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Holy Cross in Bengal, 1860-1910:

A Matter of Survival

by

Fr. James T. Connelly, CSC

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**HOLY CROSS IN BENGAL, 1860-1910:**

**A MATTER OF SURVIVAL**

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

When Father Pierre Dufal reached India in the autumn of 1858, he discovered that the superior of the Holy Cross missionaries in that land, Father Louis Vérité, was dying. Before Dufal had left France, the superior general had appointed him assistant superior in the Congregation's Bengal mission. Thus, when he saw Vérité off for France in January, 1859, Dufal took responsibility for directing the mission in which he had arrived only a few months before. That responsibility would remain his for most of the next eighteen years.<sup>1</sup>

The first Holy Cross missionaries, a priest, a seminarian, three Brothers and three Sisters, eight in all, had arrived in Bengal in May 1853. In September 1853, four more religious, two priests and two Sisters, had arrived from France to bring the total to twelve. With Vérité's departure for France in January 1859, Mercier, the seminarian, by then a priest, was the only one of these twelve still in Bengal. All the others had either died, returned to France or left the Congregation. Vérité, himself, died on the way back to France and was buried at sea. The

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond Clancy, The Congregation of Holy Cross in East Bengal, 1853-1953, 2 volumes (Washington: Holy Cross Foreign Mission Seminary, 1953), I: 43a-45. Dufal to Moreau, February 1, 1859. All correspondence is to be found in the General Archives of the Congregation of Holy Cross in Rome (*hereafter* G.A.) unless otherwise indicated.

Congregation had undertaken to supply personnel and financial support for the Church in East Bengal in response to a request from the Holy See with the expectation that Vatican approval of the young community as a missionary institute would soon follow. This expectation had been realized in 1857. It now remained for Holy Cross to fulfill its part of the bargain in Bengal.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Dufal Era, 1859-1876**

When Vérité departed for France at the beginning of 1859, he left his newly arrived assistant superior, Pierre Dufal, in charge of the mission. Dufal and two other priests, Aimé-Marie Fourmond and Jean-Baptiste Maniel, had arrived in the vicariate only in October 1858. Unbeknownst to anyone at the time, their coming inaugurated a new era for Holy Cross in East Bengal. All three would stay on the mission for the next eighteen years. Fourmond, after an interval of twelve years spent in Canada and the United States, would return to Bengal for the last nineteen years of his life, dying in Chittagong in 1907. Dufal's long years of leadership, first as religious superior and then as vicar apostolic, brought a stabilizing influence to bear on the mission which had hitherto been lacking.

Dufal was thirty-six years old when he took over from Vérité as superior of the Holy Cross missionaries in East Bengal. Ordained only five years before, he had studied canon law and served as superior at Vigna Pia, the Congregation's orphanage in Rome, had been a seminary professor in Orléans and prefect of religion, the equivalent of campus minister, at Notre-Dame

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<sup>2</sup>See James Connelly, C.S.C., "Holy Cross Goes to Bengal, 1853-1859," paper presented at the Conference on the History of the Congregations of Holy Cross (*hereafter* CHCHC), Notre Dame College, Manchester, New Hampshire, 1997.

de Sainte-Croix, the college in Le Mans. During all his time in Bengal, only once, in his last year, was his health so poor that he had to return to Europe to save his life. With the death of Vérité, Dufal was the obvious choice for vicar apostolic and he was named to the post by the pope in June 1860. When he returned to Sainte-Croix for his ordination as bishop in the conventual church, he was able to recruit three priests and two Sisters for Bengal. For the time being, at least, the survival of the mission was assured.<sup>3</sup>

The new superior's first look at his charge did not offer him much encouragement. Several of the priests who had been in Bengal since before 1857, when the new constitutions of the Congregation had been approved by the pope, had refused to renew their vows and took the position that they were no longer religious nor bound to observe the rule of Holy Cross. There were also disciplinary problems with two of the missionaries. Dufal found that Vérité's administration of the financial resources had been somewhat careless, to say the least, and that the missionaries were actually living in penury. At one point he even spoke of "an honorable retreat" from East Bengal in the face of all the difficulties.<sup>4</sup>

By the end of his first year in the vicariate, however, Dufal was beginning to get control of the situation. Whereas in April, 1859, he had written Moreau not to send any more missionaries because they could not be supported, in October he was requesting two Holy Cross

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<sup>3</sup>Moreau to Drouelle, June 5, 1858.

<sup>4</sup>Dufal to Moreau, undated 1859, April 6, 1859, and December 26, 1859. Henri-Paul Bergeron, C.S.C., "Mgr. Pierre Dufal, pionnier des missions du Bengale," (unpublished manuscript - copy in G.A.) gives an extended account of Dufal's life and work based on his letters.

Sisters to take over the school and orphanage in Chittagong.<sup>5</sup> In September 1860, two Irish-born, English-speaking Sisters, one from the United States and one from France, arrived in Chittagong. By the end of 1861, three priests and two seminarians, one of the latter Irish-born and English-speaking, had been sent out from France. Five more priests and seminarians and two Sisters came out to the mission in 1865. To be sure, not all of these people stayed for a long time in Bengal. Six of the ten men and one of the women remained on the mission four years or less. But the flow of reinforcements from Sainte-Croix had been reconstituted and the missionaries could think in terms of replacement and of expanding their ministry.<sup>6</sup>

Under Dufal's steady leadership, the situation in the vicariate began to improve. As vicar apostolic, Dufal took up the practice of spending half the year in residence at Chittagong and the other half at Dhaka. This made it possible for him to visit regularly all the parishes in the vicariate and even to maintain contact with groups which seldom saw a priest. Two new stations, Solepore and Barisal, were opened in 1862, each with a resident priest. All of this, however, was accomplished with very meager financial resources. In writing to Moreau to explain why the missionaries had no money to send to the mother house, Dufal stated that the collection of funds from the local Christians and the government subsidies were all used up in the maintenance of the church buildings and schools. Were it not for the grants from the Society for the Propagation

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<sup>5</sup>Dufal to Moreau, October 31, 1859. Dufal to Barnabo, December 26, 1859, copy in G.A.

<sup>6</sup>Clancy, I:44-52; Addenda, 28-37. *Annals of the Congregation of the Marianite Sisters of Holy Cross, 1841-1941* (Le Mans, France, 1947), 123-125.

of the Faith in Paris, they could not continue.<sup>7</sup>

As it turned out, the seven missionaries who arrived in Bengal from France in 1865 were the last Holy Cross religious who would come out to the mission for more than twenty years. In 1866, one of the three Sisters remaining in Chittagong returned home ill. A greater loss, however, was that of Dufal, himself. Moreau's resignation as superior general of the Congregation, provoked by the persistent complaints against his administration by a faction within the community, had finally been accepted by Propaganda Fide. A general chapter of the Priests and Brothers had assembled at Sainte-Croix in August 1866 to elect a new superior general and in the fifth session the choice fell upon Dufal.<sup>8</sup>

There then followed a period of almost a year during which Dufal hesitated to accept the office which had been thrust upon him. In March 1867, a letter from Cardinal Barnabo, the prefect of Propaganda Fide, to Dufal investing him with the authority of superior general settled the matter and Dufal began to make preparations to return to France. When he departed from Calcutta in August 1867, Dufal left Bernard Larbiou, the sole survivor of the tragic shipwreck of 1855, as administrator of the vicariate. Two months later, Larbiou died suddenly on his way from Dhaka to Calcutta. The hand of death was once again upon the Holy Cross mission in Bengal.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Clancy, I:44-52.

<sup>8</sup>*Annals of the Marianite Sisters of Holy Cross, 1841-1941*, 123-126. Etienne and Tony Catta, *Basil Anthony Mary Moreau*, 2 volumes (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1955), I:718-721.

<sup>9</sup>Catta, II:726-728. Clancy, I:63.

Back in France, Dufal soon came to the conclusion that he was not the man to control the factions which had brought down Moreau or to resolve the growing financial crisis which threatened the existence of the Congregation. He secured the pope's permission to resign as superior general and to summon another general chapter which might elect his successor and find a way to pay off the community's debts. This chapter met in Rome in the summer of 1868 and chose Father Edward Sorin, the superior of the Congregation's U.S. province, as the third superior general. By December 1868, Dufal had returned to Bengal where he again took up the duties of Vicar Apostolic of East Bengal.<sup>10</sup>

In his vicariate once again, Dufal found that he had seven priests and two Sisters to carry on the work there. More importantly, though, Dufal now knew the situation in France well enough to realize that he could expect little help from that quarter. His appeal for more Sisters went unheeded and the two that he had were called back to France in 1870.<sup>11</sup> In France, Father Victor Drouelle, a leader of the opposition to Moreau, had discouraged the young men in the novitiate from even thinking of going to Bengal as missionaries. Dufal had taken steps to correct the impression that Bengal was to be abandoned<sup>12</sup> but the financial crisis of the Congregation, the large number who withdrew from the community at the time of Moreau's resignation and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 and the Prussian occupation of Le Mans made it difficult if not impossible to send reinforcements to Bengal even had there been a strong will to do so.

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<sup>10</sup>Catta, II:764-834.

<sup>11</sup>*Annals of the Congregation of the Marianite Sisters of Holy Cross, 1841-1941*, 124-125.

<sup>12</sup>Dufal to Chappé, March 14, 1868. Dufal to Dussaulx, March 14, 1868.



Like Thomas Oliffe, the missionary bishop who twenty years before had arranged for Holy Cross to come to Bengal, Dufal began to look around for a religious institute that could properly tend the church in East Bengal. He came to Rome in 1870 for the First Vatican Council, expecting to meet Sorin and to take up with him the question of support for the mission in Bengal. Instead, he found that Sorin had already left for the United States. Because of the Franco-Prussian War, it was impossible to visit the houses of the Congregation in France and Dufal returned to Bengal having found no support. Of the seven priests working with him in Bengal, Dufal wrote to Sorin in March 1871, one was ready to return to Europe immediately and two were too ill to carry on much longer. Either the new personnel which Sorin had promised were sent or the Congregation should ask the Holy See to relieve it of responsibility for East Bengal.<sup>13</sup> In April 1871, Dufal wrote in a similar vein to Cardinal Barnabo. In August, Sorin discussed the situation of the Congregation vis-à-vis Bengal with the general council of the Congregation and it was decided to leave it to Barnabo and the Propaganda to decide whether Holy Cross should continue to try to care for the church in East Bengal. In September, Barnabo replied that Dufal might look elsewhere for missionaries.<sup>14</sup>

Dufal found the Cardinal's answer less than satisfactory, to say the least. He hastened to point out to Barnabo that a few independent priests, if he could find them, could not long sustain so difficult a mission as East Bengal and that only by confiding the vicariate to a religious

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<sup>13</sup>Dufal to Sorin, March 31, 1871.

<sup>14</sup>Dufal to Barnabo, April 7, 1871, copy in G.A. Procès verbaux du conseil général, August 13, 1871. Barnabo to Sorin, September 5, 1871. Dufal to Sorin, [June ?] 10, 1872.



community could an adequate and stable ministry to the faithful be provided.<sup>15</sup> At the same time he wrote to Sorin to insist that if the Congregation of Holy Cross was not going to fulfill its obligations to East Bengal, the Holy See ought to be petitioned to release it from its commitment. He, himself, Dufal insisted, was only serving as an agent of the Congregation.<sup>16</sup> Dufal managed to persuade Sorin of the justice of his position and the general chapter of the Congregation which met at Notre Dame, Indiana, in August 1872, petitioned the Propaganda to confide the Vicariate Apostolic of East Bengal to another religious community.<sup>17</sup>

While Dufal had won his point, there now remained the problem of finding another congregation willing to commit itself to East Bengal. By the end of 1872, the situation of the Holy Cross missionaries was becoming desperate. During the year, one had returned to France because of illness and one had died, leaving only six priests including Dufal in the vicariate. Moreover, the Franco-Prussian War had so disturbed the French economy that the Society for the Propagation of the Faith could not offer the customary subsidy to East Bengal in 1871.<sup>18</sup> Rome finally came to Dufal's aid and recruited the monks of the Anglo-Belgian Province of the Cassinese Benedictines of the Primitive Observance to take over the vicariate. Dufal was so informed in August 1873 and he immediately asked for permission to resign as vicar apostolic

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<sup>15</sup>Dufal to Barnabo, October 25, 1871, copy in G.A.

<sup>16</sup>Dufal to Sorin, September 5, 1871.

<sup>17</sup>Minutes of the general chapter of 1872, August 18 and Decree 12. G.A.

<sup>18</sup>Dufal to Sorin, January 30, 1872, undated 1872, and June 19, 1872. Fr. Joseph-Marie Valée returned to France and Fr. Louis Lucia died in Bengal.

and return to France with the other Holy Cross missionaries.<sup>19</sup>

However, the situation would get worse before it got better. Although the Benedictines had agreed in principle in 1873 to take East Bengal, it was not until June 1874 that a definite arrangement was made with Propaganda Fide. In the meanwhile, Dufal and his five confrères waited from month to month for the Benedictines to arrive and for his resignation to be accepted. It was not until February 1875 that five Benedictine priests and one Brother, all Englishmen, reached Chittagong and began to prepare for work in Bengal.<sup>20</sup> Dufal, in poor health and looking forward to leaving Bengal, received a rude shock in July 1875 when his faculties as Vicar Apostolic were renewed for fifteen years. Upon further inquiry he learned that the Benedictines had found East Bengal much more difficult than they had expected and were seeking to be released from their commitment to take over the vicariate. Rome had apparently decided not to release Dufal and Holy Cross from East Bengal until there was some assurance that the Benedictines were going to stay.<sup>21</sup>

Dufal must have been close to despair in April 1876 when Propaganda refused to allow him to resign until it was clear that the Benedictines would be able to provide for the vicariate. Sorin had been in Rome in January to plead Dufal's case and in June he advised him to remind

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<sup>19</sup>S.C. de Propaganda Fide, "Ristretto Con Sommario Sulla rinunzia della Missione del Bengala Orientale fatta dalla Congregazione di S. Croce, e sul progetto do affidarla alla Congregazione Cassinese della promitiva osservanza," August 10, 1874, copy in G.A. Dufal to Barnabo, August 12, 1873, copy in G.A. Dufal to Sorin, August 14, 1873.

<sup>20</sup>S.C. de Propaganda Fide, "Ristretto Con Sommario...." Dufal to Sorin, March 1, 1875.

<sup>21</sup>Dufal to Fernando [Pietro Battista], July 5, 1875. Dufal to Champeau, October 25, 1875, and December 14, 1875.

Propaganda every month or so that the doctors told him that he could not survive another hot season in Bengal.<sup>22</sup> Finally, in July and August 1876, Propaganda accepted Dufal's resignation and approved the transfer of the vicariate to the Benedictines. The last four Holy Cross missionaries in Bengal were free to return to France. In spite of the mission's straitened circumstances for so many years, Dufal was able to leave his successor a debt-free vicariate with 25,000 francs in the strongbox. After twenty-four years the Congregation's work in Bengal had come to an end.<sup>23</sup>

### **Return to Bengal**

As it turned out, neither Dufal nor Holy Cross were done with East Bengal. After a two-year stint in the United States where he served as co-adjutor bishop of Galveston, Texas, Dufal returned to Rome in 1883 to serve as procurator general, the Congregation's representative at the Vatican. It was in this capacity that he was approached in April 1887 by Monsignor Jacobini, the secretary of Propaganda Fide, with an inquiry as to whether the Congregation was still willing to accept an overseas mission as Sorin had implied when he passed through Rome the previous year. The place in question was the new diocese of Chandernagor, north of Calcutta. Dufal advised Sorin that priests, Brothers and Sisters who spoke English would be required and that a small number of missionaries would suffice at the beginning. He also noted that it would

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<sup>22</sup>Dufal to Sorin, April 26, 1876. Sorin to Dufal, June 6, 1876.

<sup>23</sup>Dufal to Cardinal Franchi, October 9, 1876, copy in G.A. Dufal to Sorin, February 15, 1876, October 11, 1876, and January 8, 1877. Clancy, I:65-66.

be a less difficult territory to work than East Bengal and that acceptance would favorably impress the Propaganda and leave it well disposed toward Holy Cross.<sup>24</sup>

Sorin was eager to be in the good graces of Cardinal Simeoni, the prefect of Propaganda Fide, because he was trying to obtain papal approval for the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, the Sisters in Indiana who had separated from those in France in 1869. Moreover, he wanted to obtain approbation of the Sisters' constitutions on his terms rather than on those of Bishop Dwenger of Fort Wayne, Indiana, in whose diocese the Sisters' motherhouse was located. Sorin instructed Dufal to convey to Propaganda the Congregation's willingness to accept an overseas mission. In June 1887 he announced to the Brothers and Priests of Holy Cross that the pope was going to confide to them a new mission "in a healthy portion of Bengal."<sup>25</sup>

The following January, however, Cardinal Simeoni wrote to Sorin and asked that the Congregation take back the Diocese of Dhaka, the former vicariate of East Bengal, which the Benedictines could no longer adequately staff.<sup>26</sup> At first, Sorin delayed answering.<sup>27</sup> When the cardinal asked again, Sorin replied that to staff Dhaka was beyond the resources of Holy Cross.<sup>28</sup> Then, facing the inevitable, he tried to get Dufal to set conditions for acceptance by

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<sup>24</sup>Dufal to Sorin, April 18, 1887.

<sup>25</sup>*Circular Letters of the Very Rev. Edward Sorin*, 2 volumes (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1894), No. 13 (June 6, 1887), II:42-45.

<sup>26</sup>Simeoni to Sorin, January 19, 1888.

<sup>27</sup>Sorin to Simeoni, March 1, 1888, copy in G.A.

<sup>28</sup>Simeoni to Sorin, March 24, 1888. Sorin to Simeoni, April 11, 1888, copy in G.A.

Holy Cross, especially guarantees of financial assistance.<sup>29</sup> Finally, Sorin agreed that Holy Cross would take back East Bengal<sup>30</sup> and in September 1888 five missionaries were en route to India. The following year, 1889, the constitutions of the Sisters of the Holy Cross were approved conditionally for seven years.

The new Diocese of Dhaka, established in 1886 when Rome had erected regular diocesan structures and boundaries to replace the vicariates apostolic in much of India, was not quite the same as the old Vicariate of East Bengal which Holy Cross had left twelve years before. While a sizeable area to the northwest of Dhaka, across the Brahmaputra River, had come under another jurisdiction, the bishops of Dhaka were given the care of Arakan, an area along the Burmese coast which stretched more than 350 miles to the south of Chittagong. Thus, the Diocese of Dhaka in 1889 covered approximately fifty-nine thousand square miles and had twenty million people, of whom about twelve thousand, less than one-half of one percent, were Christians. While the part of the diocese in East Bengal which straddled the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers tended to be one big rice field, the area along the Bay of Bengal which included Chittagong was a narrow coastal plain between the sea and the mountains and the Burmese section consisted of a mountainous interior with hills running down to the ocean. A multitude of dialects was spoken in Bengal while a different language altogether prevailed in Arakan. One improvement since 1876 was the completion of an eighty-mile railway line linking

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<sup>29</sup>Sorin to Dufal, May 21 and 22, 1888.

<sup>30</sup>Simeoni to Sorin, May 30, 1888.

Chittagong and Dhaka.<sup>31</sup>

Among the five Holy Cross priests sent out to India in 1888 were two veterans from the days of Bishop Dufal, Fourmond and Bonnet Roche, both in their fifties. Michael Fallize, 33, a Luxemburger who had joined the Congregation in the United States, was named the superior of the mission and the administrator of the diocese pending the appointment of a bishop. Another Luxemburger, Francis Boeres, 26, from the Congregation's American province, and Pierre Fichet, 32, a Frenchman who had joined the Congregation in Canada, rounded out the group.<sup>32</sup>

The men of Holy Cross proved to be better able to staff the mission the second time around than in their previous attempt to do so. By the end of the century, twenty-five priests had come out to the Diocese of Dhaka and fifteen were still on the mission. Moreover, with missionaries coming from Canada and the United States as well as from France, the French Province did not have to bear the entire burden of providing personnel and financial support for Bengal.<sup>33</sup> In addition to a broadened base of support within the Congregation, candidates for Holy Cross began to be recruited in the mission. Brother Eugene Lefevre, a native of Assam, began his novitiate in 1890 and a second Brother, Benedict, entered in 1893.

With the women of Holy Cross it was a different story. Sorin had committed himself to send Sisters 'to the mission but since the Holy Cross Sisters were organized as three separate and autonomous congregations by 1889 he could not simply make the assignments himself. When

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<sup>31</sup>Clancy, I:78-80.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., I:Addenda, 39-40.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 39-47, 62-63. See also 99.

Mother Augusta, the newly elected superior general of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Indiana, refused to send any of her Sisters so far away from home, Sorin assigned to Bengal ten of the Sisters whom he had directly recruited for domestic work at the University of Notre Dame. Mother Augusta found herself unable to prevent their going to Bengal and during a farewell ceremony at the Sisters' motherhouse she gave each of the ten women a fifty-dollar gold piece to carry as protection against unforeseen circumstances on the long voyage.<sup>34</sup>

When the ten Sisters arrived in Calcutta in November 1889, Fallize was unprepared for such a large number. Since he had neither the money to support them nor a convent large enough to house them, he divided the group, sending half to Dhaka and half to Akyab in Burma. In both places they opened schools. However, by the end of 1895, death and illness had reduced the number of Sisters to five and the following year these were called home. It would be thirty years before Holy Cross Sisters served in India again.<sup>35</sup>

While the Holy Cross missionaries were more numerous than they had been in the 1870s, the mission was still in need of personnel. The Benedictines had promised to leave five of their men in the Diocese of Dhaka until the newcomers were settled, but within three months of the coming of the Holy Cross men all but two of the Englishmen had departed.<sup>36</sup> When he took over as administrator of the diocese in January 1889, Fallize found that his Benedictine

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<sup>34</sup>*Big Book of Accounts*, 552-554, in the General Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, St. Mary's, Notre Dame, Indiana.

<sup>35</sup>Clancy, I:92-96.

<sup>36</sup>Dufal to Sorin, March 12, 1889.



predecessor had left only 2,148 rupees in the diocesan treasury although the bills for repairs to various buildings in the diocese totalled over 5,000 rupees. Moreover, many of the priest's houses in the various missions were, for all practical purposes, unfurnished. The diocese survived the next two years only by virtue of a generous loan from the archbishop of Calcutta. When the injustice of this situation was laid before the abbot general of the Benedictines several years later, he gave the diocese 7,000 rupees on condition that all papers and accounts referring to the Benedictine administration of the vicariate be destroyed.<sup>37</sup>

With the Congregation again responsible for supplying the needs of the church in the Diocese of Dhaka, Sorin was invited by Propaganda Fide to propose a Holy Cross priest as the first bishop of Dhaka. He nominated the superior of the Congregation's French province, Francois-Augustin-Joseph Louage, 62, who was consecrated in Paris in February 1891.

Born in France, Louage as a young man had joined the Holy Ghost Fathers and had studied under the direction of the Venerable Libermann in Paris. Ordained in 1853, he spent the next three years working among the recently liberated slaves and the Lepers on the island of Réunion in the Indian Ocean. Becoming seriously ill, he returned to France and withdrew from the Congregation of the Holy Spirit thinking that his career as a missionary was at an end. However, he quickly recovered his health and went off for four years to the Caribbean Islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe where he taught Greek and Latin in a college. Back in France once again, Louage taught English literature at the seminary in his home diocese of Cambrai until 1863 when he set out for North America. He got no farther than Liverpool where the bishop

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<sup>37</sup>Memorandum of Bishop Peter J. Hurth, C.S.C., in G.A., file 711, "Dacca, Bishops, Hurth".

prevailed upon him to pastor a large parish in a part of the city where many Irish laborers had settled. Finally, in 1865, he reached the United States where he offered his services to the bishop of Wheeling, West Virginia, who made him rector of the seminary which he was organizing.

There is some evidence that Louage attempted to join the Congregation of Holy Cross in France in 1869. If so, he did not stay long. In any event, during his travels in the United States he had met Auguste Lemmonier, Sorin's nephew and a Holy Cross priest. Apparently through his friendship with Lemmonier, Louage entered the Congregation at Notre Dame in January 1872. At the University of Notre Dame, Louage was professor of classical literature, philosophy and theology and wrote a textbook for a course in philosophy. He was also master of novices. In 1880 he was elected superior of the Congregation's Canadian province and in 1887 he returned to his native France to take a similar position there. While provincial in Canada he had also been president of College Notre-Dame near Montreal. Most of the missionaries who served under him in Bengal had been his students.

Besides his many talents, Louage brought with him to Dhaka a large sum of money which he had collected in Europe for the needs of the mission. These funds plus the payment negotiated with the abbot general of the Benedictines enabled Louage to pay off the debts of the diocese and to stabilize the financial situation of the mission.<sup>38</sup> Although advanced in years and in poor health for such a difficult undertaking, Louage worked hard at his charge, managing to visit all the parishes and mission stations every year and taking his turn with the other priests in the ministry of the sacraments. Forbearing to return to Europe as his doctor advised, Louage died

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., See minutes of the general chapter of 1892, August 17, in G.A.

in Dhaka in June 1894 after only three years in Bengal.<sup>39</sup>

Louage was succeeded as bishop of Dhaka by one of his former novices and students, Peter J. Hurth. A native of the diocese of Trier in Germany, Hurth was teaching school in Luxemburg when he met a Holy Cross priest who persuaded him to join the Congregation in the United States. He entered at Notre Dame in 1876 when he was nineteen years old and was ordained four years later.

In addition to his native German and English, Hurth could also speak French, Spanish and Italian. His energy and administrative ability were legendary among his contemporaries. Three years after being assigned to the Congregation's college in Cincinnati, he became the president of that institution. Three years later he began a nine-year sojourn as president of a relatively new educational institution in Austin, Texas, which he managed to have chartered by the state legislature as St. Edward's College. By dint of his general competence, dynamic personality and facility with languages, Hurth quickly became one of the most prominent Catholic clergymen in Texas. With characteristic drive, he set out for his new diocese on the evening of the very day of his consecration at Notre Dame in September 1894.

Hurth was thirty-seven when he arrived in Bengal in December 1894. He would find that his difficult diocese was more than a match for even his drive. His first act was to make a tour of the diocese in which he visited all the important centers. Soon he undertook to replace the crumbling churches with chapels in every Christian village. A lifelong schoolman himself, Hurth

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<sup>39</sup>These paragraphs on Louage are based on the biographical sketch, "Mgr. Augustin Louage," in G.A., file 711, "Dacca, Bishops".

made it his aim to have a school or a resident catechist wherever there were enough Christians to warrant it. His program was hardly under way, though, when a devastating cyclone and earthquake struck the diocese in June 1897. The convent and the cathedral in Dhaka were a total loss and there was not a single building in the diocese that did not suffer some damage. Many were totally destroyed. The rebuilding began immediately with the bishop acting as architect, construction foreman and sometimes even as laborer. Then calamity struck again in November 1897 when a cyclone followed by a tidal wave ravaged Chittagong and the Arakan coast of Burma. Nearly twenty thousand people lost their lives.<sup>40</sup>

Hurth came to the Congregation's general chapter at Montreal in 1898 desperate for help and he seems to have made a great impression on the capitulants. For the first time there was a commission on missions at a general chapter and this commission's report claimed that in the eyes of the pope the mission in Bengal was Holy Cross's "raison d'être". Hurth addressed the chapter on the difficulties of building up the church in Bengal, the poverty of the people and the lack of resources. The chapter, for its part, seems to have been swept by a wave of enthusiasm for the Congregation's work in Bengal. Each provincial superior was charged to carefully search among his subjects for those who might have a mission vocation and to work at developing such an inclination among the young candidates for membership in the Congregation. Each province was ordered to have a promoter who would gather resources for the support of the work in Bengal and to subscribe itself for a donation of one hundred dollars per year. In addition to the

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<sup>40</sup>See the biographical sketch, "Mgr. Peter J. Hurth, C.S.C.," in G.A., file 711, "Dacca, Bishops, Hurth".

traditional three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, a fourth vow of the foreign missions, to go anywhere in the world at the command of the superior general, was re-emphasized. This vow had been sanctioned by the constitutions approved by Rome in 1857.<sup>41</sup>

In the long run these measures do not appear to have borne the fruit which the Bishop of Dhaka had hoped for. Assisting at the next general chapter of the Congregation at Notre Dame, Indiana, in 1906, Hurth lamented the lack of personnel and financial resources committed to Bengal in spite of the fact that Holy Cross had been approved by the Holy See as a missionary community thus making that apostolate its "primordial work". The promoters appointed in the various provinces in Europe and North America after the 1898 chapter had not done their work very well and the U.S. Province had done almost nothing.<sup>42</sup>

The general chapter of 1906 responded to Hurth's indictment with several measures designed to improve the situation of the Congregation's mission in Bengal. An apostolic college, under the authority of the bishop of Dhaka, was to be opened in Rome for the training and education of men destined for Bengal. This college would be supported by the provinces of France, Canada and the United States. One of the general assistants to the superior general would inform himself about Bengal and look after its interests. Promoters were to be appointed in each of the provinces and henceforth they were to be "truly active". The superior general, Father Gilbert Francais, whose own brother was among the priests serving in Bengal, called on the Congregation to understand and support the Bengal mission and warned that the Propaganda

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<sup>41</sup>Procès verbaux du chapitre général, August 6, 1898, in G.A. See also Clancy, I:116-120.

<sup>42</sup>Procès verbaux du chapitre général, session 4, August 9, 1906, in G.A.

would be watching to see what Holy Cross did there.<sup>43</sup>

The truth of the matter was that for all its good intentions toward Bengal the Congregation was distracted. In France the anti-clerical legislation of 1903 had deprived the community of all of its property and had forced Francais to move the seat of the general administration to North America. The Canadian province was in financial straits and the U.S. Province was in a time of turmoil brought on in part by a rapid expansion of commitments in the United States and a sharp decline in the number of Brothers. Then, as the superior general acknowledged, missionary vocations for Bengal were rare in the U.S. and Canada because these immense countries were themselves considered to be mission territory.<sup>44</sup>

Angered by what he perceived as the Congregation's indifference to the mission in Bengal and in poor health, Hurth resigned as bishop of Dhaka and returned to the United States in January 1910. His resentment was shared by some of the older missionaries who drafted a letter of complaint to both the superior general and Propaganda Fide. Several of these men left for home shortly after Hurth did.<sup>45</sup> After fifty years, the issue for the Congregation of Holy Cross in India was still survival.

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., session 5, August 10; session 6, August 11; session 14, August 17; and decree 1.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., session 5, August 10.

<sup>45</sup>Edmund Goedert, *Holy Cross priests in the diocese of Dacca, 1853-1981* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Province Archives Center, 1983), 12-13.