau, wiser now after his experience with Bishops Hailandiere and Bourget, noted on the reverse of this letter that no one would be sent until the Society for the Propagation of the Faith had fixed an allocation for their establishment and their maintenance.⁵

Bishop Oliffe visited Sainte-Croix in May 1852. After celebrating mass for the students, he addressed the members of the Congregation in the chapter room. At the end of his conference, even though he had made no appeal for volunteers, several Brothers offered to serve in East Bengal. When Oliffe left Sainte-Croix for his native Ireland, Fr. Charles Moreau, the founder's nephew, accompanied him in hopes of being able to recruit English-speaking candidates for the Congregation who might eventually be assigned to Bengal.⁶

Moreau wrote immediately to Cardinal Franzoni at Propaganda setting out his conditions for sending missionaries to Bengal: Oliffe's successor was to be a Holy Cross priest and the cardinal would give Moreau a letter of recommendation which he might use in soliciting funds

³Drouelle to Moreau, April 27, 1852.

⁴Moreau to Barnabo, May 17, 1852.

⁵Oliffe to Moreau, May 22, 1852.

⁶Etienne and Tony Catta, *Basil Anthony Mary Moreau*, 2 volumes (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1955), I, pp. 888-889.

from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.⁷ In a carefully worded reply, Franzoni wrote to Moreau that the Propaganda could "hardly reject" his conditions while, in fact, he did not exactly accept either of them. Moreau was assured that he would be "consulted" about Oliffe's successor when that matter arose. Moreau might refer the Society for the Propagation of the Faith to Propaganda Fide if there was need for a recommendation regarding funds. Sending missionaries to Bengal, the cardinal observed, would "tend greatly to the obtaining for your society the approbation of the Holy See" but Moreau's Congregation would "have to first show an aptitude for this work."⁸ On that basis, Holy Cross committed itself to the church in East Bengal and the Propaganda approved.

Getting to Bengal

Once he had committed the Congregation to East Bengal, Moreau had to resolve two practical concerns: who would go and how would they be supported. In the case of the three previous groups which had been sent overseas, to Algeria, to the United States and to Canada, both traveling expenses and their maintenance once on site had had to be paid largely out of the Congregation's general revenues. Moreau was determined that this should not happen again. Indeed, he could not afford to let it happen again. Moreau had made it one of his conditions in his negotiations with Bishop Oliffe and Cardinal Franzoni that the expense of getting the missionaries to Bengal would not have to be borne by the Congregation. However, as the summer of 1852 passed, Moreau received no subsidy from the Society for the Propagation of the

⁷Moreau to Franzoni, May 25, 1852. See Oliffe to Franzoni, May 25, 1852. Copies in G.A.

⁸Franzoni to Moreau, June 12, 1852.

Faith and he could get no definite response from Bishop Oliffe to his requests for money to purchase passage for his missionaries.

In June, Moreau had written to the Society requesting funds to pay for the transportation and establishment of fifteen persons in Bengal. At the same time he repeated his request for seven thousand francs to reimburse the Congregation for the traveling expenses of the missionaries sent to Montreal in 1847.⁹ At the end of July, with no subsidy in sight, Moreau wrote to Barnabo that no one would leave Sainte-Croix until the money had been allocated "since such a serious enterprise should not be undertaken without the funds necessary to see it through."¹⁰ In August, Bishop Oliffe wrote to Moreau that if his people could be ready to leave by the end of the month, passage for fifteen on a boat to Calcutta could be had for 12,500 francs. Later in the year, ships left France less frequently and the passage cost more. However, the bishop sent no money.¹¹

At the end of August, Oliffe wrote to Moreau that he had received an allocation from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith that was sufficient to cover the journey and the establishment of the Holy Cross missionaries in India. Several days later the bishop wrote to Moreau again saying that he, himself, was leaving for Bengal and saw no reason for any further delay in sending the people from Sainte-Croix since the money had been granted.¹² Still, the bishop sent no money. Moreau replied that he had heard nothing from the Society and he

⁹Moreau to Societe pour la propagation de la foi, June 24, 1852. Copy in G.A.

¹⁰Moreau to Barnabo, July 29, 1852. Copy in G.A.

¹¹Oliffe to Moreau, August 11, 1852.

¹²Oliffe to Moreau, August 29, 1852, and September 3, 1852.

reminded the bishop that no one would depart from Sainte-Croix until the funds were available.¹³ A few days later, Moreau received a letter from the Society informing him that allocations were normally made only to bishops, not to religious congregations, and that the prelates, if they so chose, were to pay for the travel of any missionaries which they recruited.¹⁴

By mid-September, however, Moreau was writing to Cardinal Franzoni that only nine Holy Cross missionaries would be leaving for Bengal because Oliffe had left only ten thousand francs for their passage.¹⁵ A few days later, the bishop wrote to Moreau to say that the allocation which he had received was not enough to pay for the maintenance of the Holy Cross missionaries in Bengal but that his brother in Paris, who was also his agent, would make ten thousand francs available to Moreau for their travel.¹⁶

By then it was late September, ships from France to India were few and the price of passage was higher. An alternative was to sail from London. Passage on English ships cost less but there was the added expense of getting the missionaries to England.¹⁷ By mid-October, Charles Oliffe, the bishop's brother, wrote to advise Moreau that there was enough money to book passage for eight on the Dunrobin Castle, an English vessel that would sail at the end of October or the beginning of November.¹⁸ This course was finally agreed upon and on

¹³Moreau to Oliffe, September 5, 1852.

¹⁴Fizeaux to Moreau, September 9, 1852.

¹⁵Moreau to Franzoni, September 18, 1852. Copy in G.A.

¹⁶Oliffe to Moreau, September 20, 1852.

¹⁷Charles Oliffe to Moreau, September 24, 1852. Moreau to Charles Oliffe, September 28, 1852.

¹⁸Charles Oliffe to Moreau, October 8, 9, and 14, 1852.

November 1st, nine missionaries left Sainte-Croix for London. As it turned out, the ship's captain fell ill and the missionaries had to wait in London for three weeks at added expense until the Dunrobin Castle was ready to sail.¹⁹ The only favorable omen in all of this was the unexpected receipt of a gift of ten thousand francs from the Propaganda to pay the expenses of the missionaries going to Bengal.²⁰ In the end, however, Moreau still had to pay some of the travel costs and the maintenance of the missionaries in Bengal out of the Congregation's general revenues. Moreover, the delay in getting the money resulted in the missionaries having to pay more for poorer accommodations on a sailing ship that took six months to reach India.

During the months of negotiation between Moreau, Oliffe and the Propaganda, the number of missionaries to be sent from Sainte-Croix fluctuated. While Bishop Luquet had estimated that five priests and some Brothers would be sufficient to staff the vicariate, Bishop Oliffe, on his first visit to Sainte-Croix in May 1852, had requested eighteen people: six priests, six Brothers and six Sisters.²¹ By late June, Moreau was planning to send eighteen if the funds were available but a few days later he had reduced the number to fifteen.²² This was the number under consideration through July and August but by mid-September Moreau was writing to Cardinal Franzoni that he would send sixteen.²³ In early November, when the group left Sainte-Croix,

¹⁹Raymond Clancy, "The Congregation of Holy Cross in East Bengal," *Analecta*, III, 1 (September 1948), pp. 24-25.

²⁰Franzoni to Moreau, November 11, 1852.

²¹Drouelle to Moreau, April 27, 1852. Oliffe to Moreau, May 22, 1852.

²²Moreau to Alexis Granger, C.S.C., June 22, 1852. Moreau to Societe pour la propagation de la foi, June 24, 1852. Copies in G.A.

²³Moreau to Franzoni, September 17 and 18, 1852. Copies in G.A.

the cost of the passage and the failure to receive funds from Oliffe earlier had made it possible to send only nine.²⁴

More important was who would go to Bengal. At least some of the people should speak English. When efforts to recruit in Ireland had little immediate success, the only way to assemble some English-speaking missionaries was to transfer them from the Holy Cross foundations in the United States.²⁵ Fr. Edward Sorin was instructed to send Father Louis Baroux, plus a Brother and a Sister who spoke English. Accordingly, Baroux, Brother Benedict and Sister Mary of St. Victor left for France on 8 September and arrived at Sainte-Croix on 27 October, just in time to leave for London five days later.²⁶

More important yet, was who to place in charge of this expedition. In August 1852, the general chapter of the Congregation meeting at Sainte-Croix had discussed Michel Voisin and Edward Sorin as possible superiors of the first group of missionaries to Bengal. The decision had been left to Moreau and he chose Sorin.²⁷ In mid-September, Moreau wrote to Sorin and informed him of his new assignment. Sorin, however, declined to go. When Moreau insisted, Sorin led the Holy Cross community in the United States in secession from the Congregation.²⁸ By the end of the following year Sorin had submitted but Moreau had had to get his people under

²⁴Moreau to Franzoni, November 22, 1852. Copy in G.A.

²⁵See Catta, I, pp. 888-889. Moreau to Granger, June 22, 1852. Copy in G.A.

²⁶Edward Sorin, C.S.C., to Moreau, September 8, 1852. Moreau to Drouelle, October 27, 1852.

²⁷Procès verbaux du chapitre general, August 21, 1852, G.A. Moreau to Sorin, September 13, 1852.

²⁸Sorin to Moreau, October 6, 1852. See also Catta, I, pp. 952-983; II, pp. 1-25.

way before the end of 1852. Baroux was named as the provisional superior and the group of nine left for London and their passage to India.

The ship, the Dunrobin Castle, left London on 27 November. By 20 December, after three stormy weeks in the English Channel, it had gotten no farther than Plymouth on the southeast coast of England. There the ship put into port for repairs and Lefevre, a seminarian in minor orders, was taken to a hospital, close to death from typhoid fever. He recovered but was unable to continue the journey, so Baroux escorted him and Brother Theogene, who had been discouraged by their difficulties thus far, back to Sainte-Croix.²⁹ Baroux was too exhausted to continue on the Dunrobin Castle and he stayed in France until September, 1853, when he joined the second group of missionaries going out to Bengal. Father Louis Vérité was left in charge of the group aboard the Dunrobin Castle.³⁰

To replace those who had returned to France, two novices, Brother Mathurin, 26, and Benoit Mercier, 20, a seminarian, were professed and sent off immediately to Plymouth where they joined the others on the Dunrobin Castle. Brother Theogene started back with them but thought better of it and returned to Sainte-Croix.³¹ The first group of Holy Cross missionaries to go out to Bengal thus consisted of eight people: one priest, one seminarian, three Brothers and three Sisters. In light of the "disasters" experienced by his missionaries en route to Bengal, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith voted Moreau a special subsidy of five thousand francs

²⁹Vérité to Moreau, December 6, 19 and 20, 1852. Baroux to Moreau, December 20, 1852.

³⁰Vérité to Moreau, December 20, 1852.

³¹See matricule générale, G.A. Clancy, loc. cit., pp. 24-25.

to be paid to him directly and not through Bishop Oliffe.³²

At Work in Bengal

After a long voyage around Africa, the first band of missionaries reached the port of Calcutta in May, 1853. Vérité accompanied the three Sisters to the convent of the Sisters of Loretto in Dhaka where they took up residence and then rejoined his confrères at Noakhali, about fifty miles south in the Ganges River delta. In September 1853, four more religious of Holy Cross left France for India via steamer and arrived in Calcutta in early November after a voyage of six weeks. This second band consisted of two priests, Baroux and Voisin, and two Sisters, Mary of Bethlehem and Mary of the Purification. Their passage was paid for by a grant of twelve thousand francs from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, remitted directly to Moreau. By December 1853, the twelve Holy Cross missionaries were in place: the five Sisters in Dhaka, Baroux and the three Brothers in Noakhali and Voisin and Vérité in Chittagong. Mercier, the seminarian, was continuing his theological studies under the direction of Bishop Oliffe in Dhaka.³³

The twelve missionaries represented a wide breadth of age and experience. The two oldest, Brothers Benedict and Paulinus, were each fifty by the end of 1853. Voisin was forty-four and Vérité and Barroux were 38 and 36, respectively. Most of the Sisters were young

³²B. des Glajeux to Moreau, January 10, 1853.

³³R. Clancy, op. cit., I, pp. 31-35. For an account of the voyage to Bengal of the first group see *Annals of the Congregation of the Marianite Sisters of Holy Cross, 1841-1941*, (Le Mans, France, 1947), pp. 51-52. Regarding the payment, see Terret to Franzoni, June 17, 1853, copy in G.A.

and Mercier and Mathurin were in their twenties.³⁴ However, four years later, two would be dead, five more would have returned to France and one would have withdrawn from the Congregation.³⁵

The superior of the mission, Michel Voisin, had been a newspaper editor in Paris before joining the Congregation. He had come to Sainte-Croix in 1846, had taken a baccalaureate and was teaching in the college before his departure for Bengal. Vérité and Baroux had both had experience overseas, the former in Canada and the latter in the United States where he had worked among the native Americans. Brother Benedict had been born in Ireland, had emigrated to the U.S. where he had joined the Congregation in 1845 and had been chosen for Bengal by Sorin when Moreau had asked for religious who spoke English. In Bengal he worked as a teacher. Brother Paulinus, a carpenter and an architect, had made his profession of vows only three months before leaving for Bengal. Mercier had come to Sainte-Croix as a teenager and Brother Mathurin was a shoemaker. The two youngest among the men, Mercier and Brother Mathurin, had both been professed on December 29, 1852, and quickly sent off to England to replace those who had dropped out of the first group.³⁶

Among the Sisters, Mary Of Bethlehem, 18, their superior, was Irish-born and had come from the minor seminary in Orléans where she had held a similar position. She and Mary of St. Victor spoke English. The latter had been assigned to Bengal from the U.S. where she had been a school-mistress. Mary of St. Vincent de Paul, 21, a Frenchwoman, had taught school and

³⁴Clancy, *op. cit.*, I, Addenda, pp. 25-35.

³⁵Vérité to Lamy, September 1, 1857.

³⁶Clancy, *op. cit.*, I, Addenda, pp. 25-35.

worked as a seamstress. Mary of Jesus Suffering, 41, had been a nurse in France. Of the fifth Sister, Mary of the Purification, 20, little is recorded.³⁷

At the end of 1853, in addition to the three newly arrived Holy Cross priests, Bishop Oliffe had three other missionary priests at work in his vicariate. One of these died in January 1854 and the other in June of that year, leaving the bishop and one other priest as the only veterans on the mission. Mercier, the seminarian, was ordained in September. Baroux had become quite ill in Noakhali and exchanged places with Vérité in Chittagong. In September, the five Holy Cross Sisters replaced the Loretto Sisters in Chittagong while the latter continued to staff their Dhaka house.³⁸ When the Brothers also removed from Noakhali to Chittagong, the latter city became the center of Holy Cross activities in Bengal. Moreau acknowledged the need for more help for East Bengal but had not the resources to send anyone else in 1854.³⁹

In spite of all the difficulties during their first year in Bengal, the Holy Cross missionaries had established a foothold. Voisin, the superior of the mission, was proving to be an effective leader and a zealous pastor. The Holy Cross contingent tended to be critical of Bishop Oliffe who seemed to them to model himself on bishops in Europe who stay in one place and preside and administer instead of being among their people.⁴⁰ Voisin wrote to Moreau:

³⁷Ibid., pp. 34-35.

³⁸*Annals of the Congregation of the Marianite Sisters of Holy Cross, 1841-1941*, p. 52. Vérité to Oliffe, May 25, 1857, copy in G.A. Clancy, op. cit., I, pp. 35-36, is probably mistaken when he says that the Loretto Sisters withdrew in January 1854.

³⁹Edmund Goedert, *Holy Cross Priests in the Diocese of Dacca, 1853-1981* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Province Archives Center, 1983), p. 6. Clancy, op. cit., I, p. 36. Basil Moreau, *Circular Letters*, 2 volumes (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1943), No. 65 (June 15, 1854), p. 310, n. 4.

⁴⁰Vérité to Moreau, June 27, 1853. See also Vérité to Oliffe, May 25, 1857, copy in G.A.

The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that we must take literally the words of the Gospel, the example of the Apostles, of St. Francis Xavier, and of many others, that is, we must become poor, we must suffer, and we must become little with these poor wretched Christians. It would be easier, doubtless, to live quietly in our huts, but by thus acting we would not attain the end proposed. Those whom you send must be animated with the true Apostolic Spirit.⁴¹

If 1854 had been a difficult year, 1855 was a year of severe trial for the missionaries. Brother Mathurin and Sisters Mary of Bethlehem and Mary of Jesus Suffering were sent back to France, leaving only three Sisters in Chittagong.⁴² In June, Brother Benedict died of cholera in Chittagong. Two months later, Voisin was stricken and died before he could get medical attention. Scarcely two weeks after Voisin's death, tragedy befell the third band of Holy Cross missionaries en route to Bengal. They had landed in Calcutta and were making their way by boat through the river system to Noakhali. Their boat had grounded on a large sandbar in the river at low tide. Several hours later, the swift, incoming tide had caught several of the passengers on the sandbar and had smashed the boat. Of the three missionaries on board, Father Montigny and Sister Marie des Victoires drowned while only Larbiou, a seminarian, survived.⁴³ Thus, two-thirds of the first reinforcements for the Bengal mission were lost within sight of their destination. By the end of 1855, the Holy Cross missionaries in Bengal, ill and discouraged, numbered only eight. The Bengal mission had achieved one result, though. In June 1855, the Holy See had issued a brief of praise for the Congregation of Holy Cross, the first step toward

⁴¹Voisin to Moreau, quoted in Clancy, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 38-39.

⁴²Vérité to Oliffe, May 25, 1857, copy in G.A.

⁴³Clancy, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 36-39.

full approbation.⁴⁴

A New Leader

With Voisin dead, leadership of the mission was entrusted to Vérité. Although he had dreaded the prospect of being in charge again,⁴⁵ Vérité now rose to the occasion. The retiring, indecisive man who had proven inadequate eight years before as the superior of the first Holy Cross contingent in Canada seems to have matured under the adversities suffered during the two years that he had been in Bengal. Vérité's correspondence and other documents reveal him as a zealous pastor, confident of his own judgment, who exhausted himself in the service of his flock. His transformation was timely because the Holy Cross missionaries were shortly to be left entirely on their own in East Bengal.

In November 1855, Archbishop Carew, the Vicar Apostolic of West Bengal, died and Bishop Oliffe succeeded him in Calcutta in December. This brought matters to a head with regard to the Congregation's responsibility for East Bengal and in May 1856 Propaganda Fide entrusted exclusive care for the church in the vicariate to Holy Cross. At the same time, Vérité was appointed pro-vicar apostolic, ecclesiastical superior without the rank and sacramental powers of a bishop.⁴⁶

As pro-vicar, Vérité continued to live and work for two years at Noakhali, several days' journey from either Dhaka or Chittagong, where he had been alone since May 1854. This village

⁴⁴Catta,

⁴⁵Verite to Moreau, December 20, 1852.

⁴⁶Clancy, op. cit., I, pp. 40-41. Moreau, *Circular Letters*, No. 77 (May 25, 1856).

was the center for several communities which comprised, all told, about five hundred Christians, people mostly of Portuguese descent who had intermarried with Muslims and pagans. Vérité's presence and efforts had borne fruit to the extent that in 1855 he had to put up a new church building because the bamboo structure formerly in use was no longer large enough. He also had more than a hundred catechumens under instruction in Agartola, and his duties as pro-vicar and religious superior required him to travel frequently to Dhaka and Chittagong. By 1858, Vérité was also looking after a mission at Luchipore. This combination of work and travel took its toll on his health.⁴⁷

There were no new recruits for the mission in 1856. The following year, 1857, two European priests who had been working in the vicariate, Goiran and Basseto, retired and left East Bengal. Brother Paulinus, the last of the Brothers, was sent back to France where he left the Congregation. Larbiou, the seminarian who had come out from France with the ill-fated band of 1855, was ordained in June. Later in the year, three more priests arrived from Sainte-Croix: Coue, Rinckes and Rondet. However, two of these three were not to stay long in Bengal. Within two years of his arrival Rinckes had returned to France whence he withdrew from the Congregation. Coue drowned in December 1858. Rondet lasted eleven years until 1868 when he returned to France and left the Congregation, as did Baroux who went back to France, ill, in January 1858. In March 1858, Doyle the last of the European missionaries who had served under Bishop Oliffe, left the vicariate. By May 1858, six Holy Cross priests were trying to serve all the Catholics of East Bengal.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Clancy, loc. cit., pp. 32-33.

⁴⁸Vérité to Moreau, March 11, 1858. Clancy, op. cit., I, Addenda, pp. 27-34.

Moreover, by the end of 1857 there were no longer any Sisters in East Bengal. Vérité had closed the convent of the Sisters of Loretto in Dhaka in May of that year and the Sisters had left the vicariate. At the time of its closing there were only nine girls boarding there and the few Catholic families in the city could not support the Sisters. The maintenance of their convent school had become a financial drain on the meager resources of the vicariate and Vérité objected to having to keep one priest in Dhaka to serve the sacramental needs of the Sisters while the Christians in the villages went unattended or were left to the schismatics.⁴⁹ By September, the two Holy Cross Sisters in Chittagong had also left the vicariate. Vérité arranged with the Loretto Sisters to take over the convent school in Chittagong and Sister Mary of St. Victor, who had transferred to their congregation, was there until October 1859. However, for more than two years, 1857-1860, there were no Marianites in East Bengal.⁵⁰

Vérité's decisive action in the case of the Sisters was paralleled by his growing criticism of Sainte-Croix with regard to the Bengal mission. He complained that Moreau should never have sent an eighteen-year-old novice (Mary of Bethlehem) to be superior of the Sisters, that several of the people who had returned to France from Bengal had been incompetent to begin with and that they had been sent out so that the mother house would not have to feed them. In response to Moreau's directive that all correspondence between Vérité and the Propaganda Fide should be carried on through Moreau or Drouelle, Moreau's representative in Rome, Vérité refused to be bound by this, and reminded Moreau that he was the pro-Vicar, appointed by the

⁴⁹Vérité to Oliffe, May 25, 1857. Verite to Barnabo, May 26, 1857. Copies in G.A.

⁵⁰Vérité to Oliffe, May 25, 1857, copy in G.A. Minutes of a meeting between the Catholics of Chittagong and the Pro-Vicar Apostolic, September 25, 1857, G.A. Pierre Dufal, C.S.C., to Moreau, February 1, 1859, and October 31, 1859.

pope, and that he knew the situation of the vicariate better than either Moreau or Drouelle.⁵¹

Whether because of Vérité's growing assertiveness or of other considerations, when Moreau was invited to propose one of his priests to the Propaganda as the new Vicar Apostolic of East Bengal, it was not Vérité but Pierre Dufal, who was just preparing to leave for the mission, whose name Moreau submitted.⁵² Whatever Vérité's merits, he would never be considered for the post. On the advice of a doctor and friends he left Calcutta for Europe in January 1859 to try to regain his health. He died on board ship and was buried in the Red Sea, the sixth religious of Holy Cross to perish in service to Bengal in as many years. Of the original group of twelve who had started work in Bengal in 1853, only Mercier remained on the mission by February 1859. Voices had already been raised within the Congregation suggesting that Moreau had been foolish to accept the mission in Bengal.⁵³

But by then the purpose for which the Bengal mission had first been undertaken by Holy Cross had been achieved. In May of 1857 the constitutions of part of the Congregation had been approved by the pope and the men of Holy Cross had become an institute of pontifical right and no longer under the control of the bishops in whose dioceses they were working. It was a significant achievement for such a young congregation, but the cost had been considerable and the Holy Cross missionaries in Bengal had paid it.

⁵¹Vérité to Lamy, September 1, 1857. Vérité to Moreau, March 11, 1858.

⁵²Moreau to Drouelle, June 5, 1858.

⁵³Vérité to Moreau, December 30, 1858. Moreau, *Circular Letters*, II, No. 110 (June 15, 1859), p. 105, and No. 92 (January 1, 1858), pp. 55-56.